

EMOTIONS:

Sometimes I have Them/

Sometimes They have Me!

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

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Emotions: Sometimes I Have Them/Sometimes They Have Me!

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PREFACE

Emotions — For a Sense of Vitality

Emotions rejuvenate life and they can devastate life. Some of our grand and glorious emotions torment us as they plunge us into dark and desperate moods. At other times our emotions exalt us into the third heavens in ecstasy. C.B. Eavey wrote:

"Nothing in us so defiles and destroys the beauty and glory of living as do emotions; nothing so elevates, purifies, enriches, and strengthens life as does emotion.Every normal human being has a longing for the overflowing of natural emotion. Without the capacity to experience emotions suitable to the situation we meet, we would not be normal. Emotions of the right kind, expressed in the proper way, make life beautiful, full, and rich, rob it of monotony, and contribute much to both the enjoyment and the effectiveness of living." Eavey, C.B. *Principles of Mental Health for Christian Living*.

- Do you handle your emotions, or do they handle you?
- Do you consider your emotions good, bad, or neutral?
- Do you experience them as all important, or useless?
- Would you like it if you denied them and became emotionless?
- Would you want to become more like Star Trek's) Mr. Spock?
- Or, would you say that your capacity for love, joy, compassion, anger, anxiety, wonder, and awe makes you distinctively and gloriously human?
- Since God emotes does that mean that in emoting we share in something divine?

Those are some starting questions, and yet there are more to consider:

- Where do your emotions come from?
- What causes them to arise as they do?
- Do moods "fall on us out of the blue?"
- What do our emotions exist for?
- Do they represent a part of our "lower nature" or our "higher nature?"
- How should we respond to them?
- Should we deny them, affirm and cultivate them, or suppress them?
- Can our negative emotions serve a holy purpose?
- Can positive emotions function in a destructive way to us?
- By what method can we get in touch with our feelings?
- Do feelings differ from emotions? In what way?

I've written this book to address these questions and to invite you along on a very special journey. I have designated that journey—a *journey toward and into emotional vitality*. Along the way on this journey I want to explore how we can become emotionally alive, how we can grow up emotionally, develop emotional wholeness, and even Christianize our emotions. To that end, we will look at the positive power of Christian emoting. We will also explore the emotional healing Jesus offered via his gospel. We will delve into the subject of "putting off the old nature" and becoming invigorated with a new and vibrant psychological nature.

This journey will take us to many scriptures where we will discover wonderful psychological insights. And there we will note how those insights correspond to modern psychological thought. We will also explore many of the motivational dynamics inherent in our emotions noting how God has equipped us with emotions in order to give us a sense of vitality) in life.

"The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones" (Prov. 15:30)

"God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (II Tim. 1:7-8)

"The Lord... forgives... heals... crowns you with steadfast love and mercy... satisfies you with good... so that your youth is renewed like the eagles." (Psalm 103:2-5)

"The Lord shall guide you always, and satisfy the dry places of your soul, and brace up your bones, and you shall be like a watered garden." (Isa. 58:11)

In writing this, I believe that *emotional vitality* describes the fruit of the Christian Good-news. In other words, the work of God in the soul renews our youthfulness so that we experience *a renewed vitality* of being. We experience inner self-renewing enthusiasm. God's spirit creates a refreshing spring of living water that wells up within us into a quality of life that shares in the divine nature (John 7:37-39, II Pet. 1:4-11).

The good-news is life affirming. Because it is, I began conducting Life Affirmation Seminars several years ago with my associates Roger Rossiter and Carl Lloyd. This book resulted from my research as well as from the thousands of discussions triggered by the presentations. My aim is to relate God's Good-news to our felt needs, and to show how the Gospel is entirely relevant for the life that we live.

I wrote this while living in the context of a Christian support group. So I express here my deepest thanks to those who have supported me through that process:

Dr. Carl H. Lloyd, Dr. Larry Drake, and Bob Miller for their insights in the preparation of this material.

The Encounter support group also included:

Nancy Drake, Bob and Carolyn Young, Scott and Janice Sutterfield, Gary and Jan Groenemann, John and Shirley Bragg, Scott and Nancy Weidner, and Dennis and Charolette Dalton.

They encountered me about what I wrote in such a way that it constantly enriched my thinking about human emotions. Dona Spencer attempted to straighten out the grammar of the work. Also backing the Encounters ministry during the time of this writing: Louis J. and Maryann Hall, Tom and Ada Beam, Randy Young, and Inez Kniffen. Without these loving people, I wouldn't have had either the time or enthusiasm to have completed this book.

Synopsis

Chapter 1: Emotional Havoc — King David's Tragedy

After an affair with Bathsheba, David *mis*managed his emotions by becoming afraid of his emotions (impulses, drives, energies, motivations, etc.). So he became passive as he thought, "Passiveness will cure my impetuosity." It did not! So when his son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar, David did nothing. When Absalom murdered Amnon, David said nothing. When Absalom fled for three years, he did nothing. When Absalom returned without seeing his dad for another two years, David continued to say and do nothing. David developed the habit of "sitting on his emotions" as he repressed his feelings hoping that they wouldn't cause him any more problems. But they did.

David became cold and withdrawn; Absalom felt unloved and rejected his dad as he felt his dad had rejected him. Then in cold maliciousness Absalom plotted a rebellion that nearly split the young nation apart and sent him to an early grave. All of these tragedies arose because David didn't know how to handle his negative emotions.

Chapter 2: Psychological Splinters — The Dynamics of Repression

The story of how David and Absalom ruined so much of their lives by *repressing their emotions*. As they denied their own inner realities, rejected their subjective facts, and created emotional dishonesty within—it became a demon in their souls. Repression works paradoxically: we think we thereby rid ourselves of something hateful and ugly, but we in fact bring that evil into our depths. To dislodge these *psychological splinters* that repression creates, we must use such resources as: self-awareness, repentance, and acceptance. These psychological tools inhere in the good-news to free us for emotional wholeness.

Chapter 3: Whence Cometh Emotions?

The scriptures presuppose a cognitive psychological approach to people. The story of David and Jacob illustrate the cognitive elements in our "stream of consciousness" which determine our emotional life and responses. Old Hebraic psychology urged: "guard your heart [mind] with all diligence because out of it flows the springs of life." Human consciousness operates as a dynamic, ever ebbing and flowing inner force or process. Who knows his own mind? We all have depths yet unexplored. Yet the dynamism of human consciousness creates the inter-connectedness of cognition-will-emotions-behavior: *a causal loop*. Emotions arise from the whole range of our consciousness, verbal and abstract thinking, as well as pictorial, experiential, somatic, unconscious, emotional, relational, and intuitive.

Chapter 4: Renewing the Mind

Since emotions arise from our cognitions, to experience true emotional vitality we must engage in *cognitive restructuring*. In "renewing the mind" Christianly, we learn to think clearly and rationally in order to believe aright. "Renewing the mind" purges our misbeliefs which lie at the heart of all emotional imbalance. The seat of human depravity lies not in our drives or emotions, but in our intellect. The Christian program for cognitive restructuring entails becoming "disciples to" truth himself, "girding up the loins of our minds," cogitating principles, updating our values, imagining with Christ's stories, reprogramming our subconscious, and becoming aware of our cognitive distortions. With this new "reckoning in the soul" we become new transformed persons.

Chapter 5: Cognitive Focusing — The Dynamic Use of Will in Emoting

A renewed mind must stay in focus. We must keep *attending and intending* the specific beliefs and images that accord with reality. Cognitive focusing describes the power of will; in choosing and deciding. Behind all emoting lies consciousness—thinking, perceiving, creating and finding meaning, making choices, etc. By turning "our central self" to mind-renewing truths we can effectively manage our emoting. This intangible process of will makes us responsible selves, selves that can "set" our hearts.

Chapter 6: Taking Charge of our Emotions

Emotions do not just happen to us. As we reject passivity, we can become the architects of our future-feelings. Specific strategies for taking charge include: developing greater self-awareness, acceptance, assuming responsibility, holding our emotions accountable, conditioning ourselves by the "as if" technique, and learning the feeling of self-mastery.

Chapter 7: What do you do with an Emotionalized Predisposition?

When emotions "grow up," they become moods, complexes, and attitudes—*emotionalized predispositions*. As thoughts and motor skills become habits, so do emotions. This means that we can "program" our emotions into the subconscious where they cease to "feel" like emotions. This "Iceberg Principle," then,

in turn, masks our emotions from us. So as we seek to become "renewed in the spirit of the mind" we take our cognitive restructuring one step further—we even make new our ingrained subconscious "attitudes." How? To accomplish this deep reprogramming we first become aware of these deep mental grooves, orient ourselves to openness to change, allow people to confront us, use cognitive dissonance constructively, and learn to walk into the biblical Stories. We can un-mask our *emotionalized predispositions* and expose them to the healing power within "the mind of Christ."

Chapter 8: Emotional Wholeness for the Christian

When Paul described the "new walk" (or lifestyle) he mentioned numerous emotional facets of life that we need to Christianized. The process he suggested included: de-paganizing ("putting off the old nature"), experiencing a discipleship relation to Jesus, adjusting ourselves relationally, responsibly owning our emotions, endowing our emotions with Christian meanings, gracing people with our words, keeping on good terms with God's spirit, turning on the light of morality, living in Christ's light, and using God's resources for emotional energy.

Chapter 9: Feelings I Have About Myself

Self-image feelings play a central role in life, radically affecting all of our other emotions. Without a good self-image, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, etc. we will not develop the ability to authentically enter into *the celebration of life*. What dooms people to experiencing "low self-esteem?" Misbeliefs and unresolved guilt. To Christianize these feelings, we must restructure our thinking about our worth, focus on our true identity, learn to distinguish self-esteem from self-confidence, give ourselves permission to live as a fallible human being, and distinguish healthy and unhealthy self-denial from self-love.

Chapter 10: What do Do When You're Feeling Negative

Don't waste life imprisoned by negative feelings. By properly understanding the role and value of our "negative" emotions, we can learn to use them constructively and productively, then release them in a timely manner. Since any emotion habituated becomes "programmed" into the subconscious to then become our constant "moods," we need to effectively handle, learn from, and release these negative emotions. We release the negative emotional energy by "getting physical," sublimating it through physical activity, by cathecting, by stopping the production, by prayer and by relaxation. The key: we do not *live in* the negative emotions or deny them, but use them constructively.

Chapter 11: Positive Emoting

God ultimately designs that we experience abundant life and become fully alive. C.S. Lewis says, "God is the true hedonist," the Psalmist said that "pleasures are always at his right hand," and Jesus affirmed that he came that "our joy might be full." In view of this emphasis on joy, love, peace, self-dignity, forgiveness, etc., we simply need to learn *how to turn them on!* This process begins as we learn: to think

Christianly, to act on these life energies so that these high resolves and holy emotions and capture them, to touch, to use our psycholinguistics positively, to live in the now, to enjoy life, to develop an awe toward life, to turn on human warmth, and to energize our lives with meaning.

Chapter 12: Experiencing the Dynamics of Grace

Our emotions become shaped and formed in and by relationships. They can also become re-shaped and re-formed by healthier and holier relationships. The dynamics inherent in caring friendship, small groups, large groups of believers in worship, and counseling provides channels for *the transformative power of grace*. This power of koinonia fleshes-out love, faith and hope. Then, as we feel loved and accepted, needed and respected in human relationships our emotions become healed and revitalized by this touch of grace. These expressions of grace reflect the ultimate grace encounter—the divine one.

Chapter 13: When I was a Child

Childishness represents a snag, and sometimes a big one, in our journey to emotional wholeness. This speaks about the failure to grow up. Regressing to infantile mental and emotional states functions as the antithesis of growing up. Such regressing prevents emotional vitality and accountability. The infantilism of believers in Corinth, in some of Jesus' hearers, and in Israel when Moses herded them through the wilderness provide a close-up look at childishness in its worst forms. Such negative examples challenge us to put away temper tantrums, low frustration-tolerance, and anger reactions.

Chapter 14: The Psychology and Language of Emotion in the Bible

The Hebrews conceptualized emotions as springing from the center of their being. They used stomach and bowel words to indicate emotions—for emotions arose primarily from the center of one's being. They also had many other words that did duty for emotions and human psychology; words that dance and sing to our more scientifically oriented ears, words full of wild metaphor, colorful expression, and poetic description—all very un-western. Yet, as we come to understand their language we get a deeper perception of their concepts about emotion.

Appendix: Dreams — The Royal Road to the Unconscious

Since emotions come from cognitions, the wild and spectacular cognitions unique to our dreams reveal the pictorial nature of our subconscious and tune us into their emotional messages. Learning some basic keys for interpreting our dreams enables us to attain greater self-awareness.

Chapter 1

EMOTIONAL HAVOC

THE KISS OF REJECTION

Absalom decided that he would go first class.
So he "got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him."
(II Samuel 15:1)

The fifty runners served as heralds, as guys who could not only run a marathon every day, but who could shout out a message as they ran. "*Make way for the King's son! Make way for Prince Absalom!*" The brigade of Absalom's joggers shouted as they ran through the streets of Jerusalem. This served as their way of heralding their master. Their shouts echoed through the narrow streets and alleys of the old city. "Make way for the King's Son!"

Absalom's runners began their daily run in Absalom's courtyard in the rich district where the noble families lived. Behind them rode their master. He stood up in the chariot and handled the reins--a Ben Hur of the 9th. century B.C. Proudly he drove his gold-plated chariot and horses which he recently imported from Egypt.

"Make way! Make way! Prince Absalom is coming!"

Absalom made a special point of riding through the marketplace of Jerusalem, around the Pool of Siloam, and then up the steep inclines of Zion to the Gate of Judgment. He wanted people to notice. And they did. At the Gate of Judgment, Absalom would stop, dismount, and conduct his unofficial official business. He would poll the local people about their views of the current administration.

Though Absalom had no college training in Public Relations, he certainly had a knack for marketing. He knew how to make a stunning first impression on people. To capture attention and command respect, he had imported his gold-plated chariot and

Egyptian horses.

No wonder that people began noticing Absalom as never before. They felt that he had something special and different. Some said he seemed like a man inspired with a sense of destiny. Could he become the next king? No one knew for sure about his purpose, but most felt it would involve something very special. In the Palestinian evenings, when people sat around gossiping about current events, people would say, "What else does Absalom want?" "Absalom's destined to become the next king in Israel, and he has all the wealth that a person could dream about."

And they seemed to speak aright. Absalom neither needed nor seemed motivated by money. In fact, he had spent a small fortune when he purposed his chariot and horses. He didn't blink twice about the cost. Nor did he care about the price of the fifty runners whom he hired. Absalom had other things on his mind.

"Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate; and when any man had a suit to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him, and say, 'From what city are you?' And when he said ... Absalom would say to him, 'See your claims are good and right; but there is no man deputed by the king to hear you.'" (II Sam. 15:2-3)

Politics interested Absalom. He made his grand entrance to the Gate of Judgment every morning to meet people, to shake their hands, and to inquire about their felt need for justice. He then told them the bad news. Legally, they had no recourse in their search for justice: "There is no man deputed by the king to hear you." All doors seemed closed to them.

So Absalom marketed a felt need. He dressed for success, demonstrated a passion for justice, made people feel valued, listened with sympathy to their stories of plight as he invited each to share his or her legal problems. And he ended the encounter by validating them: "Your claims are good and right." In so doing, he won many friends and influenced multitudes of people! Doing so began to win their hearts. He also, subtly, but systematically underscored that their biggest problem involved an unconcerned king, one who continually failed to structure his administration so that they could find justice!

"Absalom said moreover, 'Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.'" (II Sam. 15:4)

Having identified the need, Absalom let each one know that he wanted to become a supreme court justice. He not only identified authentic needs, he also marketed to his audience a product sure to answer their needs—himself as judge!

At least things certainly appeared this way, on the surface. Actually, at a higher logical level, other beliefs, values and agendas drive Absalom's actions than just political ambition. After all, as the king's son, he probably could have simply gone to David and asked for such an appointment if he had really wanted that and could have demonstrated a legitimate need in that area. So *why* the impressive show of grandeur every morning? *Why* the subtle politicking against David?

"Whenever a man came near to do obeisance to him, he would put out his hand, and take hold of him, and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." (II Sam. 15:5-6)

Absalom could have authored a book about winning friends and influencing people. He certainly had invented a winsome style. He certainly seemed to know all the tricks of the trade: dressing for success, driving the latest model in Egyptian chariots, taking interest in people, expressing emotional warmth, listening with sympathy, validating people, and making them feel highly respected. No wonder he won their allegiance! No wonder he stole their hearts!

Yet Absalom did not play truthfully in his self-presentations. Beneath his charismatic personality seethed ulterior motives. All along, he sought to manipulate things to his own advantage driven from some old unfinished emotional business he carried around. He did not really want to be district judge—he wanted to "get back" at his father, David. His motive now had become to threaten and perhaps to even overthrow his dad, and he cared not if it took a national civil rebellion or the lives of thousands of innocent people.

So *where* did all of these stored-up anger and resentment come from? What led him to have gotten into such a state? For four years Absalom stole the hearts of the Israelites. Finally the day came for him to make his move and use his clout for his diabolical plot he entered into the palace of the king and entreated King David for a favor. So he did.

"Pray let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. ... So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" (II Sam. 15:7-10)

Absalom said he wanted to go to Hebron to worship, but worshiping God comprised the furthest thing from his mind. He had another intention—an intention of hatred; he wanted to demolish King David. So as Samuel had anointed David in Hebron, Absalom chose the same town as the place for his inauguration. And Absalom's smoothness in all his subterfuge worked—David suspected nothing. His deceit worked so subtly that David never picked up on his hatred, dislike, or resentment. By

this point, King David had become so emotionally blind and deaf to his son that his emotions no longer served him well as signals about things.

"With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their simplicity, and knew nothing ... And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing." (II Sam. 15:11-12)

So at Hebron Absalom made his move. His revolutionaries appointed him King, his servants blew the trumpets throughout the land and then he dispatched his messengers to marshal a vast army which could forcibly dispose David and set up a righteous kingdom dedicated to justice.

"A messenger came to David, saying, 'The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.' Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, 'Arise, and let us flee; for else there will be no escape for us from Absalom; go in haste, lest he overtake us quickly, and bring down evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.'" (II Sam. 15:13-14)

To this David fled. Once again David became a refugee in the wilds of the wilderness fleeing for his life. Thirty years prior to this David had lived as a refugee in the same woods and caves, hiding in forests and in the wadis of the Dead Sea area. In those days King Saul chased him; today he had to evade his own son who wanted his life. Then David had but entered his early manhood; now he had become middle aged, the prime of his life—his early fifties. After Saul's death David's leadership brought the northern tribes and the southern tribes together. David also captured the old Jebusite city of Jerusalem and made it the capital. Under David's wise leadership, he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and had won his wars with surrounding countries. For years, things had come together to solidify the kingdom and David's kingship. Then Absalom started a rebellion. Why? What did he want? Why had he started this thing?

"How could so many turn against me?" he wondered as everything caved in on him. David wondered about his son, "What's wrong with him anyway? Doesn't he know what he's doing? This conspiracy has ripped our country apart! What has gotten into that boy?"

News of the conspiracy undoubtedly stabbed David's consciousness awake in a new and unfamiliar way. Old memories now began to rush in, especially memories of his former days of insecurity when he never knew when Saul might throw a javelin at him. He felt utterly dependent, again. The royal life of recent years had made David forget those nights sleeping on the hard ground in the wilderness, those sleepless nights standing guard at the mouth of caves. He had also forgotten how it felt to be totally dependent upon God. David mused, "Have I been in a stupor during the past

decade?"

David began thinking about his children and especially Absalom. Suddenly he understood. It dawned on him why Absalom turned on him. "I should have seen it coming!" he cried out. "Why didn't realize it? O Absalom, my son, O Absalom!" But Absalom did not hear.

David and his men fled into the wilderness. For weeks they evaded the Israeli army without suffering many casualties. David had men with stout hearts, "as stout as the heart of a lion." Then suddenly the battle turned against Absalom's troops. The small band of David's Mighty Men began routing the rebellion. It happened in the Forest of Ephraim. Though the other army greatly outnumbered David's men, they began to prevail.

"Retreat! Retreat!" A soldier signaled on the ram's horn. Thousands of Israeli soldiers lay dead. They had irreparably damaged Absalom's militia; thus ending the revolution. Scared and confused, Absalom also fled. He mounted his mule and beat a hasty retreat. But he rode too hard, and too fast. Nor had he kept his mind on his riding. Suddenly his mule ran under a massive oak branch in the Forest. Absalom's head didn't make it. His head jammed into the fork of that branch and that knocked Absalom senseless, unconscious.

"Absalom was riding upon his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on." (II Sam. 18:6)

What a physically agonizing thing to ram your head into the fork of the tree's branch! Absalom probably hit the tree at the point of his Adam's apple so that his chin and head rested on the branch. In spite of pictures to the contrary, he did *not* get his long hair caught in the branches—scripture says "his *head* caught fast in the oak." Absalom's arms immediately fell limp as he fell into a state of unconsciousness. And though the crash must have incredibly hurt, it did not kill him. He might even have survived the oak tree if it hadn't been for a pair of eyes lurking from behind another tree.

Immediately an unnamed servant ran to General Joab of David's military and reported that Absalom had become detained in an oak tree. Joab couldn't believe the servant did not kill Absalom, so he took three darts and went out to kill Absalom himself.

"He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him" (II Sam. 18:14-15)

Now Joab took these actions in spite of David's briefing. David had given strict orders,

"Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom!" But Joab's had held some personal animosity against Absalom for quite some time. Once Joab had befriended Absalom and had experienced a close friendship. But no longer. Now Joab turned on Absalom with cold-blooded revenge.

Upon hearing about Absalom's death, David broke down:

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Sam. 18:33)

"It was told Joab, 'Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.' So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people for the people heard that day, 'The king is grieving for his son.' And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, 'O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (II Sam. 19:1-4)

Putting David on the Coach — The Psychoanalyzing David

The story that I have here plucked out of the biblical narrative gives the impression that David had always lived as a caring and emotionally sensitive father. Not! His emotional expressiveness in mourning Absalom in this last scene conveys the picture of *an emotionally alive man* with such vibrancy that he could genuinely love someone who wanted to destroy him. But to pull that one scene out of its larger context gives a false impression. David had not related in a caring or emotionally sensitive way for many years. For years he had lived in *a state of emotional hardness* toward Absalom. And, in fact, David's coldness and rejection of his son laid at the root of Absalom's hatred and rebellion toward his dad.

Actually, David had only recently learned to feel for Absalom again. Through his wilderness pain David experienced the grace to feel again. Out of his pain and humiliation he recover the ability to feel grief over his son's death.

David asked the messengers sent to him, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" "Is Absalom whole and safe; is he delivered and alive?" They told David the truth; "No, Absalom is *not shalom*; he is dead." The tragedy here lies in how Absalom died believing that David did **not** love him, did not want him, did not respect him, and wanted to have nothing to do with him. We could say that Absalom died because of David's emotional coldness.

Let's leave this story for the moment with its final scene of pathos: a man with graying hair lying prostrate on the floor on the wall of the city's gate—wailing and weeping. He cries because of *the emotional havoc he created in his own life* as well as the lives of his loved ones. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died

instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

In order to understand the psychological dynamics involved in David's coldness and Absalom's malice, we must go back to the beginning of the story. There we will discover many of the psychodynamics that contributed to work this emotional havoc. It will also provide us a negative model—*how not to manage our emotions*. The story warns that this is *not* the way to handle your emotions!

Amon the Rapist

The story began with Amnon, David's oldest son (a half-brother to Absalom). Amnon had fallen in love with Tamar:

"Absalom ... had a beautiful sister ... Tamar; and after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her." (II Sam. 13:1-2)

Amnon "could not see" any way to win Tamar's heart. "It seemed impossible to" him. Given Tamar's beauty, Amnon believed that he had no chance whatever with her. He compared her beauty with his defects and concluded her as unattainable by him. In so believing, his thoughts "tormented" him so that he became ill. Then, sick with such anxiety and self-depreciation, this state of soul began showing in his appearance.

"O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" (II Sam. 13:4)

Jonadab, Amnon's cousin, wanted to know why Amnon looked so haggard—so languid. The Hebrew word conveys the idea of "hanging down," or of "being feeble." Amnon's face drug the ground! He had adopted the look of a basset hound! Unnecessary reactive depression because he totally created it in himself (mind-and-body) by his perceptions.

Now this Jonadab "was a very crafty man" (sneaky and dishonest) and counseled Amnon to feign sickness, and get King David to send Tamar to his house as his nurse. That would give him a chance to be alone with her. Then he could make whatever advances he wanted. That's some counsel!

Amnon, completely infatuated with her, view this as a great idea. So some time thereafter he heard Tamar knocking on his courtyard door. She had come to bring him her homemade chicken noodle soup (like a good Jewish maiden). But he turned his head every time she put the spoon to his mouth.

"What's wrong?" she inquired. Amnon said he didn't like eating in front of the servants! So she dismissed them all from the room. Bad idea. Still Amnon would not

eat. Tamar inquired again, "What is wrong, my brother?"

At that moment, Amnon "took hold of her and said to her, 'Come lie with me.'" But Tamar refused. She knew the wrongness of such an act, and so pleaded with Amnon to act with integrity.

"No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this wanton folly. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the wonton fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.' But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her." (II Sam. 13:11-14)

Amnon had gotten into a state where his lust had gotten totally out-of-control. He confused sexual attraction and lust with love. He did not respect Tamar. Her rational words failed to persuade him. His lust clouded his mind. Nor did he seem to have the ability to anticipate the inevitable consequences that would come as she suggested. Nor could he hear Tamar's proposal to become his wife if only he would ask the king for her. "He will not withhold me from you." But Amnon either did not believe her or had gotten too lustfully impatient to think of postponing his immediate wants. So he raped her.

"Then Amnon hated her with very great hate; so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he loved her. And Amnon said to her, 'Arise, be gone.' But she said to him, 'No, my brother, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other which you did to me.' But he would not listen to her. He called the young man who served him and said, 'Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.'" (II Sam. 13:15-18)

Amnon made matters worse (in that day and time) by throwing Tamar out after he cruelly and heartlessly raped her. After fulfilling his lust, he felt only contempt for her. Hatred! Despite that, Tamar begged him to keep her. Those were truly different times than today! But, of course, back then in that more primitive culture, men did not recognize women as equals, so they did not consider rape as evil a fate as the state of being husbandless, so the beautiful daughter of the king, a member of the royal family, *preferred* to marry her rapist than be turned out.

Yet Amnon's character deficiency and lack of conscience caused his love to turn to hate. He "hated her with very great hatred; so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he loved her." Here we see just how infantile and impatient his character, as well as how grossly immoral. He behaved as a wonton fool—cruelty lived in his narcissistic heart. Though his father, David, lived and thought as "a man after God's own heart," Amnon didn't adopt that orientation at all.

"Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her" Amnon shouted at his servant. Thus screaming and kicking, he forcibly had Tamar removed from his house just as he had forcibly raped her. Against her will and tears he had inhumanly used and manipulated her, and then turned her out. Amnon behaved monstrously toward her. His own emotional problems indicate a deep sense of rejection and lovelessness. Could David, the "man after God's own heart" have failed that thoroughly to make his own son feel loved, appreciated, and worthed? I think so.

"Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent the long robe which she wore; and she laid her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went." (II Sam. 13:19)

All of this raises another interesting question. How can a godly man raise a son so depraved in morals and human compassion? The answer lies, I believe, partly due to David's passivity. In terms of his parenting of Amnon, he just let things happen. He failed to exercise fatherly admonition, so that he did not train him in the way he should go.

We find this passivity in David's fathering style described in a later text when his other son, Adonijah, exalted himself as the king. He did it in spite of the fact that God and David had designated Solomon as the next king. At the time David laid on his death bed, and the author of I Kings wrote,

"His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?'" (I Kings 1:6-7)

The Hebrew word for "displeased" here means "*pained*" "to travail, suffer pain, grieve. What comprised David's great parenting fault? His refusal to pain his sons. He did not want them to hurt. He didn't want to hurt their feelings. So, he never reprovved them or challenged them to become responsible, saying, "Why have you done thus and so?" In other words, David "spoiled" them by letting them get by with mischief. He gave them too much of a life of ease! He swung too far to the other side from the strict discipline he undoubtedly had received. Perhaps he did this also as a reaction to the pain he suffered as the youngest of eight boys. But whatever the cause, David's passive style of interacting essentially taught Amnon and Adonijah to become demanding, ego-centric, irresponsible brats. They lived like self-centered tyrants, expecting the world, and incapable of accepting life's *nos*.

Question. Where did David learn such passivity? We find not a single trace of such passivity in David during his younger years. So where did it come from? I believe *it arose from the trauma he suffered in his affair with Bathsheba*. It seems that he became passive because as a consequence of Nathan's rebuke, *he began to fear himself*—he began to fear his passions, his energies, drives, and emotions. And whenever we direct a state of fear, not longer toward *objects*, experiences, events,

etc. in the world, but toward another one of our *states of being* (our God-given passions, energies, motivations, hopes, etc.), then we have created a *meta-state wherein we turn our psychic (psychological) energies against ourselves*.

Absalom the Counselor

"Absalom said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.'" (II Sam. 13:20)

Absalom now entered the scene for the first time. With compassion he met Tamar in her time of grief. He encouraged her, gave her counsel, and took her into his own home to provide emotional support. Absalom related to her as any emotionally mature and loving person would. He counseled, "Do not take this to heart." He did not want her to dwell upon her trauma. He knew that dwelling on the traumatic experience would only cause it to dominate her consciousness and fill her every waking moment.

To *take something to heart* means treating a thought or event as a matter of great importance. It means concentrating on it and exalting it in one's valuing and perceiving. Absalom as much said:

"Look Tamar, it was a terrible thing that Amnon did to you, but don't make it worse by continually re-experiencing it in your mind. Let it go, Tamar. Don't focus on it so that it fills your soul making you bitter and consuming all of your psychological energy."

Absalom's advice to Tamar that she should "hold her peace," however, was not good. "Saying nothing about" the matter was neither good nor appropriate. Tamar needed to ventilate her feelings, to express her grief, and to be understood and supported by loving people. Yet his advice that she "hold her peace," in this context, served as a *counsel for repression*. Now because repression (in contrast to suppression) never operates as a healthy way to deal with the kind of violent experiences or emotions she had suffered, in recommending the silent treatment, Absalom followed in the steps of his dad and his passivity. "Let's not deal with the issue. Let's keep things hushed up, and then things will all work out. If we pretend it doesn't exist, it will go away."

So how did David deal with all of this when he got word of it?

"So Tamar dwelt, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. When king David heard of all these things, he was very angry." (II Sam. 13:20-21)

David did not like the situation one bit. Actually, the news of Amnon's folly made his blood boil. What a scandal in the royal family! What an act of a wanton fool! It brought shame to David. Yet though Amnon had committed a wicked and cruel deed, a crime and an act of immorality—*David took no action*. He felt aroused to a

great anger, but he sat on his feelings. He squelched himself from making any response. Not one word do we ever hear expressed from David with regarding calling Amnon in to even do as little as have a father-son talk with him. Not one word in the scriptures indicates that he ever confronted Amnon about what he had done. David experienced a state of intense emotional arousal (anger), but he did nothing to rectify things; he did not even offer his help to Tamar. He tried to pretend that none of it happened. So as with Adonijah, so with Amnon — "His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?'" David sat on his emotions and thereby allowed the injustice to just stand without any redress.

Now we find it good that David got angry about the situation. God gives us anger to register the violation of values and the threat to the good. But what did not work out as good involved David's "do nothing" response to his anger. God grants us the ability to experience anger in order to provide us the energy and motivation to swing into action when we feel threatened. Anger motivates. It energizes us to take effective action. But to experience the emotion *without acting* weakens our very capacity to emote. And, in the long run, it works havoc in our character (more about this in Ch. 10). To feel without using the emotional energy *conditions us to passivity*. The ability to respond with anger gives us the motivation needed to work for justice. So scripture mandates: "Be angry and sin not." Without misusing it, we need to experience our anger, and our anger fully. But David apparently did not give himself permission to use his anger constructively. This indicates that sometime after the event with Bathsheba, he must have become afraid of his emotions and of acting from them.

"But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom *hated* Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar. ... After two years Absalom ... invited all the king's sons..." (II Sam. 13:22-23)

Nor do we find David as the only person repressing his emotions. Absalom was doing the same thing! (The father's errors passing down the generations). Absalom must have believed that he should not hate his brother. Yet he did. He hate does not represent a decent emotion to have toward one's brother. Yet he hated him, and with good reason. But like father, like son; he felt without allowing that feeling to motivate him to seek justice in a healthy and proper way. So though he hated Amnon, he behaved as if he liked him, as if he thought of everything as just fine. Absalom wore a mask of niceness to cover-up his hatred.

Now the feeling of *hate* functions as all of our other God-given emotions, it exists as a somatic state of arousal directed by our thoughts, providing us information (accurate or inaccurate) about our assessment of our life situation. Scripture informs us: "Hate what is evil" (Romans 12:9). Yet hate, like anger, exists as a highly volatile emotion and can easily become misused. Designed to motivate us to rectify evils, it

moves us to take effective action so we can then release it. As with all of the "negative" emotions, we should *not* "live in" it for any length of time. Living in any emotions habituates it. Living in hate habituates it so that it becomes maliciousness.

Both David and Absalom failed to use their negative emotions positively. Each stifled himself. Each began living inauthentically. Consciously or unconsciously each assumed that if they did not acknowledge their true feelings, those feelings would simply go away. Not! Emotions do not work in that manner. Repressed emotions do not just go away. Instead they go underground, into our subconscious heart, and there they continue fermenting, growing and boiling.

And then, this very process causes our emotions and personality to become more and more distorted and twisted. Unresolved, repressed thoughts and emotions demand more and more psychic energy to keep the truth from ourselves. There they become energized and grow into distorted forces that work havoc in our personalities. It happened to David and to Absalom.

For two years the king and his sons, as well as their families, walked about the palace politely smiling at each other. They buried the issue of Amnon's immoral behavior and their feelings about it in a grave of silence. They all carried the unfinished business within them because they didn't allow themselves to deal with it openly. Then one day Absalom asked permission to host a grand banquet for the King's family.

Absalom the Murderer

"After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baalhazor ... and Absalom invited all the king's sons." (II Sam. 13:32)

Absalom wanted the whole family with him to celebrate the harvest time and his prosperity. He invited his father David, but David declined, "Let us not all go lest we be burdensome to you." Unsuspecting that Absalom had a devious plot up his sleeve, David passively agreed to have Amnon and the rest of his children show up for the party.

But repressed anger and hatred had turned into cold calculating malice in Absalom and had transformed Absalom's psychic pain into something dark and demonic-like. For two years he carried a living emotional cancer in his soul, yet Amnon never suspected Absalom's true feelings. Insensitive and self-centered, Amnon probably thought that he and Absalom had a great relationship.

"Then Absalom commanded his servants, 'Mark when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Fear not; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant.'" (II Sam. 13:28)

In giving his servants this pep talk we note that Absalom had not lived by his own counsel; "Do not take this to heart." For he had taken his hate-thoughts and images of revenge to heart. He meditated on his sister's humiliation until it filled his waking and sleeping hours. In addition to this ugly orientation of soul, Absalom lived an inauthentic life. He wore a mask of niceness and lost touch with the depths of his feelings. Repression took over from there and created an emotional demon of revenge in the subterranean depths of his heart.

"Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil." (Eccl. 8:11)

Absalom consciously knew that David had not served justice in the way he had handled the situation. So unconsciously he felt driven to do something about it. After two years, it became obvious to him that David would never get around to doing anything. Eventually Absalom decided that he would serve justice himself by taking the law in to his own hands. Yet in serving justice, ironically his heart became "fully set to do evil." As a vigil anti-group of one, Absalom put out a contract on his brother.

"So servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded." (II Sam. 13:29)

Absalom immediately fled to Geshur. There he stayed for three years (II Sam. 13:34,37-38). In response to this new development, David responded with his now characteristic response—more passivity. He felt without acting. *Grief for Amnon* filled his heart, but he did not use his motivating emotion to do anything about it. Eventually, he worked through his grief for Amnon, and eventually he began thinking about Absalom. He even wished that he would come home. But he took no step toward bringing his banished one home.

"*David mourned* for his son day after day. So Absalom ... was there three years. And the spirit of the king longed) to go forth to Absalom; for he was comforted about Amnon, seeing he was dead." (II Sam 13:37-39)

When the scripture says that "the *spirit* of the king longed to go forth to Absalom" the original Hebrew text says "King David's *reins* (or kidneys) issued forth to Absalom." This Hebraic phrase identifies the deep emotional feelings within David. Yet he took no action. He felt, but failed to utilize his emotional energy for seeking reconciliation. It looked as if he had become inwardly blocked from taking effective action.

"Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that *the king's heart went out* to Absalom. And Joab sent to Tekoa, and fetched from there a wise woman..." (II Sam. 14:1-2)

David's thoughts ("heart") turned to Absalom; he pondered whether he should take

any steps to bring Absalom back. Yet other forces operated within him, stifling him. He had become psychically inhibited from acting. Unfinished emotional business caused David to procrastinate.

Now General Joab cared about David and decided to do something. So he took action. He hired a wise woman to come to David and present herself as a mourner who wanted audience with the king about an injustice. So dramatically, she approached David's Gate of Judgment. Her charade involved acting as a widow and stating that her first son had died and whose last son would soon die at the hand of the avenger of blood. She effectively played the role. And as she did, David's emotions became aroused: "As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground!" he vowed. At that very moment, she turned the tables on him.

"Why have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again." (II Sam. 14:13)

With a firm gentleness she confronted the king. As Nathan before her, she also bypassed David's mental blocks and rationalizations by acting out a Story that hooked his attention and then his emotions. But David smelled a rat. "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?"

Yes, she confessed, "It was Joab ... in order to change the course of affairs." (II Sam. 14:19-20). Perhaps Joab had battered David about bringing Absalom back for quite some time, and this technique reminded him of his General who had been trying to get him to do something.

"Then the king said to Joab, 'Behold, now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom. ... So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem.'" (II Sam. 14:21-22)

What happened next I can only make some suppositions. Following Joab's departure to Geshur to bring Absalom back, and Joab's return, David changed his mind. For when Absalom did return to Jerusalem, David informed him, through Joab, that he forbid him to see his face. David had put him on probation.

"Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence. So Absalom dwelt apart in his own house, and did not come into the king's presence." (II Sam. 14:24)

"He is not to see my face" expresses a Hebraic idea that forbid Absalom to enter into David's *"presence."* What an anticlimatical ending to Absalom's homecoming! After all those years and then Joab's excited encouragement for Absalom to return home—it all fizzled out at the end. He returned, but, in a way, he did not return. He entered the walls of Jerusalem but he received a taboo from entering the palace. His own dad

wouldn't allow him to see him. He had to live apart. In this way, Absalom's homecoming became more like receiving a sentence to solitary confinement than the resolution of a family problem.

Today we say that "a man persuaded against his own will is of the same opinion still." This described the situation with David in terms of the persuasion that Joab had performed via the "widow woman." While David occasionally thought about his son and felt moved to effect a reconciliation to him, and though Joab gave him the push he needed to do something about his banished one—yet something else worked deep inside David inhibiting him from making it a reality. Some deep force within his personality kept him inhibited from showing a father's love.

David suffered from the problem of repression. He had never resolved his anger toward Amnon and toward Absalom. His feelings toward Tamar and his sense of guilt for sending Tamar to Amnon, and then Amnon to Absalom's banquet—all of that David repressed, pushed down, forced out of his conscious awareness. And yet it existed in him as an unfinished gestalt. No wonder David refused to "face" Absalom. He did not have the ability to face himself. He could not pull himself together and deal forthrightly when his own emotions and impulses. Five years passed and those repressed emotions had created a mood of coldness and bitterness. David had become emotionally numb.

Absalom the Unloved

Absalom settled down in Jerusalem. He married, fathered three sons and a daughter (whom he named Tamar!) and grew into a handsome young man. "From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." And what magnificent hair did he have! His yearly visit to the barber always included a weighing of his long lush hair—usually tipping the scales to the tune of five pounds! "So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence." (II Sam. 14:28)

Seven years had now elapsed since Amnon raped his sister. During the past five years neither Absalom nor his dad had so much as seen each other's face. It seemed that David had not moved an inch closer to calling his son so that they could accomplish a reconciliation. Finally the pressure built up beyond what Absalom could handle. He found it intolerable to live in that state of probation. In desperate, he wrote a letter to Joab asking him to do something. Anything! Joab tossed the letter in the waste case. He too had become sick and tired of the whole mess. "I wonder what's wrong with Joab? It's not like him to not answer his mail."

Absalom sat down and scribbled out another letter. No response. Now Absalom began to really get steamed. As if he thought it bad enough that his dad continually ignored him and treated him as a second-class person, now Joab had started to do the

same. Absalom's frustration erupted into violence.

"Then he said to his servants, 'See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.' So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house, and said to him, 'Why have your servants set my field on fire?'" (II Sam. 14:30-31)

Absalom couldn't stand any more rejection. Enough had become enough. He felt sick and tired of the passive punishment his dad continued to hand out. Today we recognize David's behavior as "passive-aggressive." Absalom hated the feelings of worthless he picked up from David, and so poured out his emotions to Joab:

"Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.' Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king; and if there is guilt in me, let him kill me.'" (II Sam. 14:32-33)

Absalom could take anything but this cold treatment. To have his dad treat him with such silence, such contempt, such rejection... created in him *an emotional hell*. The psychologist of Israel explained the process when he wrote "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). And Absalom had become mentally and emotionally sick. Now he had reached an threshold and figured "What's the use?" He would willing suffer any consequences he would have to face in order to make amends and become reconciled to his dad. More than anything else in life Absalom just wanted to feel loved and valued by his dad. He wanted to know that his father genuinely cared about him.

"Then Joab went to the king and told him; and he summoned Absalom, so he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king; *and the king kissed Absalom.*" (II Sam. 14:33)

"The king kissed Absalom." **David** did not kiss his son; that would have taken a lot of ability to relate in a personal way. No. The **king** kissed one of his subjects. David performed the act as merely a matter of state. Though David and Absalom faced each other, only one looked at the other. David still could not, and did not, meet Absalom's eyes. He could not truly encounter him as a father meets a long lost son. David kissed him, but did not have the ability to convey to Absalom any true feelings of love or acceptance. David did not accept him.

Once again Joab had forced his hand. So though Absalom stood before his father, David did not "see" him. This explains why he did not experience the kiss as an expression of human warmth, and why the relationship remained unhealed. They met, but they did not meet deeply. They met, but did not become reconciled emotionally. They met, but did not really meet. So do we hvae any wonder that Absalom walked out of that chamber and began "stealing the hearts of the men of Israel"? I think not.

"Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a suit or cause might

come to me, and I would give him justice." (II Sam. 15:4)

Absalom felt David's injustice more profoundly after that perfunctory kiss. He experienced that kiss as a kiss of rejection rather than a kiss of love. Absalom's feelings that justice had failed in Amnon's case only became intensified when the king kissed one of his subjects as a matter of protocol. And the media operating as it undoubtedly operates in all ages probably spread the word about David's ineffectiveness in dealing with his own family.

Consequently, when Absalom turned on his dad, he began rejecting as he had received rejection. He found himself driven by what psychologists today call the "*rejection syndrome*." He looked for acceptance, but found only rejection. Rejection became his dominant psychological experience. It filled his soul. And with that living within him, it represented what he had to give out. And so he did.

So later, when Absalom finally met his death in the oak tree at the hand of Joab, David wept bitterly—a new emotional experience for David. The "Dark Night of His Soul" (again) in his second wilderness experience had plowed up his heart, and enabled him to feel those sensitive fatherly feelings for the first time in many years. Repentance and pain had turned up the hard soil of his heart. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son."

After years of coldness, David felt again. He became emotionally alive to his son—but it came too late. The emotional havoc had already occurred: two sons had died violent deaths, a daughter humiliated by rape and rejection, and a nation torn apart in civil war. Now I'd call that emotional havoc.

David the Represser

Several contributing factors combined to create David's problems. One of the central of those difficulties involved his newly acquired passivity. He simply failed to take the initiative; he lacked the courage and boldness to jump into action. He allowed too many things to slip without taking effective action.

Yet this portrait of David *radically differs* from the one we received of him from his earlier days. Then he didn't hesitate to jump into the fray and fight off lions and bears when he took his sheep into the wilderness. Then he impetuously jumped into battles with giants! Then he gathered five stones— one for the five Goliath brothers! Then David never behaved passively. Then he took on life with energy and aggressiveness. Nor did David take it lying down when Saul went "mad as the hatter" and began throwing javelins at him. He stayed in there trying to reason with him! As a young king, David also showed himself a vigorous and enterprising soul: he unified the

nation, established a new capital, defeated the Jebusites, Hittites, Philistines, and other warring nations, kept covenant with the house of Saul, etc.

Nor did David act passively when his hormones got stirred up when he saw Bathsheba bathing. In fact, his impulsiveness, his acting on his lustful emotions without thinking precisely describes what got him into that trouble. Then to complicate things, he swung into action plotting to kill Bathsheba's husband, again, without thinking.

Then Nathan exposed him. While David thought he had covered up his tracks, his conscience gave him no peace, but tormented him daily. He had restless nights as he tossed and turned on his bed in agony. Guilt tormented him, making his spirituality painful and distressful.

Then Nathan came and drew David into a Story that aroused his anger at injustice and cruelty. At that point, Nathan pointed his finger prophetically and said, "Thou are the man!" But something else happened to David in his repentance. It seems to me that he *became afraid of himself*. After that event, we see a different man in scripture. Afterwards, he seemed to become *afraid of his impulsive emotions and impetuous drives* (a meta-state).

Why? Because this primary state (his energies, quick thinking, quick acting state) had gotten him into such terrible trouble. So the trauma of his guilt, along with the psychic pain entailed in grieving Bathsheba's baby that died, left David emotionally exhausted. So at some level, conscious or unconscious, David made a decision. *He decided to deny his emotions* (another very destructive meta-state). He must have decided: "Feelings are too dangerous. My impetuous emotions always get me in trouble. They nearly destroyed me this time. I've got to become more cautious. I've got to stop feeling. That's the only safe thing to do." So, afraid of his energies, drives, and emotions— David repressed his feelings.

So David's passivity arose (not from his God-given neurology), but from his fear. His passivity coincided with his repression. As he repressed his strong and vigorous emotions, he made himself more and more *a victim of circumstances* inasmuch as he refused to let his emotions motivate him to take effective action. So he *did nothing* when Amnon raped Tamar. David falsely assumed that repression would make his life safer, that it would guard him against impetuous sins. But repression did not solve his problems. By "shutting up" his emotions, repression made David less capable of coping with life. It always does.

Today we remember David as "a man after God's own heart." This phrase refers to David's *God-centered consciousness*. David had made himself the kind of person who thought God's thoughts after him. David had sought to make himself ever open to

God's ways.

Once when he cut off a piece of King Saul's robe to show Saul that he had no intention of hurting him, "his heart smote him" (I Samuel 24:5). David's spirituality coincided with his conscientiousness. When the Philistines defeated Saul, though David had suffered at Saul's hand, David took no pleasure in his death, but rather felt deeply the pathos of Saul's demise. He even wrote a lamentation in honor of Saul (e.g. II Sam. 1:1-27).

David the, as God's man, maintained a moral awareness of God's call for holiness, but not because he had attained any degree of perfection. David, as with every person, lived his life far from perfection. In many ways, his life looked more like a moral riot. Nor did David succeed very much as a father or husband. Another scripture described David as "a man of blood." Instead of a saintly image, the scriptures portray David as a man of great passions and energies with his greatest redemptive feature as truly and deeply caring about God's will and committing himself to doing it.

The one thing going for David consisted of this—that above everything else he wanted to live as God's man. He *wanted to do* God's will (a meta-state). This orientation made his conscience sensitive to morality, which enabled him to experience the heart of spirituality—the ability to experience a broken heart.

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, God, thou will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18)

David's *God-oriented consciousness* made him a man after "God's heart." That consciousness kept him alive to God's dealings in his life. That consciousness made him always ready to re-adjust his thinking. So when David's repression created a situation where Absalom felt rejected and so rejected David in return, God used that opportunity and David's pain to motivate him to re-evaluate his life and make some needed changes. It hurt. But through the pain *David learned to feel again*. He learned to rely on God's wisdom again, and to know the value of the Lord's discipline:

"Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost part (the inner chambers of the belly)." (Prov. 20:30)

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

What does this story of David teach us today? The Story warns us against shutting down our emotions through repression. David just created *more emotional havoc* when he repressed. It did not make his life any safer. The negative feelings he felt

toward his sons should have lead him to expressing his thoughts and using his emotional energy for righting the wrongs in a healthy and proper way.

All in all, David's passivity backfired on him. It created the very problems he sought to avoid. So David learned, the hard way, that by paying the price of feeling vulnerable and imperfection cost him far less than putting up a front. He also learned that he could not protect his children, and that by not "paining" them he only trained them to become irresponsible persons. In the end, they suffered more for it. His spoiling weakened their moral character and planted the suggestion inside of inferiority—persons that their dad did not trust for adult responsibilities.

Repression and passivity do **not** only prevent emotional vitality. They prevent emotional wholeness. *To journey toward emotional wholeness and vitality we resolve to become emotionally honest with ourselves and others.*

Chapter 2

WHY THE EMOTIONAL HAVOC?

"He who hates, dissembles with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart"
(Proverbs 26:24).

King David closed his eyes to his problems. He assumed that they would simply go away. They did not. In the end he discovered that repression not only did not make his problems disappear, but made them much worse. Repression may have temporarily soothed his conscience as he buried his immediate pain below the threshold of consciousness, but it did not effectively enable him to address his problems. Nor did his emotions go away. In the caverns of his subconscious David's repressed thoughts and emotions continued to boil and seethe. His passivity in dealing with his emotions and relational conflicts only gave his rejected feelings time to become *psychological splinters* in his soul.

This story of David and Absalom illustrates how repression and not-facing problems intensifies our difficulties and disempowers us thereby making us less capable of dealing with life. Repression turned the handsome prince Absalom into an ugly frog—a monstrous with rage. Repression distorted and diseased the soul of both father and son. David repressed his anger and frustrate in an attempt to become safe from impetuosity. But it resulted in creating a rejection dragon in him and him suffering from emotional coldness. Each had a festering psychological splinter lodged within.

Today repression still creates psychological splinters in our souls. Repression creates emotional coldness, uncontrollable passions, and the lack of emotional vitality. The psychological splinters that we create by repression we must pull out by *learning to face life head-on*.

The Dynamics of Repression

By definition refers "to excluding from consciousness." It occurs primarily on the unconscious level as we *defend* ourselves against painful thoughts and emotions that

we don't want, that we refuse. Repression then involves "the rejection from consciousness of painful or disagreeable ideas, memories, feelings, and impulses." Activated by fear and/or repulsion, repression consists primarily of *a refusal to see*. As such, it comprises a state-about-a-state (a meta-state). I reject (one state) the state of seeing my fallibility, humanness, vulnerabilities, errors, etc.

Now because we do not want to *face up to some ugly cognition or feeling*—we do not see. This makes us predisposed against seeing. We "close our eyes, shut out ears, and harden our hearts" against those states of consciousness that we find unacceptable. We reject inner motives and impulses that we deem unacceptable such as selfishness, greed, resentment, lust, and fear. Why? Because to know such things about ourselves threatens our self-image and self-definitions. So to cope, we restrict our self-awareness. Yet in so doing we only make ourselves *psychologically blind*—as David became. We lose our ability to know ourselves.

Repression involves *a denial of reality*. Our unconscious reasoning (un-reasoning) goes something like: "If I do not acknowledge this thing, if I refuse to face it or see it, it will go away." We re-enact the psychological mechanism of the original couple in the garden. We experience Adam and Eve's defense mechanism—*hiding*. We take cover by grabbing psychological fig leaves to cover our shame and nakedness. We conceal from ourselves our own inner reality.

We often engage in such cover-up unintentionally, sometimes just to show ourselves as socially polite. We say, "I'm doing just fine," when we may not feel fine or evaluate our situation as fine at all. Things may actually have gotten into a state of chaos. We may inwardly feel torn-up and desperate to talk with someone. Yet because we want to maintain a social image we wear *a mask of niceness*. Of course, when people ask, "How are you?" they do not ask for information anyway. They use such words merely as an expression of social greeting. Yet when we cover-up we hide not only from others, but from ourselves. Our words cover up our inner hurts and true feelings like fig leaves covered Adam and Eve. We pretend just as David pretended when Amnon shamed Tamar. We shut off some of our feelings and impulses for the sake of showing ourselves as a pleasant person hoping that things will get better.

Yet in so doing, we engage in *an act of dishonesty*. With others and ourselves we act and speak dishonestly. When David became "very angry," he still pretended (first to others) that he actually didn't feel angry. In trying to become un-angry, David did not become happy with Amnon. He only deceived himself. Pretending that we do not feel angry when we do feel angry does not make the anger go away. It only creates various anger masks: irritability, malice, unforgiving, coldness, depression, and sadness.

Psychodynamically we cannot live in dishonesty without hurting ourselves. We have been designed so that dishonesty violates our very being. Yet we cannot live in dishonesty; it's too painful. So a dilemma arises. We either quit being dishonest (the healthy response) or we experience a hardening of the conscience (the unhealthy response). Perpetuating a state of conscious dishonesty results in a distortion of our conscience capacity. "A bribe corrupts the mind" (Eccl. 7:7).

Acting or thinking dishonestly means that we lie to ourselves and that lead us into *living a lie*. That describes what happened to David. "Oh this will go away," he told himself. But it did not. He soon began living that lie. From that day forward he could not relate in a real way with Amnon, Absalom, Tamar or anyone. He had to keep on his "Mr. Nice Father" mask around them all and behave as if nothing had ever happened. He could no longer express himself honestly. As time proceeded he became more and more alienated from himself and the reality of his emotions.

Ironically, by repressing the evil we refuse to confront, *we bring that very evil into ourselves*. Our repressing does not wipe out our repulsive thoughts or emotions. They do not go away and leave us alone. We only drive them to deeper and deeper levels of the subconscious. There they become part of our programming for there our subconscious mind accepts them and begins to actualize them. Spiritually this means that the evil we will not forgive or accept—we become. This explains the dynamic which gives rise to the fact that what we often hate in others we develop in ourselves, but cannot detect it within ourselves. The stubbornness we cannot stand in our dad becomes one of our unacknowledged qualities.

To prevent this conflictual material in the repressed mind from reaching consciousness—we develop layers of defense. Barriers. We blame, rationalize, deny, and project. We do this because we find the "evil" revolting. Our conscience feels a natural repulsion to whatever we regard as "evil." Our innate nature senses the ugliness, dangerousness, darkness, and confusion of "evil."

M. Scott Peck in *The People of the Lie* describes the problem of "evil" as that which confuses all of us—even the most wise and secure adults. "How much more," he asks, "does it confuse, bewilder, and overwhelm those less wise and experienced, especially children?" Peck described one child living with "evil" parents—parents who may behave in either abusive or immoral ways. What must such a situation feel like to the child?

First the child will, undoubtedly, feel repulsed from the "evil" in his parents and yet, simultaneously, the child will also feel love and dependence on them. After all, the child knows them as his or her parents. What nightmare dilemma! The child loves *and* hates; feels attracted *and* repulsed. So before the child "knows good and evil,"

s/he faces an ultimate moral dilemma. Yet the child's age and lack of experience limits the alternatives available. Such children commonly either harden their conscience becoming psychopathic (without a conscience) or introject the "evil," by blaming themselves, becoming guilt-ridden, etc. To forthrightly understand and accept the situation lies beyond the child's capacities.

When we don't straightforwardly face reality, we distort it. This distortion of reality functions as our attempt to "save" ourselves. In psychology we call these techniques of coping, *defense mechanisms*. They comprise such maneuvers as: intellectualizing, introjecting, compensation, reaction formation, regression, disassociation, fantasizing, denying, etc. The soul not free to face reality in all its ugliness must absolutely avoid it. This describes the essence of the process of repression—*avoiding reality*. We avoid our own inner reality because we lack the security and freedom to face those things about ourselves that we find unpleasant and unfavorable.

King David sought to avoid the ugly realities in his family. He simply refused to face them. He hoped they would all go away. By excluding them from awareness he at least felt better. But in the long run *it deadened his sensitivity to all emotions*. He became cool, detached, and apathetic. In fleeing his anxiety, David ruined his very capacity for feeling. By refusing to suffer with Tamar and refusing to confront Amnon, David became alienated from himself and estranged from life. He did avoid the immediate pain and ugliness, but in doing so he became less human and less real.

Why did he do it? Part of his motivation arose for the sake of his *Role as King*. He probably carried a bunch of "shoulds" in his head. "A King *should* handle his family." "A king *should* not let things eat at him." "A king *should* not have children who do shameful things." "A king *must* have a model family."

Such role expectations shouting in his head created inner pressure on David. His expectations prevented him from acting and communicating in an real and authentic way with his emotions. He had a role to play. He wanted to measure up. He assumed a mask of pleasantness, niceness, and non-anger. He wanted to act like a professional—cool and detached. He did not want to leave the kind of legacy that his father-in-law Saul left when he became an old man eaten up with anger and jealousy. Though David felt irritated and angry, frustrated and upset, he refused to give vent to his emotions perhaps in fear of becoming what Saul became—a man filled with an evil spirit.

I know about the inner pressure Shoulds, Musts, and Role Expectations create. Like David, I also want to impress people, make a good showing, maintain a good image and look as professional as possible. I want people to think well of me. I care about my Christian reputation; I want people to see me as a gentleman with tactfulness and

diplomacy. Consequently I live with a preconscious awareness that if I experience or express anger or hatred I'll hurt that image. So what do I do? I all too often push down my anger and other emotions that I have labels as non-acceptable.

Upon completing an early draft of Chapter Three where I tell a personal story about feeling like "blowing a reckless driver away," I passed out copies of that chapter to a Christian support group for their evaluation. Some in the group felt I used language too violent! They said they feared that if I shared those feelings I would lose credibility as an author. They worried about what I constantly worry about—making a good impression! Even now in writing this, I experience uncomfortable feelings. I don't like knowing that image-building functions as one of my motivations. That knowledge jars with other values that I own. My self-talk goes like this, "Making a good impression" borders on self-exaltation and pride. Why should I care so much about what people think? That's their problem, isn't it?" And so I go back and forth between values!

Those in my support group fully accepted me and my aggressive feelings on the highway. Some because they said they fully identified with my anger feelings. Others because they knew and loved me in spite of my more aggressive nature. I felt secure among them to show myself in a transparent way and so felt no need to hide behind a role, yet I also know that I don't have many places where I feel such freedom.

Whenever we over-value our roles and de-value the importance of self-knowledge, we become *masters of disguise*. We become pretentious. Then, we begin to arrogate to ourselves qualities we do not as yet have and to reject some qualities that we refuse to see in ourselves. Shoulds and musts get into our heads and scream at us. We become afraid of owning up to some of our motives and impulses and refuse to allow them to cross the threshold of our awareness. We post "*Keep Out*" signs and station guards on the border of consciousness to prevent such unwanted and threatening cognitions from entering.

Role expectations in relationships and in our vocation provide us the motivation and method for repression. Life then becomes a sham, a mere front. We then seem to forever pose. We seem to forever dress up to impress others. We thus become more and more alienated from ourselves and from those energies, needs, impulses, drives, thoughts, and feelings within with which we refuse to deal.

Consider the role expectations of masculinity in our culture. According to our cultural expectations and the constant advertisement that defines *a real man*, I should not show feelings of tenderness or gentleness. They call that "sissy stuff." To act and become masculine involves coming across as tough, aggressive, hard, protecting, dominant, superior, strong in reason, and oriented toward the world outside the home.

So they say.

Now to the extent that I try to cram myself into that cultural mold, I become more estranged from my own emotional reality. I become oblivious to parts of myself equally valid. I lose touch with my human need for emotional warmth, nurturing, orientation toward home activities, and with the qualities that have been excluded into a little compartment entitled "feminine qualities." Yet the truth about ourselves as human beings indicates that we cannot experience wholeness when we disown parts of ourselves.

Subjugating emotions for the sake of roles creates inauthenticity. We cease to live as real. We lose touch with what we truly feel, think, and value. The role begins to dictate what we can feel, think, and value. Our emotions get squelched as we try to climb the ladder of success. Thoughts and feelings of contentment, humility, compassion for others, living in this present moment, etc., become discounted and sacrificed as we try to live up to the cultural ideal of "making it to the top." Such roles condemn a great part of our humanity thereby making life more shallow and superficial. Roles prevent us from true human free. They enslave us. In this, repression operates as a kind of pseudo-integration. Via repression we attempt to make us whole by compartmentalizing our self. Not wise. Nor will it work. The repressed person does not have the freedom to deal with his or her warring elements.

By repression we only become neurotic. Why? Because we lose touch with *our emotional reality*. Then we lack a unified self and only experience opposing currents of feelings and thoughts working against us. We experience this as an "inner war." Subconscious inhibitions war against our conscious intentions. Then this inner conflict manifests itself in a variety of states: indecision, confusion, apathy, the lack of motivation, emotional blindness, and/or anxiety.

How does this come about? We certainly did not begin life repressing our emotions or afraid of experiencing life. Observe infants and small children—seeing them it becomes obvious to us that they *live without the role-anxiety and inhibition of role expectation*. They feel completely free to feel what they feel and to experience their states of consciousness. They think, feel, and act spontaneously, expressing what they real think-and-feel. Inhibitions do not come built-in, we have to *learn* them. Someone has to *condition* us for them.

Little children can get into a fight over a toy one minute and a few minutes later freely play again. They live in the moment and do not yet have the ego development of consciousness to hold resentments. So they act and speak without pretensions and they bubble with natural enthusiasm. They live fully in the present moment without putting stipulations or conditions upon things. My point? We do not repress by

nature. Repression arises as a learned strategy. It comes as we *forbid ourselves* to feel and express certain feelings (a meta-state).

"Behold, this alone I found that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices." (Eccl. 7:29)

God designed us upright (*yashar*) "straight, right, true, and authentic." The fault doesn't lie with God. We invent repression as one of our "devices" (*hashav*: inventions, plans, schemes). Why? We want to become "a Somebody." We want to avoid tabooed emotions, experiences, thoughts, etc.

Sometimes we repress because we simply do not want to feel bothered by something. So at such times, we "shut up our bowels of compassion" (I John 3:17). Perhaps we feel that ourselves as "just too busy." We don't want to take the time and trouble to get involved in helping someone. So we close our eyes. We shut up our affections; we do not let ourselves feel or become emotional. In time, however, we pay the price for our busyness, we become closed and hard persons—Scrooges. Not only does our heart (consciousness) become less sensitive to others, but our spirit becomes as impenetrable as a rock (Deut. 2:30). We become tightfisted, insensitive, and unthinking.

King Nebuchadnezzar *hardened his spirit* when he lifted up his heart with pride (Dan. 5:20). He believed himself as too important to let lesser people bother him! Jeremiah also preached to a generation that had "*hardened their faces*." "They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent." (Jer. 5:3).

Repentance comes to us as the theological and psychological opposite of repression. *Repentance* originates from a Greek word (*metanoia*) that refers to *a new state of consciousness*. In *metanoia* a person changes his or her mental perceptions. Consider that. As repression hides things from our awareness, repentance makes for self-awareness and understanding. In repenting, we open our eyes, *think anew* (*metanoia*) about life and about our responses to our opportunities. Repentance permits us to feel the pain of our guilt and littleness. Psychologically then, repentance offers us a tremendous potential for change. It functions psychological "tool" for repairing the damage of repression.

Though many psychologists and counselors would never admit it in these words, they work essentially to help people to "repent," "confess," and commit themselves to a new way of life. After all, people come to them with problems and difficulties—ways of thinking, feeling, acting, speaking, and relating that they need to reject, give up, acknowledge, claim agency for, and change (i.e. repent). In therapy they teach (provide new information); they relate to clients as authority figures; they hear confessions as clients release built-up emotions; and they challenge people to change

by thinking differently (readjust cognitions). Their alter—the safe place of their office.

Repression, on the other hand, refers to a *psychic hardening* or as the biblical phrase puts it, a "hardening the neck." A "stiff neck" describes a stubborn spirit, a person who defiantly refuses to face the truth. This leads to an unyielding stance.

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you." (Acts 13:15)

"If there is among you a poor man ... you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him... Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart ... and your eye be hostile" (Deut. 15:7-11)

"Base thoughts" here refer to thoughts of stinginess and greed. They indicate the person's values and beliefs that motivate us to hold back from others. In the Hebrew text, the verse says, "Lest there be a word (*davar*) in your heart that is evil in thinking..." Evil words, sub-vocalized in self-talk, create the emotions that move us away from relating in a kind or generous way. Our perception become evil so that we see situations through the mental filter of stinginess. This causes us to close our hands and shut our hearts against those in need. We repressed the more humane emotions due to our messed-up values. Psychic hardness leads to the impenetrableness. We become as hard as dried out clay. We become *emotionally calloused*—closed to feelings of morality and conscience.

"Take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day ... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:12-14)

Sin hardens our moral sensitivity. It sears our conscience for it makes us feel dirty and defiled. God has designed our nature in such a way that *we cannot choose evil as evil*. When we choose evil, we do so because we believe (or have deluded ourselves) there we will obtain some "good" in it. Thus scripture portrays "evil" as *deceptive*. Evil lures us by some immediately pleasure. And because, psychologically, we can't opt for evil as evil, we have to become mentally seduced by evil. No wonder we find "evil" always surrounded by rationalization and distortion. No wonder Isaiah so severely condemned this distortion when we call "evil" good and good "evil" (Isa. 5:20-21).

Seeing "evil" in ourselves represents for most people a very painful state of consciousness—one that few of us seem to endure for long. Only the healing grace of forgiveness cleanses and restores our inward knowing (*conscience*, from *eidesis* "to know," thus a knowing with one's self, a knowing in relation to God). Then we don't have to rely on the defense mechanisms to maintain sanity and dignity. Yet

these mechanisms that quell the voice of conscience also estrange us from reality. And so we become alienated. We lose our capacity for discerning right and wrong and this, in turn, brings a halt to our moral and emotional growth (Heb. 5:11-14).

Repression prevents maturity. If in repressing our thoughts and emotions we prevent ourselves from knowing truly ourselves and our "reality," it consequently blinds us to moral reality. Then, with a defiled conscience we lose our sense of God because we fear knowing the universal moral Agent. Yet our psychic capacity of conscience gives us our inner sense of God. (Note *conscience* in I Peter 2:9 used in the sense of "an inner awareness of God." "A man for conscience toward God" (KJV). This kind of inner knowing motivates us to act graciously toward persons that we experience as mean or cruel. The RSV translates *conscience* here as "mindful of God").

Our "conscience" thus comprises our capacity for awareness of transcendence. Within our conscience God puts "eternity" (Eccl. 3:11), so when we cut off this psychological capacity we block and inhibit many of our other spiritual functions. Job denied that he had engaged in concealing his transgression "by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I stood in great fear of the multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me..." (Job 31:33-34). He didn't live a life of deceit. He had practiced no fraudulent behavior, but had honestly related to others. Why? Because he did not cringe in fear of what people thought. So, accordingly, this prevented the need for living a double life.

When we repress, we do so because some *emotional need moves us to repress*. Job said, in effect, that he lived openly and that he had no motivation to deny or lie. The Bible describes this dynamic of *needing* to repress as the "heart (belly) *preparing* deceit" (Job 15:35). In other words, it means our emotional nature ("belly") often motivates us to avoid face our own inner reality. Our emotions can sometimes motivate us to self-deception when we develop an emotional need to repress thoughts, memories, and/or feelings. Yet living with such deceit leads to inauthenticity and other emotional problems (Prov. 26:24, 3:32, 7:10, 12:5,20).

"Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. ... they have not spoken aright; no man repents of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' ..." (Jer. 8:5-6)

Jeremiah here explained the phenomenon of backsliding, psychologically, as caused by when we "hold fast deceit." Israel held deceit fast because they did not want to face the truth. So *holding fast deceit* described their way of defending themselves from a self-awareness that they didn't want. This protected them from the painful feelings of guilt. They refused to say, "What have I done?" And this refusal to face their inner emotional and psychological truth contrasts with repentance in the verse.

So, "*holding fast deceit*" and *repenting function as opposites*. One holds illusions and plays games to avoid reality, the other courageously moves toward reality. Theologically, lust and pride represent two of the major "deceits" that lure us into deluded thinking and that cause us to live lives of deceit (e.g. Heb. 3:13, Obad. 3).

"Behold, Thou desirest truth in my inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." (Psalm 51:6)

David knew that deceit went against the grain of his nature. After sinning with Bathsheba, David began to live a life of lies, fraud, and deceit. His great cover-up began. Though he covered his tracks pretty well, his *secret heart* knew... and gave him no rest. So he began rationalizing what he had done. Yet because God made our inward heart for truth, even repression could not keep undesired thoughts from slipping back into consciousness.

"When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me..." (Psalm 32:3-5)

Here David's insomnia, stomach troubles, and nightmares functioned as unconscious signals from his spirit about something terribly wrong. His conscience quickened all his emotional energies and made life miserable for him. And, it motivated him to come clean.

"Blessed is the man whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." (Psalm 32:1-2)

Repentance served him as a healing psychological and spiritual therapy. By restructuring his cognitions, he began pulling out those "psychological splinters" that festered in his soul. Then through forgiveness he became free to live in a real and authentic way again. Forgiveness enabled him to face the truth in his inward being. God's grace granted him the security and strength to be human and imperfect without the need for repression. Now he could devote his secret heart (subconscious) to know wisdom (emotional truth).

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:10-12)

Repentance as mind-changing renewal opens up our deepest emotional nooks and crannies and allows us to become "aired out" so to speak. Repentance releases the built-up pressures and enables us to drain off that pressure. Repentance breaks up the dams that repression builds allowing us to feel once again and experience the natural motivation within.

If Repression does so much Damage — Why do we do it?

Primarily, we repress because we feel scared. *Fear* motives us to hide things from ourselves and others. Feelings of guilt, disgust, low self-esteem, and rejection create tremendous psychic pain--such psychic pain that frightens the bravest of us. *We repress because we do not want to know such things about ourselves.* We repress thoughts and feelings that we have deemed unacceptable— this includes experiences and emotions like failure, sin, inhumanity to others, stupidity, inadequacy, error, fallibility, etc. We do not want to keep in mind our past memories of pain because we read them as an insult to our self-image. This kind of psychic *pain* always drives repression. For David it involved the pain of Tamar's humiliation, the pain of his inadequacy as a father, and the pain of failing in his role as King.

David may also have had other painful old memories driving his repression behavior. Memories about his own sexual misdeeds. He may have felt pained from remembering how he acted impulsively when he ordered Uriah killed. Amnon's sexual sin triggered fears in David that motivated him to repress his anger. He opted for the "Stiff Upper Lip" approach, of grinning and bearing it, hoping that repression would solve his emotional energies.

And with us also—we all experience emotional hurts and pains. It comes with the territory of existing as a human being. Emotional pain works democratically in that it affects all of us! No one has an exemption to experiencing things that "fall short of" the ideal. And so anger, fear, resentment, bitterness, rejection, confusion, etc. thereby come into our lives.

Nor can we limit *emotional pain* just to humans. Even God suffers emotional pain! This means that while such pain usually and most often arises because of imperfection, it also arises from the very nature of love--- of caring, sympathizing, extending oneself for others, etc. So it also lies in the very nature of compassion. The more we care--- the more susceptible we become to heartache. So no healthy or humane way exists for escaping pain. The question then becomes, *How do we want to handle life's pains?*

"Be wretched and mourn, and weep" (James 4:8) "Be angry and sin not ... be tenderhearted" (Eph. 4:26, 32)

Fear, anger, grief, sense of loss, sadness, etc.—these represent some of the major emotional pains that come our way. And yet these do **not** represent forbidden emotions. When appropriate, and used productively, such emotions function as gifts, God's good gifts to us. Consequently, we need to accept them rather than point our finger to the basement of the soul and condemning them to that darkness.

"Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the

light, that it may be clearly seen" (John 3:20-21)

Fear keeps us cowering in the dark. We repress because we fear exposure. Yet the light not only exposes, it also heals and gives warmth. We find the creator's light sweet because it gives us *the courage to face ourselves candidly* (a meta-state). And, if the Father accepts us, knowing *all* of our imperfections, so we can accept ourselves. Knowing our deepest thoughts and intentions, he yet loves us. And upon this basis, we can totally eliminate our emotional need to repress. With this empowering understanding, repressing becomes unnecessary.

Thus, *grace represents the ultimate therapy for repression*. Even psychotherapy relies on the central importance of "grace" in emotional healing. It shows up in accepting the person, entering into his or her world with sympathetic concern, respectfully interacting with dignity, hearing him or her out, believing in his or her potential, giving permission to live authentically, etc. In these ways, the therapist *graces* the client and provides him or her a safe place for learning interpersonal and emotional honesty. So the therapist facilitates insight for the person into his or her own self-deceptions. Everything about the therapeutic situation (the fellowship, the openness, the concern, the insight) *graces* the sufferer. And this makes the experience healing.

Grace also makes *metanoia* (mind renewal) possible. Metanoia describes the renewed capacity for "seeing life anew." The old idea of "repentance" as a form of emotional cowering, or "penance," inadequately identifies the biblical concept. "Repentance," first and foremost, describes a cognitive-emotive experience—coming to new perspectives and letting those new meanings and understandings create new emotional responses.

"Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death." (II Cor. 7:10-11)

"Godly grief" renews life for it cleanses the conscience and keeps us emotionally sensitive to people. And *legitimate suffering* plays an essential role for emotional and mental health. It functions therapeutically if it helps to cleanse our inner heart.

Carl Jung spoke for most psychologists when he wrote: "The tendency to avoid problems and emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness." He called neurosis "a substitute for legitimate suffering" (17). Thus, we become neurotic (literally, "full of nerves") when we refuse legitimate suffering! M. Scott Peck echoed the same theme when he described psychotherapy as the process of learning how to experience legitimate suffering.

Psychic pain blesses us in much the same way that physical pain operates as a blessing.

Both pains alert us to dangers in life and then motivate us to *do something about those dangers*. We jerk our hand back from a hot stove because our nerve-endings give us an experience of pain. A signal of negative reinforcement! Without the discomforting signals we might do irreparable damage to our hand. Psychic pain provides us the motivation to jerk our soul back and take a good look at what's hurting us. C.S. Lewis called pain "God's megaphone to a deaf world."

Repression and Depression

One Sunday morning I stepped into the church's library to meet with two men. I had served as the minister of that church for nearly two years and on this particularly morning we would celebrate my wife's birthday after the services. I mentioned to them that I felt myself in a hurry. They said they understood, it would only take a moment. Then one said, "We are relieving you of your duties here as of today."

"What?" I said in disbelief and shock. I knew I had recently ruffled some feathers, but this announcement took me by a complete surprise.

"Why are you doing this?" I inquired, no longer thinking about the birthday dinner that I had planned with Donna and her family. They said it didn't matter why. "The matter was settled and that was that." We had two other elders, so I asked if they had conferred with them. At that point they told me that one man actually made the decision, and that while they had disagreed with him, and had tried to talk him out of it—his decision stood as final.

That evening they informed the church. Many expressed lots of anger along with confusion, and a sense of helplessness to do anything about it. It didn't make sense to the great majority of the members. Several argued with the leaders late into the night and many later transferred to other churches as their form of protest.

We also moved to another church and I busied myself in my work, dismissing the whole incident as a case of infantile politicking. In fact, I hardly had a sense of being fired or unemployed inasmuch as I continued several of the study groups that I had worked with for some times, as well as my load of individual counseling with many of the same people.

Then, six months later, Donna one day commented, "You seem unusually irritated all the time, and anxious."

I denied it, "I am not!" I irritably snapped back!

"Sometime is wrong, Michael, I can tell. What are you worried about?"

"Nothing's wrong! I'm fine."

And at some level, I truly believed that. I did not sense the "wrongness" of anything.

True enough, I had felt more tired and more of a sense of fatigue of late, and seemed to have increasing difficulty falling asleep at night, but other than those symptoms of distress, I had no other sense of something wrong.

From time to time Donna would again say, "Well, I think something is wrong!" One day she said, "You are just not acting yourself; are you depressed or something? Where's your natural enthusiasm that used to bubble over into everything you did?"

That struck a nerve. Later, I permitted my feelings to surface and began realizing that I had experienced much internal sadness, but had pushed down that sadness. Allowing the feelings and thoughts to rise I felt overwhelmed with a very strong sense of sadness, of disappointment, of confusion, of helplessness, etc. Thoughts-and-feelings also of rejection seemed to flood in. My mind turned to thinking of myself as a failure. I felt hurt and angry about what had happened six months ago.

Facing these negative emotions for the first time, I realized just how upset I had actually felt about the experience but had not admitted so. I felt angry about the insensitive way they had thrown me out, and angry that one power-hungry man who had gained ahold of such control. I felt angry about the way they made the decision, how they broke it to me, how the two men who did claimed helplessness against "the powers that be," etc. I also felt upset because it violated a basic belief I held about living in covenant commitment with a group of believers.

As I felt these angers and frustrations, a sad sorrowfulness came. At first I pitied myself about the loss, then owned more and more responsibility for my own realistic expectations, naiveness, lack of "politic savvy," etc. Eventually I came to terms with those painful thoughts, emotions, and memories. And as I grieved, the pain released its grip on me. The godly sorrow freed me from that past pain. It empowered me to "see life afresh" as I gave myself permission to think about what had happened.

Donna noticed the improvement in my spirit almost immediately and that, in turn, enriched our relationship. The emotional pain felt terrible and yet worked most helpfully in bringing resolution and clarity. It played an essential role in assisting me to break up the dammed up emotions that repression had caused within.

Guilt in Repression

Guilt also motivates us to repress. Subjectively we experience guilt as judgment. When we have done wrong, and stand "guilty as accused" of violating some value, these thoughts lead us to feel like we deserve to punishment, and that we will soon receive punishment. And depending on the meanings you give to "guilt," guilt feelings can make us feel unclean, condemned, unworthy, bad, etc. At a very rudimentary level we can feel as if the guilt will lead to our destruction, that we will fall apart and

disintegrate because of it. No wonder we can from guilt then go to desperate!

"I said, 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.'" (Isaiah 6:5)

Isaiah experienced a penetrating insight into himself when he "saw the Lord." Accordingly, his self-awareness then triggered feelings of uncleanness and disintegration. The word he used here for "lost" (*damah*) means "undone" (KJV) or "to be destroyed."

We repress guilt to save ourselves. And yet it functions only as a pseudo-salvation. Repression attempts justification, but doesn't accomplish it. In repression we unconsciously wipe out the evidence against us (the unacceptable thoughts) and thereby shut the mouths of the witnesses. If that doesn't work, we might shoot the judge (our conscience). We sometimes repress by rationalizing; by "reasons" (however spurious) that "explain" our actions. This can promote outright un-sanity!

"Aaron said, 'Let not the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses ... we do not know what has become of him.' And I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf...' (Ex. 31:21-24)

A likely story! And yet Aaron tells it with a straight face. This indicates the extent to which repression can promote *irrationality*! The nonsense we note in others goes undetected by them. The crazy things we say to ourselves somehow seems to "make sense" to us! Our "belly prepares deceit." Our unrecognized emotional needs is setting us up for self-deception.

We rationalize guilt because we have a need to escape evil. "Evil" always desecrates human consciousness. "Evil" finds no resting place in us. Why? Because God designed us for goodness. Even when we misbehave and act sinfully, when we "miss the mark" of his glory, our awareness of that wrongness cannot endure it but for a short duration. And during that recognition, we tend to experience horror, terror, disintegration, and repulsion. T.S. Eliot wrote, "We human cannot bear too much reality." This becomes especially true of the reality of "evil." Aristotle had defined man as "the rational animal," but the truth lies closer in defining us as the rationalizing animal.

This explains our natural proclivity for discounting sin. We laugh at it, joke about it, but resist confessing it. We blame it on others, project it onto our social environment, play games in our minds to atone for it, but do not easily own up to it. Legalists have an ingenious way of fending off guilt— they redefine it as overt acts, and thereby reduce sin to external acts. Jesus addressed this kind of repression by pinpointing sin's

true essence as a matter of the heart (e.g. Matt. 5:21-22ff).

We repress for many reasons: pain, guilt, discomfort, fear, unwillingness to get involved. The Priest and Levite failed to see the man in the ditch, they walked by unmoved. They "shut up their bowels of compassion" (Luke 10:27-37). Why? Probably because they didn't want to invest the time, trouble, and energy. They may have also repressed because of their own self-imposed limitations on their ability to love. By contrast, the Samaritan saw, felt and acted. He loved enough to *not* repress. Sometimes we repress because we just don't know *how* to handle our emotions—especially the emotions we may have tabooed such as anger, fear, intimacy, kindness, spirituality, etc.

Psychological Desolation

Jesus once warned about the "desolating sacrilege... standing in the holy place." Contextually, he referred to the armies of Rome that would desecrate the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matt. 24:15, Luke 21:10). Playing on his language, psychologically, *repression functions as a desolating sacrilege in the sacredness of human personality.*

Repression certainly desolated David's character turning him into a cold and emotionally blind person. It devastated his once sensitive and warm soul, making him rigid and cruel. Repression desolated Absalom's ability to forgive turning him into an Incredible Hulk of anger and fury. Repression does such damage because it operates outside our conscious awareness where we have neither control nor understanding of it. It works silently in the deep subterranean caverns of the soul creating grotesque forces.

Out of such a cavern the monstrous mood of apathy arose as a cloud from hell and unnoticingly entered David's soul. Repression then incapacitated him from caring for his own son. It destroyed his "natural affection" (II Tim. 3:3 KJV). He wanted to care, but he could not bring himself to care. He felt partially motivated to reach out, but then inevitably felt inhibited by a force within him that he did not understand. The story of David traced in the previous chapter leaves us with the impression that he did not even realize how he came across so unlovingly to his children. The sense is left with us that he really did not know that Absalom felt utterly unwanted and unloved by him. In that sense, he didn't seem to really know what he was doing. He was that blind.

In this way, *repression creates emotional blindness.* We end up feeling little connectedness to life, to people and even to ourselves. We become cold people inhibited from showing affection and over-intellectualizing our emotions. Carroll Wise described this as "a need to intellectualize feelings." Repression can lead to this.

People can learn to substitute "evasion talk" for feeling. Repressed people can talk *about* their feelings without feeling the experience or emotions to which they refer. A simple forthright registering of rage, or emptiness, or insecurity feels far too dangerous for them, too unacceptable. They live as if under a great injunction thundering in their soul forbidding them, "Thou shall not feel!"

As a person becomes emotional blind via repression, this makes a person *an emotional illiterate*. David certainly became emotionally illiterate about Absalom, did he not? Even if his Intelligence Quotient (IQ) peaked at 140, his Emotional Quotient (EQ) had to bottom out around 25—an emotional moron. I can image David making an inspiring talk about forgiveness during that time in his life. He knew the truth. And he could have voiced it effectively. Yet within him, he felt cold, bitter, scared, driven by the demon of unfinished business, unforgiveness, confusion, powerlessness, etc.—a whole host of demonic-like forces.

Now mark well the stark and pathetic contrast between Absalom's dad and the prodigal son's dad in Jesus' Story. What a contrast! Both boys became prodigals; both did wicked things—things for which they felt ashamed. And both wanted to go home. Both fathers also wanted their boys to come home. One father felt moved with compassion for his son, and the other's heart also went out to his son (II Sam. 14:1).

But David's repression produced a devastating difference. David put Absalom on probation and could not (would not) endure seeing his face. The other father looked out for his son and while yet a great way off—*ran to meet him!* He picked him up off the ground, gave him a great big hug, and welcomed him home in style and warmth. He gave him the red-carpet treatment: ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, a new coat, and a fatted calf dinner-party with music and dancing. He shouted, "My son that was dead is alive! It is time to celebrate his homecoming!" Emotionally expressive and in touch with his feelings of excitement, he let himself go with the joy and delight.

The other father couldn't produce such expressions of grace. David did not even have the initiative to call Absalom home. Joab forced his hand to do that. Then David felt inhibited about completing the reconciliation. All he could do involved "laying down the law." Absalom could not see his face. A demon of coldness prevented David from responding with emotional warm, compassion, gentleness or care. David behaved more on the order of the prodigal son's legalistic brother (Luke 15:11-32).

Underlying David's inability to love laid his inability to accept and face his own emotions. His taboo of his emotions had put him in a vise-grip. He could not "get into the mood." He felt inhibited from feeling "natural affection" for his own son. Why? It all resulted from living an inauthentic life for the sake of his role. It had

become a habit and caused self-estrangement. David lacked emotional vitality because his repressed anger had become a demon in his soul.

Floyd Ruck wrote that one of the mechanisms of repression involves "our thinking becoming rigid" (page 523). Repress your willingness to face reality, to face the truth, to face the facts about whatever presents itself as existing—and we eventually damage our perceptual abilities. We become mentally inflexible as we fixate on one thing and lose our emotional agility in dealing with life's challenges. Not a pretty picture.

Psychologically, such *fixation* occurs when a person becomes obsessed and preoccupied with one thing in an extreme and exaggerated way. In repression we become fixated upon that which we cannot, or will not, accept. Hence the dragon-state of *refusal-to-accept*. Then the very thing we cannot stand begins to consume our psychic energy and grows into a *compulsion*—a strong irrational impulse. Paradoxically repression creates obsessions from the very things we want to put out of our minds. It gives them more energy, not less.

John Powell described this law of the unconscious poetically, "Hell knows no fury like that of a scorned emotion." (p. 103). The repressed, scorned emotion takes revenge on us by inhibiting us so that we cannot forgive or forget. We become abnormally preoccupied or hung up. Many psychologists identify this dark shadowy side of personality as "the Dark Side." Jung called it "The Shadow." It certainly functions in a demonic way. Literal demons from hell could not do a more destructive job on us than what our scorned emotions do.

Absalom certainly presents a vivid picture of possession (a possessed man). He was possessed by hatred and anger, he wore a mask of friendliness toward Amnon. He said nothing to him that gave the slightest cue that inwardly he burned with hate. Yet every day Absalom's sense of outrage grew. He saw no justice forthcoming from the King. Finally he took matters into his own hands. In cold-blooded malice he plotted the murder. Absalom had become obsessed with revenge. Hatred and bitterness possessed Absalom, as did rejection. These demons controlled him. He lived as if under the influence of psychic forces that he did not understand. He didn't think it would lead to this. But it did. He nursed his anger and thereby "gave place to the devil" (devilish forces) (Eph. 4:26-27).

Possession — An Evil Spirit Within

Now in scripture, we find that people possessed and obsessed with negative thoughts and emotions described as "*filled with an evil spirit*." Most, if not all, instances of such indicate that "demon possession" resulted from either *the misuse of a negative emotion*. Many occurred due to the dynamic described here of repression.

King Saul presents to us a classic example. It occurred immediately after Samuel announced that God had rejected Saul as his king in Israel because of his rebellious attitude. To this announcement, Saul superficially repented. He said he felt sorrow about that, but his sorrow seemed more involved with the negative consequences of his loss than that he had done wrong. His real concern still centered on his image.

"I have sinned; *yet honor me* now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God." (I Sam. 15:30)

Deep inferiority feelings ruled Saul's soul, and had for a long time. In our first introduction to Saul we observe a young man who "hid himself among the baggage" when Samuel sought him in order to anoint him King (I Sam. 10:22). Yet many years later we find him still unable to face himself, his creatureliness or fallibility. So when Samuel promoted/anointed David in his stead he became possessed by some very negative emotional states:

"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him... Whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." I Sam. 16:14, 23)

God sent an evil spirit. How or in what way did *God* send him an evil spirit? This attribution of demon-possession to God arose inasmuch as God rejected Saul and removed his divine anointing from him. And Saul subsequently picked up that *spirit of rejection*, but hated it and rejected it. So Saul's emotions originated in the way he respond (thought-felt) about God's action of rejecting him as king. His resulting severe bouts of depression sprang from his negative meanings about his realization (a meta-state) that God no longer chose him as Israel's leader. David's music therapy seemed to help, it refreshed Saul. The Hebrew word for *refreshment* means "airy" (*rawah*). Saul felt "aired out" emotionally probably because the music soothed him and got his mind off his hurt— at least temporarily.

Then another terrible thing happened to Saul. David slew Goliath and the dancing girls celebrated it with a song as they worshiped in the villages. Yet that song served as everything but music to Saul's ears.

"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' And *Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him ... and Saul eyed David* from that day on. And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house ... Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul..." (I Sam. 18:7-16)

Literally the text says, "*It burned Saul very much ... and it was evil in his eye.*" Saul's moral fault arose from his perpetuated anger. He would not let the sun go down upon

his wrath. He nursed his upset and gave place to the devil. His anger, jealousy, and fear of David grew until it became a monster in his soul. Ultimately Saul became filled with an evil disposition. Violently he began lashing out, first at David and then at Jonathan, trying to pin them to the wall with his spear (I Sam. 19:9, 20:30ff). Saul ended his days as an anger-filled and embittered old man who never relinquished his throne.

The Destructive Nature of Repression

Repression means "cramming our strong feelings into our subconscious," says James Dobson. And this becomes dangerous because in so doing we lose control of them (page 93). This loss of control makes repression a demonizing and devastating force because it does its damage below the threshold of our consciousness. Norman Wright compared repressing anger to "placing a waste-basket full of paper in a closet and setting fire to it." (page 120).

Repression gives our scorned emotions time to blaze up into a destructive force. Then those unacceptable cognitions secretly slip into life in disguised forms. Fenichel, a psychoanalyst, theorized that the mechanism of repression requires the soul to expend energy constantly to maintain the repression. Then, later, the repressed material "pops out" when we least suspect it via Freudian slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, misreading, mishearing, forgetting, and dreaming—the dynamic subconscious mind releases its repressed material.

The same psychological school describes scorned and unconscious emotions that come out in relationship transference. Frequently an authority figure calls forth (evokes) in us deeply buried thoughts, images, memories, and feelings we once held toward some authority figure, usually a father or mother. Sometimes husbands and wives unconsciously transfer these thoughts and feelings toward each other when they actually belong to another emotional relationship. Transference make relations strained and inauthentic. It prevents people from relating in the present as it allows the past to keep intruding.

Dislodging Psychological Splinters

Now if we want to experience full and healthy *emotional vitality* we need to get in touch with thoughts-and-emotions so we can deal with them straightforwardly. Without such internal permission to have our emotions, own them and express them we will tend to repress them and that will distort our personality and create "evil" dispositions within. Such self-awareness does not operate as a luxury for humans, but a prime ingredient for emotional health. We can have no emotional vitality while we simultaneously repress. Repression causes our cognitions to become rigid and our emoting cramped. Realizing these psychodynamics impels us to deal with today's emotional business, to release our negative emotions, and to tap the power of positive

repenting.

First, Learn to Feel and Emote Straightforwardly

Begin by granting yourself full permission to feel and to experience life via your physical sensations. After all we meet reality initially through our senses. The territory of the world impinges in billions of stimuli every minute upon our eyes, ears, skin, tongue, and other intricate senses within our physiological system. Emotions begin here in our biochemistry and bio-electric nervous system. Actual physiological changes occur when we emote. Our blood chemistry changes as glands pour hormones into our blood stream.

Research has identified two different physiological states for emotions. In fear and anger that we direct inward, our bodies release the hormone epinephrine, while in anger turned outward, we release norepinephrine (Ruck, 19++, pages 388-389). Though we do not have a specific physiological state for each emotion, we do have physiological arousal concomitant with the emotion.

If our *emotions* consist of facets and components of our physiology, of our "thoughts"-somatized, then obviously, we need to accept and welcome our bodies and senses and sense receptors. To do so enables us to truly learn to feel. What do the bodily sensations actually feel like when we experience anger, fear, sexuality, etc.? What sensations occur within when we go into a nervous, excited, or anxious state? Learning to so monitor our God-given bodies provides us the basis for understanding what we feel. In doing so, the theology of God's good creation (Genesis 1-2) provides us the foundation for fully accepting and respecting our bodies as our vehicles for navigating life and as the place where we experience our emotions.

If you have noticed, I have carefully distinguished using the term *feelings* as having reference to the actual kinesthetic sensations of the body and sensory systems within while the term *emotion* refers to a higher and more complex phenomenon—our thought-feelings as a gestalt—a phenomenon greater than the sum of the parts.

In learning to *feel* our body and recognize our *emotions*, relaxation techniques play an important role. Sense for yourself *how it feels* to tighten your head, eyes, and jaw until you can't hold the tension any longer and you naturally relax them. Experience your shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, and chest, tighten and release the muscles in your stomach, back, pelvis, buttocks, thighs, calves, feet, and toes. We incorporate much of our "learnings," understandings, memories, etc. throughout our body.

And what should I say about exercise? Should we wonder at all that God created us as physical beings with muscles that we need to use and exercise? And should we wonder further that our level of physically fitness tracks over and relates almost

directly to our level of emotional health? A sluggish body cannot but affect "mind." Often, many of our emotional states have much more to do with our level of physical unfitness than to some mental, spiritual or relational problem.

To ask "What do you feel?" Or, "Where do you feel this?" necessitates good body awareness. And that takes time, quietness, exercise and an appreciation for the body. For some people, this will only come after they first adjust their attitude toward the body. Many have grown up hating their physical self. Perhaps they grew up accepting some leftover of Platonian philosophy that viewed flesh as evil, as one's "lower nature." This philosophy became Gnosticism in the second century and then entered Christian theology and thereby contaminated the Christian perspective.

Yet biblically God made our bodies and he made them good, not evil. God marvelously designed our bodies fashioning them from the ground and then affirmed his good handiwork: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31). The highest compliment to the human body occurred when God assumed flesh and blood himself (John 1:14). Jesus took upon himself the totality of "human nature" and not "angel nature" (Heb. 2:14-18). Salvation does not deliver us from the body, but within the body which we then present for God's use. The body does not represent our "lower nature." Thoughts, imaginations, ideas, and life *apart from God* comprise what the scriptures refer to as the "lower nature" (or "flesh," Rom. 8:5-11).

Second, Grant Yourself Permission to Emote

Normally we use the terms *feeling* and *emotion* interchangeably and indiscriminately because physical and psychic sensations overlap and overflow so much. Yet to speak more accurately, feelings refer to bodily sensations, our kinesthetics whereas emotions refer to more complex reactions, reactions loaded with cognitions. *We feel* because we have a body in which, through which we feel. Cut off our sense receptors, block the neural pathways, anesthetize the body and we stop *feeling*. *We emote* because we seek and attribute meaning via our consciousness, self-consciousness, community-consciousness, time-consciousness, moral consciousness, etc. *We emote* because we discern meaning in ourselves, our actions, our relationships, our world, and our experience in time. As such, we live not only with *signal reactions* (reflexes) in our body, but we live with *semantic reactions* in our mind-body because we attach significance (meaning, semantics) to things, events, people, words, etc.

To stop experiencing physical sensations, you have to block sensations. To stop emoting, you'd have to stop meaning-making. But we can't. We have something eternal and transcendent within us always seeking and creating meaning.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put *eternity* into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the

beginning to the end." (Eccl. 3:11)

Meaning creates emotions. Or, to turn that phrase around, you emote because of your meanings. If you define, view, perceive, understand, belief, etc. that an event, situation, person, or word means something—then that meaning creates your emotions and thereafter your emotional life. As we cognize meaning, so we emote. Change your meanings--- reframing your perspective, and you change your emotions, experiences, behaviors, talk.

Anger illustrates this well. We feel anger—its physical sensations in our gut and in our muscles. We also feel it cognitively as angry thoughts, angry perceptions. As we become aware of our anger, we come to understand how it energizes our body and can detect ourselves moving into an angry state as well as the thoughts that feed it. Such awareness leads to endowing us with control over it. Awareness of feelings and cognitions precedes control. Becoming aware of our responses enables us to decide what to do with our emotions and how we can stop their production. Denying our emotions creates inauthenticity and self-alienation—the essence of neurosis (Horney, 19++, p. 74, 97).

If we find our *feelings* complex, how much more so our *emotions*. They arise from a complex interplay of physical sensations and cognitive understandings. Every strong emotion has a strong physiological arousal. Our heart begins to pound. We feel butterflies doing cartwheels in the stomach. But what *emotion* does this represent? Fear, excitement, anxiety, anger, romantic love, anticipation, dread, etc.? The physiological components will function in a very similar way in all of these emotions. What determines our emotion beyond these physiological components arises from our cognitions. *Our conceptual appraisals and evaluations differentiate our emotions.* So to become emotionally aware we need to develop an awareness of our values, thinking, believing, decisions, learning history, thinking patterns, etc. Then, as we grant ourselves permission to emote and recognize how we create our emotions, we become empowered to take charge of our emotional states.

Third, Practice the meta-state of Accepting Your Emotions

In acceptance we simply acknowledge something for its identity and functioning. As such, accepting does not bind us to approving or liking what we find. So in accepting our emotions we simply report the state of our body (our feeling sensations) and an honest reporting of our thoughts. We think what we think. If we don't find the contents of our thoughts useful, productive, positive, Christian, we can change that. But we first accept whatever thoughts we have entertained because they create our emotions. Such acceptance undoes the damage done by repression. It empowers us to adjust our thinking so we can come to terms with the realities of pain, guilt, involvement, intimacy, dreams, etc.

Pain. All too often we immediately think/assume that "Pain is the worst thing in the world and we must avoid it at all costs!" But no. The Judeo-Christian perspective in the scriptures offers us a different idea. There we discover such radical understandings as: Jesus "was made perfect through suffering" for he learned obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb. 5:9, 2:10). This reframes our thinking. Suffering does not represent the worst thing in the world; an undeveloped soul that doesn't mature represents a worst evil. Suffer can even have redemptive value. It can humanize us and carve out our soul so that we can receive joy (II Cor. 1:3-8). While writing this chapter, Shirley Bragg brought to my attention a quote from Jess Lair; "Marriage is for God and for pain." God gave it to us for pain—a pain that thereby teaches us how to obey, forbear, and sympathize."

Guilt. We can even find positive values in guilt inasmuch as it leads us to *metanoia*. This readies us for Christ's forgiveness and healing. We no longer need to pretend ourselves as something other than what we know of ourselves. So while guilt *feels* bad, denial of guilt *works evil* for us. Grace answers guilt freeing us for emotional vitality for it purges our conscience from evil (Heb. 9:14, 10:22, I Tim. 1:5,19).

Interpersonal Involvement. If we repress caring emotions because of fear of our tender feelings, or because we don't want to bother with people, then God's pure and unconditional love for us gives us a new experience of this deep and wonderful facet of life. His love therapeutically heals our fears and readjusts our values. It gives us a new appraisal on life's purpose—wholeheartedly loving God and others (Matt. 22:37-40). He put us here for the express purpose of learning love. When this insight permeates our deep heart, it motivates us to respond to others in practical and caring ways (I John 3:17-18).

Intimacy. For those who repress feelings of intimacy Jesus provides a new model for non-possessive and non-manipulative love. Though a man's man, Jesus unashamedly put his arms around children, received the love of the men and women about him. He lived emotionally vibrant as he welcomed the gentler emotions of kindness, compassion, and caring into his everyday experience.

Dreams. Our minds do not stop functioning when we sleep, they simply work in a different way, at unconscious levels, pictorially, without the constraints of reality, etc. When we dream, our subconscious and unconscious facets of "mind" think and process. Thus receptivity to our dreams enables us to discover some facets of our deep programming: basic emotional patterns, repressed thoughts and memories, and the problems that challenge us. Dreams seem mysterious to us because they come in mostly pictorial and kinesthetic formats, without meta-labels, without negation, and without the constraints of "reality" as we know it in the daylight. Yet as we get in touch with our dreams, they lose their mystery and yield many helpful insights.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Repressing unwanted thoughts, memories, and feelings hinders emotional vitality. Though repression temporarily seems to make us feel better, it drives our problems into the subterranean caverns of consciousness where it there *makes havoc* of our psychological nature. Repression basically arises from our unwillingness to experience the whole of life. We become fragmented souls.

But emotional health depends on becoming holistic: coming clean of our guilt, facing our emotions without censure, aware of our values. We take a significant step toward vitality the day we decide to stop hiding from ourselves (a meta-state). That decision for openness lays the foundation for self-understanding and opens our hearts to the meanings and feelings all about us. It leads to a therapeutic lifestyle which enables us to enter deeply and joyfully into relationships.

Have you ever lived with a splinter in your finger? Painful! And if untreated, it can fester to become a poison in the blood stream. Then it would become life-threatening. *Psychological splinters*, in the same way, threaten the soul. But via the skillful use of such tools as honesty, acceptance, repentance, and forgiveness we can dislodge those splinters.

End of Chapter Notes:

1. II Kings 17:14, Nehemiah 9:16,17,29, Jeremiah 7:26, Psalm 75:5, Deut. 9:6,13, 31:27, 10:16, Exodus 32:9, 33:3,5, 34:9, Ezek. 2:4).

2. Conscience comes from *suneidesis*: un "with" or "within" and *eidesis* "to know," thus a knowing with one's self, a self-consciousness with regard to being right or wrong. Or it may refer to the knowing within one's self of God, thus a consciousness of God.

3. I Pet. 2:19 employs the word conscience in the sense of an inner awareness of God: "A man for conscience toward God" (KJV).

Chapter 3

WHENCE COMETH EMOTIONS?

"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."
(Proverbs 23:7 KJV).

Once upon a time, a very rich man arose who had a very greedy and stingy eye. He viewed things so greedy that when he had a few friends over for a meal, he would keep a mental tabulation on how much each friend ate. He tallied up their bites. He kept having his friends over because he viewed it as the thing to do, but he never really enjoyed the gatherings. Every bite of food that someone gulped down ate at him. He begrudged them eating his food and became so tight-fisted that he could not think about anything else. A psychologist (proverbist) in Israel detailed this story in the following scenario:

"Don't eat at the table of a stingy man or be greedy for the fine food he serves. 'Come on and have some more,' he says, but he doesn't mean it. What he thinks is what he really is. You will vomit up what you have eaten, and all your flattery will be wasted." (Prov. 23:6-8 Good News Bible)

On the surface, the courtly words of the stingy man gives every evidence of hospitality. He says, "Eat and drink!" "But his heart is not with you." His words functioned as a social mask that covered up his inward reality and motivation. Inwardly stinginess had eaten him up. The Hebrew text reads that he has "*an evil eye*"—a bad perspective. He does not like to see his friends heartily eating up his food which cost him good shekels! So his consciousness ("heart") does not focus on his guests as guests. Inwardly he reckons (*sha'ar*, decides, thinks, estimates) as he counts up what his friends eat. And that "inward thinking in the heart" operates as *the determining factor* of his psychological reality. For "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he."

This principle that *a man's psychological nature springs from the way he thinks* tersely summarizes a tremendous biblical principle about human psychology. Yet many translations fail to convey this idea with clarity.

"Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food. Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven. Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies; for he is like one who is *inwardly reckoning*. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you; but his *heart* is not with you." (Prov. 23:3-7 RSV)

The translation, "For he is like one who is inwardly reckoning" offers a smoothed out English version of the Hebrew sentence. "For as he reckons (*sh'ar*) in his soul (*nepshesh*) — **so he is.**" In other words, *his souls' reckoning determines his psychology.*

This vignette from the Proverbs presents for us *a parable* that highlights the cognitive nature of human nature from the Hebraic perspective. Where do our emotions come from? *Our emotions arise from our thinking, reasoning, deciding, believing and imagining.* Our mental sight ("eye") determines our perspective on life and correlates to our inward reckoning. These things create our emotional world—"so he is."

This underscores something we all know intuitively, namely, that a person's outward behavior and words do not tell the whole story. People can fake their way through social gatherings and life. In this banquet scene, the Proverbist warns against the stingy man who tries to come across as a man of generosity. He puts on airs of joy and invites his friends to partake of his abundance, but behind his mask of liberal hospitality lurks a grudging niggardly calculator who estimates the price of every bite. The rich man had thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc. other than what his appearance portrayed. His words gave one impression, his inner cognitions dictated another reality.

This man with *the evil eye* (stingy perspective) may not have even had awareness that in his soul he kept count of the cost. *Stinginess* might have become such an ingrained and unconscious habit that he could have sincerely not-known. He could have become that blind to his own emotional predisposition. If that had become the case, he probably wondered in quiet moments why he found no real delight in social gatherings and why he felt so lonely and disconnected from people. "What's wrong with me anyway? I have everything I need, but find so little happiness?"

The psychological lesson of the story lies in the Proverb; "*What a person thinks in his or her soul describes one's inner reality.*" Jesus taught the same principle:

"What comes out of man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the

heart of man, come evil thoughts..." (Mark 7:20-21)

At the root of the man's miserly feelings we discovered greedy thoughts. His perspective of stinginess created his begrudging, envious, and jealous state. "As he reckoned in his soul, so he became." *His cognitions created his emotions.* He experienced life, emotionally and relationally, according to the kind of thoughts and appraisals he made about life.

This Proverb (22:7) therefore provides a rich psychological insight. It points us in the direction of "thoughts" (and thought transformation) if we want to change our psychological nature, personality, character, and emotions. Our cognitions play that much of a role in creating our emotions.

Has Anyone Seen a Cognition Around Here?

What does this term *cognition* mean? It refers to "the act or process of knowing including both awareness and judgment." David Burns (1983) defines a cognition as—

"... the way you look at things, your perceptions, mental attitudes and beliefs. It includes the way you interpret things, what you say about something or someone to yourself." (page 11)

"Be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight: keep them within your heart. For they are life to him who finds them, and healing to all his flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life." (Prov. 4:20-24)

The Proverbist here declares that our motivation and emotions flow from our heart, or consciousness, like a river flows from a spring. This suggests the rhythm and reason that explains our emotions, namely, bubbling *emotions* as well as turbulent and quiet emotions all *flow from the spring of our cognitions*. "Heart," as used here, refers to mental capacities. This strictly Hebraic usage of the word "heart" provides us insight into how the ancient Hebrews conceptualized cognition as located in the heart. By way of contrast, they conceptualized feelings as centered in the bowels and belly.

This paragraph identifies *the essence of biblical psychology*—emotions follow mind. As we attend words, incline our ears, see with our eyes, and hold words in our consciousness, we come to experience a fuller and richer life. "They are life to him who finds them and healing to all his flesh." The Proverbist recommends that we "keep the heart with all diligence" for the very reason that life's issues flow from it.

Sometimes we see the word "flow" translated by the verb, "publish." In other words, as we exercise vigilance over our cognitions, we determine how we will *publish* our life story. This suggests that the quality and depth of that publication (that "flow")

depends on the quality and depth of our cognitions.

To illustrate. The ten fearful spies appraised the challenge of conquering the land of Canaan in terms of impossibility. They thought negatively and "brought forth" (published) an evil report of the land. They said, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." (Num. 13:31-33).

Rational Emotive Therapy (RET, now REBT) has formalized this understanding. Albert Ellis founded RET upon this very premise:

"Human thinking and emoting are not radically different processes; but at points significantly overlap. Emotions almost always stem directly from ideas, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs ... and can usually be radically changed by modifying the thinking processes that keep creating them."

Paul incorporated this very principle about human nature in his writings relative to Christianizing human personality:

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:1-2)

"Put off your old nature ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature..." (Eph. 4:22-24)

"Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2:5)

"Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you." (Phil. 3:15)

These passages affirm the importance of cognitions in determining personality. The mind informed by legal standards ("the flesh," i.e. the law in contrast to the covenant of grace) orients one toward rules, legislation, fear, danger, etc. A mind informed by God's spirit orients one to a different kind of spirituality, one which leads to experiences of joy, peace, security, no condemnation, etc. (Rom. 8:1-4, 5-8).

We should not think of *mind* in a dry or abstract sense when we read such passages, but in a holistic and dynamic sense. Biblically, the term "mind" does duty for *all of the mental powers of consciousness*: thinking, reasoning, apprehending, discerning, seeing, questioning, concentrating, imagining, meditating, remembering, conceiving, concluding, desiring, willing, intending, purposing, etc. From "mind" come ideas, thoughts, concepts, judgments, opinions, values, morals, beliefs, designs, intuitions, plans, insights, sentiments, and feelings. A comprehensive word that takes in all of these facets of consciousness sends us back to *cognition* (hence, re-cognition).

Biblically, "*mind*" functions as a *dynamic phenomenon*. Contrary to popular talk "*mind*" does not have little compartments, one labeled Intellect, another Reason, Reflection, Conscience, Will, or Emotions. We would do better to think of "*mind*" as kaleidoscopic in nature, such as, perpetually alive with a variegated and changing consciousness. It operates more like *an aquarium* that we see as constantly affected by external things that enter into it, and by the generation of new things from the forces living within it. This suggests that mind has depths and its own dynamism like a lake full of unexplored subterranean caves and life. Significantly, the Bible frequently compares the mind to moving waters.

"The King's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." (Prov. 21:1)

"The purpose in a man's mind (*leb*) is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." (Prov. 20:5)

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream." (Prov. 18:4)

Our stream of consciousness operates like a never-ending impingement of external sensations and impressions upon our consciousness. Obviously a static spatial model of human personality can only present that in a flat and one dimensional way.

"The inward mind and heart of a man are deep!" (Psalm 64:6)

The Hebrew text reads, "The inward part (*kereb*, the middle, the bowels) of man's heart (*leb*) are very deep (*'amak*, unsearchable, profound, deep)."

Sigmund Freud did not first discovered the unconscious. The Psalmist here knew of the mysterious depths in the human mind millennia before Freud appeared on the scene. Freud explored those depths, gave them more scientific names, and popularized his invented scheme of "ego, id, superego, conscious, preconscious, and subconscious." He gave psychology its modern impetus in studying the dynamics of the mind and expanded our modern awareness that mind is far more extensive than consciousness. Yet in spite of all that, he certainly did not discover it.

David's Stream of Consciousness

Given this understanding about emotions arising from cognitions, we can now understand David's feelings toward Absalom. His feelings arose from his cognitive values and beliefs. He became angry because Absalom took justice into his own hands and maliciously killed his brother. David hated that. He felt angry and hurt also that Absalom used him in setting up the devious banquet. Perhaps David blamed himself for Amnon's death. David "inner reckoning" disvalued his emotions. He hated his own impulses (a meta-state) and that lead to him trying to solve his emotions-about-his-emotions by using the mechanism of repression. Eventually his

"stream of consciousness" became dammed up with various layers of prohibition. Inwardly, his cognitions created a complex of inhibition and coldness.

When Absalom's civil revolt drove David to flee for his life, David fled the city in fear and grief. He departed with a heart plowed-up with grief and shock. The experience *jolted* him. Fleeing into the wilderness served as a kind of shock therapy that jolted free some of his psychic blocks. It caused him to feel his feelings again so that his emotions began to break up. Now, into the stream of his consciousness flowed memories. He remembered how it felt when Saul chased him for seven years as he became a refugee in the wilderness. He also remembered God's covenant of faithfulness. He remembered how good and spiritual it felt to trust God. Pain, shame, regret, and repentance entered him. And the overall effect of the experience? It woke David up! He must have asked himself, "What have I done with my life?" And through it he saw that he had not "guarded his heart with all diligence."

David "went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weep as he went barefoot and with his head covered" (II Sam. 15:30). The emotional pain of rejection permeated his soul. Then Shemei appeared. Now nobody would have wanted a guy like Shemei around when they go through a personal crisis. Shemei seemed to have no respect for the office of king—he didn't even seem to have the common decencies of a compassionate human being:

"As he came he cursed continually. And he threw stones at David, and at all the servants of king David; and all the people and all the mighty men. ... And Shemei said as he cursed, 'Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow! The Lord has avenged upon you all the blood of the house of Saul ... See, your ruin is on you; for you are a man of blood.'" (II Sam. 16:5-8)

When Shemei appeared, he really let David have it! He mocked him, he called him worthless, he blasphemed him, he lied, and he threw rocks at him. Not exactly a sympathetic response to all that David had gone through. Of course, David's right-hand man and personal body-guard, Abishai, exploded over this.

"Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." (II Sam. 16:19)

Here we see Shemei's bombastic ranting and barbarous vilifications as having got under the skin of brutish Abishai. That "repulsive gnome with bent legs and arms and toothless raw-red gums" (Joseph Heller) angered Abishai to the extent that he wanted to decapitate him then and there. And he could have. Abishai was one of David's "Mighty Men of Renown." Once in battle, he slaughtered three-hundred men single handedly.

Here before him stood ugly Shemei obscenely spewing forth his loathsome

vituperations *and* Abishai asking permission to knock his head off. And though Abishai stood like a powerful Arnold Schwarzenegger, but he could not stand the verbal abuse he heard David receiving. It infuriated him. He wanted to get his hands on that dirty mouth of Shemei and permanently close it. Nor did he stand out alone in that sentiment. A force of several hundred men supported David--all of them boiling mad, veins protruding, hearts pumping at top speed, eyes narrowing—all in a mood to kill.

"The king said, 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, 'Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today.'" (II Sam. 16:10-12)

David responded with composure and serenity to an emotionally explosive situation. So though Shemei's spoke words laden with red-hot emotion, yet did not hook David's anger. Amazing! David faced a situation that normally would precipitate fury, but he demonstrated a psychological distance from the irritation. *Something within him* enabled him to rise above it all. What? What secret did he have that prevented him from getting hooked into feeling defensive or revengeful?

His cognitions! His state of consciousness predisposed him to focus on something higher and better, namely, God's message through the traumatic event instead of the traumatic event itself. Here we have a marvelous picture of *emotional control* in the midst of a most trying experience. Here we see David effectively and healthily *controlling his anger and rage, his self-pity and despair*. He did so because he had shifted his perspective in that moment and thereby *transcended* that immediate situation. His past memories and experiences enabled him to tune into a greater reality. At that moment he saw "Him who is invisible."

Could David no longer perceive Shemei? Yes, of course. Yet his spiritual vision gave him something so much bigger to use as his reference point. This spiritual vision did not give him an escape from his problems: the blaspheming man continued to mock in David's time of heartbreak. But his vision gave him *a transcendence over the problem*. He went "meta" (above) the immediate situation.

Now he could perceived Shemei within the larger context of God's overriding providence. Note David's words that captured this concept: "If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" David's heart focused on God's encounter with him. Consequently, out of that consciousness flowed a godly response that transcended defensiveness or reactivity.

David's *self-control* before Shemei did not come from the control of repression. In fact, no longer did he continue to use the mechanism of repression. David now felt emotionally sad: "...weeping as he went barefoot and with his head covered." David did not lack an awareness of his emotions. He even cultivated sad feelings. So accordingly, he took off his shoes and covered his head. Situationally, the experience of loss and separation lead to his grief. So he allowed the normal grief feelings to surface. No longer did he repress his emotions.

Now, standing before Shemei, David psychologically suppressed his emotions of anger or injustice and let other emotions surface. *Suppression* refers to a conscious, deliberate, non-evasive expelling of thoughts and feelings from focal awareness in order to turn one's attention elsewhere. Unlike repression, suppression does not deny the facts, or pretend reality as otherwise. It rather checks, arrests, restrains, and keeps certain thoughts and feelings from becoming dominant in the soul— with full awareness of suppressing.

David Roberts in *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* says that suppression does not cause psychological harm because of the fact that it operates in consciousness.

"For the sake of aims which (we) wholeheartedly espouse, (we) can put up with a considerable amount of inhibition, inconvenience, and sacrifice without falling into mental illness" (page 13)

In suppressing his feelings of rage, and by not giving vent to feelings of hurt or despair, David dealt with Shemei without losing his head. He did not interpret his experience egocentrically, but theocentrically. He did not whine, "How terrible! This is Awful! I can't go on living." His self-talk didn't indulge in such self-pity. "This baboon has no right to talk to me this way; Abishai, you want to knock his head off? Well, go ahead. Lift that donkey's head off!"

Nor did David allow his mind to become poisoned with lies. He told himself the truth. Though Shemei severely cursed and unfairly criticized him (to put it mildly), David took it in fairly good humor. He focused his attention on several truths, namely, that criticism does not comprise "the worst thing in the world;" that God can use and speak through even hateful and destructive people; and that his self-esteem did not ride upon the current of people's praise or rejection. Such truth in the center of his consciousness liberated him for emotional control. David experienced a personality transformation because he kept renewing his mind.

It's All in the Way You See It!

"The first principle of Cognitive therapy is that all your moods are created by your cognitions or thoughts. A cognition refers to the way you look at things, your perceptions, mental attitudes and beliefs. It includes the way you interpret things, what you say about something or someone to yourself. You feel the way you do right now because of the thoughts you are thinking at this moment." (pages 11-12)

Our mental perception determines the content and nature of our emotions. The cognitions of our heart create our psychological and emotional reality. Thus we have a cognitive control over our emotions, character, and motivation. No wonder Jesus' first good-news word involved *metanoia*. "Repent and believe in the good-news" (Mark 1:14-15). To believe in his great news entails making a mental pilgrimage from our old, unrenewed mind of secularity, legalism, cognitive distortions, etc. to the mind of Christ. *Metanoia* refers to seeing life anew. It signifies a spiritual mindset—a making new of the mind.

This essential process arises due to the fact that we use "mind" to *discern meaning* in life. This accords also to the neurological fact that before we can *experience* (emotionally) an external event, we must *process it* with our mind and give it meaning. We have to subjectively "understand" an event in terms of some reference, some context, some meaning, before we can generate any *emotions* about it. In other words, meaning precedes emotion and further, meaning creates emotion. Thus, how we see an event functions as an all important consideration in any consideration of where our emotions come from. When it comes to understanding why we feel what we do, it all lies in *the way we see and appraise meaning*.

What does this cognitive basis of emotion, response, personality, behavior, etc. lead to? Pragmatically this means that *no external event can cause any emotion in us*. Emotions arise from our understanding of how a person, an idea, or an event relates to us. Our emotions give us a body-feeling of our sense of something's significance to us. An "e-motion" speaks about the somatic *motions* in our body as a result of the *evaluations* that we creates. This creates the emotion, not the external thing.

So pragmatically, this means that *nobody makes us feel anything*. They can invite us to think, attribute meaning and emote. But they cannot "make" us emote. When we feel angry and sometimes shout, "You **make** me angry!" our accusation states an erroneous conclusion. It may seem to us that they "caused" the emotion. Emotions, especially habituated ones, work very rapidly in the nervous system. Yet the truth, conceptually and neurologically, remains. That person *does not make us feel* anything. They do not, and cannot, get inside our neurological system and cause our emotion. (Unless, of course, they knocked us down and inject some mood-altering

chemicals into our blood stream!) In the private world of our thoughts we have complete freedom to think what we want to think, to entertain the ideas we want to entertain. And that, and that alone, truly causes our emotions.

In the story before us, David had many stimuli before him to think angry thoughts, self-pity thoughts, depression thoughts, and/or thoughts of revenge. But he did not. He refused to allow his circumstances to control his consciousness. He turned his attention to some God-centered thoughts and so felt composed before Shemei. Meanwhile, the brute Abishai felt totally enraged and murderous. The difference between David and Abishai? A difference of perspective. The same triggering event before each of them, yet very different cognitions in their minds, and therefore very different emotions.

We therefore need to learn how to distinguish between those factors that **cause** emotion from those that **precipitate** an emotion. The precipitating, triggering and contributing events and facets involve a great many things: people, words, ideas, events, circumstances, state of physiology, how well you slept the previous night, etc. But *only our own cognitions* can give rise to our emotions. After all, *where* does our emotions occur? In *our* nervous system as a *response* to certain stimuli. Therefore our personality predispositions, our habitual thinking, our present thinking, our silent assumptions, our habituated internalized "scripts" (programs), etc.—these factors actually create and cause the emotion.

Misbeliefs in the Stream of Consciousness

When Jacob's ten boys returned one day from the field carrying a multicolored coat soaked in blood, Jacob believed their report. He believed their suggestive idea that a wild beast had slain his favorite son, Joseph. What else could he believe? The evidence seemed overwhelming: no Joseph, Joseph missing, his coat here, all bloodied, the brothers looking and sounding concerned and asking their father about the coat. All ten sons testified that they found the shredded coat in the wilderness. The coat gave evidence that a wild animal must have attacked its owner. And, besides, Joseph hadn't come home, had he? Jacob broke down and grieved over Joseph's death with bitter weeping.

"Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted and said, 'No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.' Thus his father wept for him." (Genesis 37:34-35)

So Jacob *believed* Joseph had died and so *felt* as if he had died. Yet as we know from "the rest of the story," he thereby misbelieved about the matter. Yet, given the way the human nervous system operates, when he so misbelieved about Joseph, he so mis-felt. "Real" emotions of grief, sure enough, but emotions that did not reflect external reality—only his own internal reality.

When we fast forward the movie twenty years, he hear those ten sons telling their father a different story. They tell of meeting Joseph in Egypt. Yet, instead of feeling happy, Jacob's mind and emotions blew a fuse.

"Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.' And [Jacob's] heart fainted, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived; and Israel said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die.'" (Genesis 45:26-28)

The words that Jacob's sons told him failed to make him feel better. In this instance, Jacob certainly *understood* the words, but *he did not believe them*. And understanding without belief has the effect of giving us no understanding. Most interestingly the Hebrew text says, "*His heart froze*" (fainted). His mind chilled, languished, and dysfunctional momentarily.

In other words, the new information seemed so preposterous to Jacob that it struck him as utterly ridiculous and impossible. Un-believable! So Jacob's mental circuit breakers overloaded as the idea of Joseph having not died, but having gone elsewhere shocked his very sense of reality. *To believe that would mean* a radical readjustment of ideas and beliefs that he had lived with for twenty years. It would mean a total readjustment of his mental maps that he had lived with for so long. It would mean that his other sons had entered into a conspiracy against him and lied. Jacob felt confused. His mind spun around and around as his "heart froze."

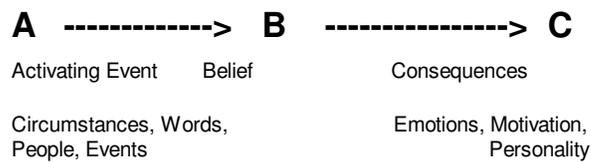
Yet in spite of the emotional roller-coaster that Jacob rode that day, he mind-emotions worked perfectly well in just the way that God made our mind-emotions to work. After all, *Jacob's emotions followed his cognitions* as day follows night. Depending on what he believed about Joseph—so he felt grief or joy. Independent of the reality of Joseph's condition, Jacob's emotions rose and fell according to his faith. This describes the way our emotions work in each and everyone of us. Our emotions follow our thinking (our valuing, believing, representing, etc.).

Again this illustrates that events *per se* do not *cause* us to experience our emotions as we do, but our *thoughts about those events*. We feel as we process those events mentally and give them various meanings and values. Marcus Aurelius, philosopher and Emperor of Rome in the second century put it most succinctly:

"If you are pained by an external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs you—but your judgment about it." (*The Meditations*, 121-180 A.D.)

As Simple As A - B - C

RET (Rational Emotive Therapy, now REBT with B for Behavior) has a simple way of remembering the psychodynamic that we have presented and illustrated. Identified as "*The ABCs of Emotions*" the law of emotional functioning states that the **Activator** (A) as consisting of any external event or circumstance which then we filter through our thoughts and **Beliefs** (B) wherein we we various meanings and interpretations to the events and that then then results in and causes various **Consequences** (C), primarily our emotions, but also behaviors, speech, responses, etc.



Psychologist Nathan Brandon writes, "The content of man's emotions is the product of his rational faculty. His emotions are derivative and consequence." Archibald D. Hart has written:

"We have a natural tendency to think crookedly and therefore establish and maintain self-defeating patterns of behavior and emotion. Emotions are not mysterious nor impossible to control, but can be explored and understood in the context of one's learning history and current patterns of thinking." (page 43)

Our learning history and our current pattern of thinking play key determinant roles in our emoting. This phrase "*learning history*" alerts us to the importance of *what we have learned* via our early experiences and conditioning. Why? Because that learning has become incorporated into our very neurology (and so has become subconscious) as it has become our silent assumptions or predispositions from which we operate.

Your Emotions Switch

Shortly after I moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1979 while driving on one of the crowded interstates in the city one afternoon, I had become absorbed in a talk program on the radio. So while thoroughly enjoying the discussion that afternoon all of a sudden the car immediately in front of me and in the left lane pulled directly into my lane leaving less than a foot of space between us. Whooooo! Then to make matters worse, he slammed on his brakes.

"You idiot!" I muttered as I jumped on my brakes to prevent a collision. Quickly I

shot a glance to my right to see if I could possibly swing into that lane. No! I saw a car in that lane. "What are you trying to do, get us all killed?" I said angrily to myself in the car. Within seconds twenty cars or so on Interstate 44 had come to a complete standstill.

I glanced in the rearview mirror. Cars behind me continued to squealed their brakes to prevent a collision and began to line up. Suddenly "the suicide driver" dived into the right lane, and off an exit ramp. Good riddance!

About that time my heart began pounding, and my thoughts caught up to the surge of adrenalin rushing through my bloodstream. By now scores of cars had become backed up behind me, and several of the drivers had taken to blowing their horns.

The best I could figure—the guy with the cereal-box driver's license had thought he would miss that exit and so opted for slicing across three lanes of traffic in front of cars doing 65 miles an hour, thereby making everybody slam on their brakes and endanger all of our lives. "Why in the world couldn't he have drive two miles to the next exit ramp?" I asked myself, and kept repeating because I got no response.

As I resumed driving, I noted that I had lost my pleasant mood. (Where did it go?) Though the radio had not missed a beat throughout the episode, I also noticed that I had not heard it for several minutes. Nor I didn't even care about it. I caught myself still breathing fast, my hands felt sweaty, and momentarily I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. So within a space of ten seconds (or less) my emotions underwent a transformation from a state of serenity and enjoyment to one of irritation and anger. My internal dialogue had really changed too. "Someone ought to lock that guy up and throw away the key! The idiot!"

Question. What caused that ten-second emotional change? I could not have obtained faster results if human beings came equipped with a *literal switch* on the side of the head or under the arm-pit that one could flip for different emotional states. With incredible speed and efficiency I had energized myself and transformed my emotional state. I did it by altering my cognitions. From thinking about the radio program, I focused on the driver's stupidity. "What is he trying to do, get us all killed?" "If I had a tank I'd teach him a thing or two about pulling in front of me like that!" "If I had a shot-gun, I'd like to put the fear of the Lord in him!" Such thoughts, supplemented and intensified by the physical sensations of fear created hostile emotions within.

From emotional delight to an intense state of anger mixed with fear, I flipped the emotion-switch in seconds. *Instant Emotion!* If I had perceived the man in different terms I would have created a different emotional response.

"I bet that fellow is driving like that because he is in a desperate situation and

must be trying to get to a hospital. I wonder if he has an accident victim in the back seat, or perhaps a woman in labor?"

To think such thoughts would have turned on emotions of sympathy and good will. "God, help that fellow to get through this traffic safely and quickly. Go with him."

Cognitions, then, compromise the switch for changing emotions. The process usually transpires over a longer period of time than what this highway scene. But it does occur. Just as we can "fly into a rage," with training we can learn to "fly into a calm." It takes some cognitive learning about one's emotions, learning to think with a renewed mind, strengthening the will, effective focusing, and getting in touch with our subconscious predispositions. And because we can do it, we shall take this as our lead into this journey toward emotional vitality.

The Mystery of Human Consciousness

Today we talk about consciousness, preconsciousness, unconsciousness, and subconsciousness. In biblical literature, "heart" had to do service for all these realms of consciousness. "Heart" designating "mind" holistically referred to the many facets of consciousness and their products: thinking, reasoning, reflecting, imagining, desiring, willing, feeling, etc.

Now, psychologically, *we have but one consciousness.* Yet this one multi-dimensional consciousness operates on many different levels. M. Scott Fletcher has written, "Will, intellect, conscience are only names for the different ways in which the one consciousness manifests its activities." (page 18).

This insightful statement informs us that will, conscience, mind, emotions, imagination, etc. function only as *names*, mental constructs, verbal descriptions and not objectified substances. There exist no compartments in the soul. These words simply describe a human soul *functioning* in taking cognizance of the world and responding to it. So through labeling these functions and distinguishing them with different names as we do, we tend to reify them. We turn them into Things or entities. Yet they do not so exist.

Biblically, man does not have a Will, a Conscience, an Intellect, Imagination, Emotions, etc. Rather, man has a single consciousness with the power for willing, thinking, imagining, emoting, and knowing. These capacities consequently flow from the one consciousness and we cannot strictly separate one from another. There exists in our willing and thinking—emoting, and imagining in our reasoning, and reflecting in our feeling. All of these processes interface with each other and influence each other. The fact that we use nouns to identify these different functional powers of the

soul due to the nature of language itself warns us to take care lest we unintentionally reify them into separate things.

A quick trip to an English dictionary reveals the holistic nature of consciousness. There we find *mind* defined as that which "thinks, feels, wills, exercises perception, judgment, reflects; it is the aggregate of all conscious and unconscious processes originating in and associated with the brain." Webster defines mind as involving both the functions of thinking and feeling!

Similarly, Webster defines *emotion* as—

"... any strong manifestation or disturbance of the conscious or unconscious mind typically involuntary and often leading to complex bodily changes and forms of behavior."

For *feeling*, we find the definition,

"... the affective, emotional aspect of all mental life and its phenomena."

Again, this indicates that what we call mind and emotion simply function as facets of consciousness and that we cannot split these asunder except in verbal and conceptual abstraction. From the point of view of actual life, we can find no actual division between the power of reasoning and emoting, cognizing and feeling an emotion. In fact, they cannot function apart from each other. Gordon W. Allport says that this verbal division results as an unfortunate limitation of vocabulary that forces "psychological analysis to treat emotion and reason ... as if they were separate provinces of mental life." (page 18).

There always exists a blend of emotion in reason and reason in emotion. Our words about these things exist only as *words* and mental constructs that we may use to help us make sense of the depths and mysteries of consciousness. Yet though they may at times help, they can also inadequately and ineffectively convey false impressions—like the separateness of these functions. In that way, we may fail to recognize the dynamic nature of human nature as a holistic and interactive cybernetic system.

God designed us as whole beings ("in-divisible," hence "individuals"). This holistic emphasis jars with the old faculty Psychology of the 19th. century that portrayed human nature as comprised of parts: a Will, an Intellect, a Conscience, etc. Biblically, we understand human nature as a holistic thing—a consciousness that has mental, emotional, somatic, and relational dimensions.

Modern psychology now recognizes this wholeness of man. First a quotation from Howard and Martha Lewis and then from Dr. Franz Alexander.

"Mind does not merely affect the body, it permeates its constitution ... on the

other hand, there's not a function of any organ of the body which does not enter into the constitution of your mind." (page 10)

"The fact that the mind rules the body is, in spite of its neglect by biology and medicine, the most fundamental fact which we know about the process of life."

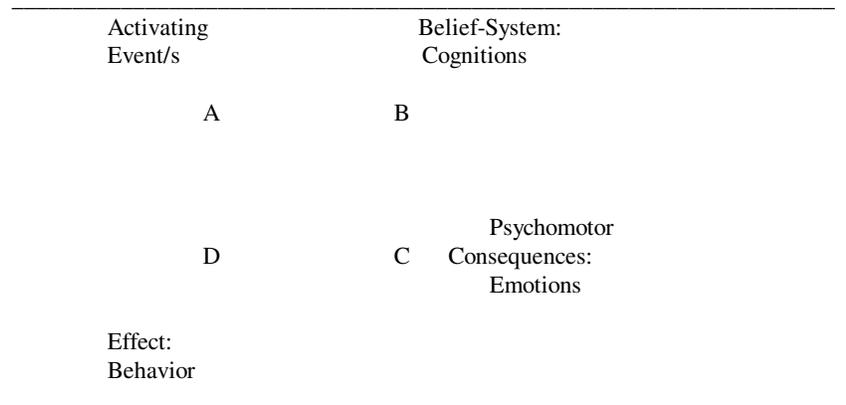
Regarding the biblical understanding, Professor David G. Myers has written:

"The body is the predominant partner in the Hebrew idea of personality. For the Hebrew, psychical includes much that we should call simply physiological; they simply did not distinguish the two."

Understanding the holistic and cybernetic nature of human nature as a system informs us about the causal relationship that exists between our thinking, emoting, and behaving. *What affects one facet of human processing and experiencing affects all facets.* In this way, sick thoughts can sicken the body. Anxiety in the mind can end up as somatic anxiety in various parts of the body. John Powell succinctly states, "When I repress my emotions, my stomach keeps score." Nathan Brandon describes an emotion as a psychosomatic form in which we experience our estimate of the beneficial or harmful relationship of some aspect of reality to our self (p. 69).

The intricate inter-relationship between our psychic capacities and bodies establishes a causal loop. Not only do cognitions create emotions, but emotions evoke corresponding cognitions. By acting depression, slouching, adopting a basset hound look, moving lethargically, we induce feelings and thoughts of tiredness. So while the mind predominates in the creation of emotions, our holistic consciousness with its causal loop effect means that *we can effect change by thinking differently, acting differently, or feeling differently.* We can break into the causal loop on the emotional and behavioral level as well as the mental level. This leads to a more complete schematic of the ABCs of Emotions in Figure 3:2.

Figure 3:2



Abraham H. Maslow (1965, *Psychology of Being*) has warned against such dichotomizing. When we separate the psychic powers into separate compartments we become blind to the rich and mysterious holism of personality. Maslow succinctly makes his point with a proverb: "*Dichotomizing pathologizes and pathology dichotomizes.*" (p. 175). W.L. Carrington expressed the same idea when he wrote, "Anything that tries to separate man into parts interferes with wholeness."

Dimensions of Consciousness

In saying that cognitions create emotions we do not thereby reduce emotional experience to dry rationality. *Mind* operates as a rich concept indicating not a sterile and abstract computer, but a dynamic reality programmed for meaning and emotion. We cannot think without simultaneously emoting. We have emotions in all of our thoughts. And we have thoughts (values, judgments, beliefs, and reason) in all of our emoting. And because of this dynamism of the mind, we can think about consciousness in terms of it having many dimensions of "knowing."

We think and develop "knowings" via —

- Visual pictures, images, sights.
- Auditory sounds
- Words and internal self-talk
- Abstract words and concepts
- Somatic and kinesthetic awarenesses
- Experiential and motor knowledge
- Unconscious thinking/ Intuitive understandings
- Emotional habits
- Relational awareness

1) Visual and Pictorial Thinking

We resort to pictures when words fail. Hebraic psychology glories in portraying mental life in terms of what we "see" ("eye" in the sense of perspective). This inner capacity for seeing describes the power of imagining, hoping (seeing what may come into existence), and anticipating. Because we think in terms of the mental pictures within our minds, we have a "*narrative consciousness*." We think in terms of stories. We constantly look for plots, dramas, actions, journeys, conflicts, and movement toward solutions. On the theater of our mind we have picture galleries and our language shares of the nature of hieroglyphics—abbreviated pictures, each worth a thousand words.

We experience consciousness as highly visual because our earliest consciousness began as primarily visual. We saw the world before we could manipulate it with words. We pointed to things before we could express what it in language. Thus we program our subconscious with all sorts of sights and sounds, experiences and "understandings," before we had a vocabulary to accurately file things away.

2) Auditory Thinking

We think in sounds and the internal reproduction of tones, volumes, noise, music, etc. In the theater of our mind we hear sounds, tones, different qualities of volumes and pitch, as we repeat words, music, etc.

3) Verbal Thinking

We think in and with words. This distinctively human capacity provides us the ability to symbolize with audible sounds and funny lines on paper, namely, with symbols which stand for something other than themselves. Words function as vehicles of meaning. The verbal dimension of thinking enables us to store knowledge, to evaluate the logic of thinking, and to communicate across both time and geography. Current Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) testing depends primarily upon verbal thinking. Educators continue to preach that we should expand our vocabulary because when vocabulary expands so does intelligence. This describes some of the wonder of words.

4) Abstract Thinking

Word not only convey thoughts of empirical realities (things one can see, taste, touch, feel, or hear) but also realities that *transcend* the world of sights and sounds. Words trigger our minds to think about cars and hammers, tigers and bears—all empirical things. Words also enable us to think abstractly about non-empirical realities: justice, loneliness, perfection, the third heaven, motivation, self-esteem. We can even conceptualize things that do not exist at all: unicorns, the adventures of the Starship Enterprise, and Micky Mouse, etc.

Abstract concepts tend to become reified inasmuch as we use nouns to describe them. For instance, what does "motivation" refer to? Does it refer to a thing? No. Yet we often think of it and talk about it as if it existed as a tangible substance. We talk about someone having motivation and another having no motivation. Actually everybody experiences motivation inasmuch as to have life involves "moving." Yet no surgeon has ever opened a patient's chest and said, "Well, look there! I believe we have cut into this man's organ of motivation."

Motivation does not exist as *a thing*. It rather exists as a working concept that describes a life-orientation involving a person's level of energy, responsiveness to life, and the meaning he or she finds in life. Motivation concerns one's cognitions, emotions, behavior, relationships, and motives. It arises from the very fact that human beings have needs and wants, thoughts and ideas.

So while motivation does not describe a material thing, our predicate-subject language structure tends to cause us talk as if it comprised a thing. All this underscores the inadequacy of words, especially in dealing with abstract concepts. It further illustrates our need for pictures, poetry, music, mathematics and other kinds of languages whereby we can communicate our ideas. Think for a moment about the words you would employ to transmit your understanding of eternity, spirit, love, and moral oughtness. Reality exceeds the load-limit of our human languages.

5) Experiential and Motor Thinking

We come to "know" our world not only through the words we hear and see, but also through such intangible things as body language (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) the "atmosphere" of places, and feelings. No wonder so many of our thoughts exist on an ineffable unconscious dimension. Life's experiences communicate non-verbally and subliminally.

Even events "speak" to us. A cold shoulder "says" that John does not want us around, or that he feels angry or preoccupied. An unreturned phone call "speaks" to us. Of course, sometimes we become all too ready to "read" into life's events more than what exists, but nonetheless we pick up impressions from the things that happen to us. As children, a spanking created bodily sensations and when combined with cognitions "said" we "are no good," in danger, could get hurt, should change our behavior, and/or that somebody cares that much about our welfare.

6) Somatic and Kinesthetic Thinking

In addition to "body language," we somatize our thoughts. It happens automatically because we exist as bodily beings. When we get up on a stage to sing a song, give a speech, or perform in a drama we have feelings in our stomachs—butterflies doing cartwheels! How do we experience this physiological arousal? As anxiety, fear,

excitement or what? It depends on the cognitions. Depression usually expresses itself in bodily behaviors. So do romantic feelings. Within us we have lots of endopsychic stimuli that constantly impinge on our consciousness giving us a sense of what it feels like to experience life, movement, actions, etc.

We think somatically because our earliest "knowing" of life comes in the somatic dimension. The morning I wrote the first draft of this chapter, my seven-month old daughter (Jessica) crawled up to my typewriter in my office and signaled me that she felt bored. She indicated, without uttering one intelligible word that she wanted her recreational director (me) to do something about those feelings.

I picked her up, gave her a great big bear-hug, swung her around the room, played three minutes of peekaboo and then tickled her ribs. She loves such. I spoke words during this morning ritual but she didn't understand their cognitive content. Yet in another sense she did understand. She "knew" somatically that the interaction we experience constituted some level of fun and delight, and that she wanted more. I communicated my love and acceptance of her by the play and it got translated in her being via the bodily feelings she experienced. Though her ego-consciousness has only begun to develop, she already had programmed certain somatic knowledge into her subconscious: feelings and images that let her know that "life is good," that "I am loved," that "It's ok to explore the world," that "Big people will be there for me," and that "I am known and recognized as a person."

Somatically we all pick up feelings and impressions—understandings that arise "before" words and hence, ineffable. We walk into a room and though everybody's sociable and say pleasant words to us, we get a gut feeling of something as wrong. We may eventually discover our impression as accurate or inaccurate. It may stem from the immediate situation or from leftover business of the previous day. It may arise because of indigestion. But whatever its cause, we do pick up impressions and come to "know" our world—intuitively, without reasoning and without words.

7) Unconscious and Intuitive Thinking

Because of our mind's dynamic depth we have the capacity for thinking below the level of consciousness. This unconscious thinking occurs constantly. It occurs concurrent with conscious thinking and continues during our hours of sleep when we lack conscious altogether. A decade ago advertizers became excited about designing commercials with subliminal messages that a person could not pick up consciously. They hoped to influence consumers below the threshold of conscious thought. In this way they could bypass the consumer's mental blocks. Subliminal advertizing consisted of incorporating pictures or words flashing across the screen at a speed just below the threshold of awareness. Advertizers believed that the subliminal messages would register on the deep mind and eventually work their way out in a person's

behavior. Subsequent research has called the effectiveness of the procedure into question. Yet we have no question that we do think on an unconscious level.

The phenomenon of memory witnesses to a mind deeper and more extensive than the conscious mind. In Augustine's book on "The Philosophy of Memory" he marveled at this capacity within human nature.

"Great is the power of memory, exceeding great is it, O God, an inner chamber, vast and unbounded! Who has penetrated to its very bottom? Yet it is a power of my mind and it belongs to my nature, and thus I do not comprehend all that I am."

In the absence of psychological vocabulary, Augustine spoke in terms of "the great cave of memory." "I know not what hidden and inexpressible recesses within it, takes in all these things to be called up and brought forth when there is need for them."

Augustine poses a mystery. He sees a man whom he knows but he cannot recall his name. He tries to remember. First he tries this name and then that name, but he rejects them all. He "forgot" his name. Yet Augustine says that he has not altogether forgotten for some trace remembrance exists, or he would not have the ability to definitely say, "That is not his name."

"Hence, each one is rejected, until that name presents itself which our knowledge without objection accepts as familiar to it. Whence does this name present itself, unless from memory itself? ... If it had been completely wiped out of the mind, we would not remember it even when reminded of it. For we have not as yet completely forgotten what we still remember to have forgotten." (pages 236-248)

From whence doth memory arise? From the subconscious dimensions of mind. We all have experienced the resurgence of old thoughts that have laid dormant in our deep mind. A trip to a childhood home can trigger such memories. The smells, sights, and sounds speak to long forgotten experiences and suddenly we begin to tell stories and experiences that we have not experienced as part of consciousness for years. Where have all these things we know and yet haven't had awareness of been during this time? What "deep hiding place" held them?

Doctors Penfield in his 1950 research on the neuro-physiology of the brain and Eric Berne's development of his model of Transactional Analysis both utilized the assumption that apparently everything we have ever heard, seen, learned, and experienced has somehow and somewhere become permanently recorded in the depths of the brain.

Habits also witness to the subconscious mind. Via conscious learning and acting are able to program knowledge and skills into our deep mind. We drive the information and way of responding into our soul, forming deep grooves by repetition. I learned the keys of the typewriter in my ninth grade. At that time I had the keys memorized and could have told you the location of any key. But today I do not have such knowledge—at least not in my conscious mind. Yet my fingers "know." I cannot immediately tell you the location of "x" on the keyboard. But by thinking of a word with "x" in it (x-ray) and letting my fingers move as if typing, I can find the "x." My "x" finger lies next to my little finger on my left hand and it moved to the bottom row. The "x" key must lie as the second key from the left on the bottom row. So my fingers *know* what my mind cannot remember.

Along with Augustine this marvel of human consciousness calls forth praise for God's handiwork:

"Great wonder arises within me at this. Amazement seizes me. Men go forth to marvel at the mountain heights, at huge waves in the sea, at the broad expanse of flowing rivers, at the wide reaches of the ocean, and at the circuits of the stars, but themselves they pass by. ... Great is the power of memory! An awesome thing, my God, deep and boundless and manifold in being! And this thing is the mind, and this am I myself."

Our subconscious mind absorbs our conscious "knowing" and sets us on automatic. This psychological mechanism allows habits to develop which frees our conscious mind for new things. Thus we know things we do not have the ability to recall consciously. These things have become preconscious, not present in consciousness, but capable of being recalled without counter any resistance or repression. We drive cars, ride bikes, walk up steps, write and speak various languages, and do a hundred other things every day without consciously thinking about our actions. I know how to tie a tie, but don't ask me to explain it! I know it with my hands.

The woman Jesus healed of the hemorrhage immediately "felt in her body that she was healed of her disease" (Mark 5:29). A Greek word for intellectual knowing (*egno*) here becomes translated by the kinesthetic term "felt." Thus, her knowledge somehow existed more as a knowledge of her body—a felt knowledge.

8) Intuitive Thinking

This kind of thinking stands as closely associated with relational thinking. We describe such intuitive thinking as the power of "attaining direct knowledge or cognition without rational thought and inference." Left brain/right brain research indicates intuition as the forte of the right brain for it primarily thinks pictorially, imaginatively, inductively, holistically, and emotionally. The left brain, in contrast, thinks logically, mathematically, verbally, abstractly, and deductively.

David never told Absalom about his anger or hatred. Nevertheless Absalom certainly picked up those feelings. He *intuitively knew* (had an inward knowing) that his dad did not love him. Absalom undoubtedly picked up impressions of David's dislike in the emotional atmosphere that surrounded David. By structuring the relationship that forbid Absalom to see David's face, Absalom felt unwanted and rejected. So though David loved his son, he felt inhibited from expressing that love. And, given that Absalom could not read his dad's mind, he picked up on the negative aspects, that of his dad's anger and disgust for him.

9) Emotional Thinking

The reciprocal relation between cognitions and emotions make it impossible for us to think apart from feeling. Emotion influences and penetrates all of our thinking. This interpenetrating of emotion into all of our thinking enables us to care about truth. But too much emotion throws us out of balance the other way; our emotions begin filtering and dictating what we what to find. The emotional thinking involved in catastrophizing, terrorizing, awfulizing, and rationalizing illustrates thinking controlled by emotions.

The problem does not consist of *emotional thinking* per se. It rather consists of *irrational* emotional thinking. Our choice lies between rational emotional thinking and irrational. Since we do not exist as disembodied beings we can never engage in the kind of "pure" thinking of a robot, computer, or machine. Carl Weaver writes:

"Our moods and physiological reactions color all of our thinking processes and filter all incoming and outgoing communications so that any concept evoked in us by a communication from another person necessarily involves our entire physiological system." (p.48)

There exists no such thing as pure intellectual thinking, reason untouched by emotion. Even Mr. Spock of *Star Trek*, though he continually tried to convince the crew that Volcans live beyond emotion and do not allow emotions to affected their logic, shows lots of emotions. He does not show his emotionality in the same way that Captain James Kirk expresses his. Spock does not fall in love with every beautiful woman on every planet in every galaxy. Yet Spock has his own emotions: pride in his superior rationality, arrogance over McCoy's temperamental outbursts, contempt for human's dependence on emotional needs.

10) Relational Thinking

As human beings we have a communal structure to our consciousness; we cannot even learn to speak without other people. When it comes to surviving emotionally, we must have deep and rich relationships—relationships that communicate life's richest meanings (love, joy, hope, and empathy).

Most of our memories consist of *memories of relationships*. And given that during our first years we lived and processed information without language, we have much of our older programs in our subconscious coded kinesthetically—according to how we felt in relation to significant others. Via those relationships we came to know that we counted or did not count. Our experiences with the emotionally significant people conditioned us for life. An old proverb says, "Only the burnt child fears the fire." Psychologically this means that our experiences shape and mold us for patterns of thought and emotion.

A spoiled child accordingly tends to grow up (mis)believing that everybody else exists for the purpose of attending his needs. Alfred Adler posits that we pick up many of our impressions and beliefs about life and ourselves according to our position in the family constellation. Thus first-borns, an only child, a middle child, a last born, etc. all tend to pick up similar kinds of programs for coping, relating, being, etc. Adler further noted that doting parents frequently give a child the idea of his own inferiority and that they cannot trust him to do for himself. The structure of that relationship suggests and triggers such thoughts.

The Heart of the Matter — The Heart

Summarily, *cognitions create and control our emotions*. Our God-given mechanism for emotional control lies in the nature and content of our thoughts. By changing our perceptions and perceptual habits we can take charge of our emotions.

Further, our *learn* our emotions. They arise as learned phenomena. Via our early home life, our culturalization, our role models, our values, we acquire our current emotional styles. If then, below every emotion lies a thought, then by changing that thought, we change our emotion.

H. Norman Wright has succinctly said, "The messages you send yourself in your mind are the determining factors in what's done with the feeling." By re-educating our consciousness (updating our beliefs) we "put on the new nature." Cognitions cause emotions. This enables us to distinguish between *causation* and *elicitation* in emotional arousal. Cognitions cause; external events elicit and together they determine our feelings.

Thus endeth the dichotomy. Reason and affection go together; we cannot divorce mind from emotion without generating many disastrous ill effects. Separating the two only creates psychic pathology. Emotion without reason becomes uncontrollable passion based on unconscious irrationality or mere sensuality. Reason without emotion results in sterile intellectuality based upon unrecognized emotion. For emotional wholeness we need both.

Emotions make us human and enable us to discover beauty and goodness. Via emotions we cognize values. Meaning has an *affective* as well as a *cognitive* nature. Reason makes us wise, giving us insight into the nature and structure of reality. We entertain a false notion when we assume that because emotions correlate with *subjectivity* that somehow this undermines or negates the quality of the emotion. Actually, our reason also exists as subjective. Yet as long as exist as *subjects* all of our thinking, feeling, and experiencing will involve subjectivity. We sometimes use the pejorative "emotional" as if emotional mean "the irrational bordering on the insane." (Hillman, 19??, p. 190).

Actually the only contrast that we can accurately draw lies between irrational emotion and rational emotion. Pragmatically this means that we can discover and understand our emotions as we get in touch with our beliefs. I've noticed in myself that by allowing my emotions and thoughts to surface when I feel intensely competitive I usually discover feelings of insecurity. Then I discover that when I think "I need to win" that thinking then drives me to behave competitively. And that, in turn, prevents me from enjoying the activity for itself. Yet by simply registering my emotion and back-tracking to the thoughts out of which it came, I find that I have more control over it. It provides me *the power of choice* as to what to do with it. And the process itself tends to mellow my emotions.

The insight concerning the intricate relationship between cognitions and emotions helps us to gain clarity about the various thoughts and values that we process within. We often talk about many feelings that do not consist of emotions or feelings at all. We say, "*I feel so ugly I could cry!*" But that does not describe *a feeling* (a body sensation) at all. It expresses a strong evaluation or judgment. If we ask again, "And how do you feel about that?" then we might get a true feeling (i.e. sadness, fear, disgust, anger, etc.).

"*I feel like I'm going nowhere* in this job!" again expresses a judgment, not a feeling. The feeling underneath that judgment could consist of discouragement. "*I feel alone and without a friend,*" confuses a fact (aleness) with a feeling (loneliness). "*I feel sorry for mother!*" also muddies the waters because "feeling sorry for" prevents us from developing clarity or awareness about our cognitive appraisal that created that pseudo-feeling. The feeling underneath such a judgment probably consists of sympathy, but it could also arise from contempt.

We take a big step toward emotional vitality as we get in touch with our thoughts and emotions and sense their relationship. While our states of consciousness come suffused with both sensations (kinesthetics) and judgments (mental appraisals), it helps when we accurately report our thoughts and distinguish them from our emotions. Then we can see how we create our emotions via our thoughts.

Where do emotions come from? Norman Wright succinctly writes:

"An emotional reaction is preceded by knowledge, evaluation, and finally, judgment. But these occur so rapidly and even unconsciously that you might not be aware of them happening at all. After the judgment has been made the emotional reaction follows with the appropriate muscle and glandular changes which are a part of emotional activity." (15)

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Because our cognitions create our emotions, we can discover the rhyme and reason within the emotions we experience and the emotional style we have developed. Our soul reckons with various cognitions which, in turn, determines our motivational nature. Becoming aware of this dynamic empowers to see and own our responsibility for taking charge of our emotions.

Our emotions exist as multi-influenced. A great many forces and factors influence them. We find them affected by our state of health, sleep habits, fatigue, fitness, body chemistry, biorhythms, hormones, weather, people, events, words, the way people look at us(!), etc.

We tap into *the cognitive controls* that determine our emotions, we can become more emotionally healthy. We do that by updating our misbeliefs with truth, clarifying our values, enriching our mental life with new images and words, bringing truth to the archaic erroneous zones, grappling with meaningful abstract concepts, and developing our intuitive powers. In a word, we "guard our hearts with all diligence" eliminating all cognitive garbage that turns our emotions putrid and poisonous. We renew our minds and enter into transformation.

Chapter 4

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

"Be transformed by the renewal of your mind"
(Romans 12:1-2)

The river of emotion flows from the spring of thought. Neurologically we cannot experience the external world without first bringing it into our consciousness via our senses and giving it meaning. The psychological law involved in the creation of emotion goes like this: Constitutional temperament plus physical sensations plus cognitive interpretations create emotion.

The good news in this asserts that we have a cognitive control over our emotions. By renewing our minds we transform our character. By Christianizing our minds we therefore Christianize our emotions. In this chapter we will look at the need for total *Metanoia* and enumerate specific ways for renewing the mind.

The Universal Heart Problem

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer. 17:9-10)

The word "*heart*" in the scriptures primarily and usually refers to human cognitive and mental processes. Jeremiah's statement therefore stands as an indictment against the mind. He asserted the trickiness of the mind. "It is deceitful above all things and incurable." Another version reads, "It is desperately wicked" (KJV) and sick. Jeremiah sounds incredibly modern with that last descriptive word—*sick*. Today we use a similar psychological/medical word, *neurotic*. Jeremiah offers a thorough going analysis of our psychic condition because he asserts that this sickness operates universally.

All of us have valued incorrectly, believed lies, and received erroneous programming. We all experience a craftiness in our consciousness. We have difficulty in thinking and communicating in a straightforward way with ourselves. We have many thoughts and emotions that we do not want to face. So we end up playing various psychological games with ourselves trying to avoid facing reality.

"Who can know it?" Jeremiah asks rhetorically. Who among us can become so self-aware as to know his or her own mind? The question calls for a negative answer. No one. Jeremiah reveals a psychological acumen about human nature. Long before modern psychology got around to detailing all of the psychic defenses that we come up with in fending off painful truths Jeremiah wrote that "the heart is treacherous above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?" (Noffatt)]. It imperviously resists our own inspections into its secrets.

"Who can know it?" God!

"I the Lord search the mind (*lev*, heart) and try the heart (*kileyah*, kidneys, reins, the inner secret part which denote the secret workings and affections of the soul."

Probing the depths of our consciousness stands as God's prerogative alone. He only knows the goings on in there.

"Behold, this alone I found, that God created man upright, but they have sought out many devices." (Eccl. 7:29)

Originally God created us (including our mind) upright (*yashar*, straight, right, righteous, true, authentic). Then came the deterioration. We sought out many devices (thoughts, plans, inventions, intentions). These devices or stratagems protect us from knowing evil against ourselves. Today we refer to them as psychological defense mechanisms.

We have the capacity for straight thinking and believing, yet we also have a strong tendency to misuse our rationality and to think crookedly. In this way our God-given endowment becomes alien to us so what should function as unnatural to us (irrationality, sensualism, ungodliness) becomes "second nature." This describes what in theological language we refer to as our "fall."

"This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate comes to all; also the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead." (Eccl. 9:3)

"*Under the sun*" refers to the days of life on this side of eternity. In this time frame our minds become "full of evil and madness." Insanity! We experience a "lower nature" because we set thoroughly set our mind on things in this world. Becoming

depraved with evil we become mad. This word "mad" comes from *holelah* which also refers to boasting. In other words, as we seek out many devices for self-protection our worry about our self becomes unhealthy. We try to boast ourselves, but all our boasting consists of madness. Our inner urge for glory and dignity springs from a God-shaped vacuum within that longs for meaning and significance. Yet life "under the sun" we cannot attain it.

Apart from a covenant friendship with God, we will never satisfy our drive for dignity. Instead, it just drives us on madly in our search for fulfillment. You will find this theme emphasized in the book of *Ecclesiastes*. The preacher (*Koheleth*) repeatedly asserts that life "under the sun" "is vanity of vanities" and a "chasing after the wind." Apart from God's presence and revelation, only madness can fill our souls as our life becomes disoriented from its vertical dimension. We become "estranged and hostile *in mind*, doing evil deeds" (Col. 1:21).

Our nature thus needs *a total cognitive restructuring*. Empiricism does not reveal all essential truth for living. In fact, without some facts about life that transcend "life under the sun," our minds invent all kinds of wild notions.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

"Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Rom. 8:5-6)

Without Spirit revealed truth, we lack the essential programming we need. Without a revelation of God's wisdom, we become "carnally minded" (KJV) rather than "spiritually minded."

"The mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:5-7)

The seat of human depravity then does not lie in the so-called "lower nature" of our emotions and impulses. Instead it lies in our so-called "higher nature" as contained in our mind. Without God's truth our reasoning power itself becomes bound to the irrational, it becomes carnal, hostile and thus ungodly.

"You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:17-18)

"... men who by their wickedness suppress the truth ... For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds became darkened" (Romans 1:18-32)

Misinformation causes us to misbelieve and to suffer various forms of bondage. Conversely, the “truth sets us free.” As we mentally attend *untruth*, we program our subconscious with irrational ideas that become part of our basic predisposition.

Jesus succinctly summarized the spiritual and psychological dynamic operating in this in these words: "Be it unto you according to your faith" (Matt. 9:29, 8:13). Our subconscious heart actualizes its beliefs. "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." This underscores the importance of right believing and constant re-evaluation of our beliefs.

"Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God." (I John 4:1) "I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (II Cor. 11:3)

Biblically, *deception* describes our most prominent danger. Warnings about it shout at us from nearly every page. Over and over, we are warned to be mentally alert and on guard against any kind of delusion that might trick our minds:

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:7-10)

"He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." (I John 2:11)

"Let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous." (I John 3:7)

"If any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself ... Let no one be deceived; God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:3-4, 7-8)

"Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool." (I Cor. 3:18)

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived" (I Cor. 6:9)

"Do not be deceived; 'Bad company ruins good morals.' Come to your right mind, and sin no more" (I Cor. 15:33)

"Take care, lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day ... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:12-13)

Now while delusions deceive our minds and thereby distort our personalities, not all delusions have equal value or effect. Some have greater consequences than others. In scornfully satirizing the deceived idolaters who fells a tree and uses part to make a god and part to warm himself, Isaiah concluded his ridiculous portrait with a serious and jolting statement:

"He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, 'Is there no a lie in my right hand?'" (Isa. 44:21)

A *deceived mind* cannot even perceive reality, especially one's personal and moral reality. Such a mind suffers from blindness and darkness. By definition, *deception* refers to the complex situation of misperceiving but perceiving one's perceiving as accurate. With a mindset like that, no wonder we get out of touch with reality. The Psychologist of Israel wrote, "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes" (Prov. 16:2). A deceived mind cannot face the truth and does not want to face it. This explains why the Proverbist describes one living in a condition of deception as walking in darkness and "not knowing where he is going."

Do You Get it Yet?

Those blockhead disciples of Jesus illustrate blindness of mind. If their selection demonstrates anything, it underscores the fact that Jesus did *not* depend on the Intelligencia for the progress of his kingdom. They did not lack intelligence, they rather suffered from thick-headedness. So after three years of personal instruction, their mental obtuseness continued to frustrate Jesus.

Once when Jesus turned his back on some Pharisees because of their phony questions, he departed, walking for their boat. Once aboard Jesus commented, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." The disciples didn't know what to make of that. In their wooden literalness they interpreted it as a rebuke for having forgotten to bring bread with them on the boat. Jesus exploded:

"And being aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" (Mark 8:11-21)

Jesus blasted away at their sluggish minds so wedded to the irrationality of literalism via his rhetorical questions. Then he did something in symbolism that drove home his point that suggested that they needed *a second touch of his healing grace* in order to see things clearly.

It happened when they arrived at Bethsaida. There some people brought a blind man to him:

"And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking.' Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly. And he sent him away

to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'" (Mark 8:22-26)
Here, upon his first touch, Jesus "failed." I think this "failure" to provide total and complete healing of the man's vision with the first touch as an intentional move on Jesus' part. Why? In doing that *he created a parable in ritual* for his disciples—a parable about *them*. For like the blind man after Jesus' first touch, they could see. Yet their minds were still somewhat cloudy and dark. They needed another touch by the therapeutic hand of Jesus.

When the blind man first looked up the disciples were undoubtedly huddled about him. In a way they looked like slow moving trees. He saw, but not clearly. So with the disciples. They could see, but they needed so much more clarity before they could *really* see. This story occurred immediately before Caesarea Philippi where Jesus provided them the ultimate revelation of his identity, thus it significantly parabolizes in action their need for a second and third and fifteenth touch.

Programmed for Mindlessness

Our mental habits present another problem with the mind. For what we consciously think, perceive, believe, and attend repetitively, we thereby *program* into our subconscious where it then becomes automatic. Then later it gives rise to our impulses and basic predispositions. We describe this psychodynamic more commonly as "habit." By repetition, we habituate patterns of thought and behavior. In turn they begin operating out of our deep heart apart from our conscious direction. What once demanded total concentration now passes into the subconscious where it motivates us unconsciously.

Once habituated, the conscious mind actually gets in the way of our subconscious. If I think about where the keys are on the typewriter too much I begin making more mistakes. Athletes know that they do their best when they play ball by their "instincts," their habits and skills which have become "second nature" to them. This mechanism frees the mind to move on to new concerns. It prevents our consciousness from getting all cluttered up with information and details.

But this blessing can become a curse. After all, the subconscious part of mind does **not** discriminate. Whatever it receives through repetition, it habituates. It programs it in so that it becomes our motivation. Yet our life, with all of its emotions, energies, and motives, can have no higher quality than our programing. *GIGO*: computerese for "*Garbage In, Garbage Out.*" If we have attended misbeliefs, irrational ideas, false values, junk reading, ungodly images — then we will find our subconscious programmed with those very things.

Another complication also arises. As our subconscious makes our learning automatic it not only frees our conscious mind for new learning, but it *freezes* our old

programming. The program then tends to become closed to new information that questions its basic assumptions. We become predisposed to doing the same things, feeling the same things, thinking the same things.

Like a car with cruise control, once we push the button and "set" it, we can take our foot off the accelerator, sit back, relax and forget about what maintaining our speed. The mechanism does it for us. The human psyche's *automatic cruise control* lies in our subconscious mind. Once programmed, we don't have to worry about maintain our speed ("motivation"), the mechanism does it for us. We don't have to think about our destiny, what we value, or any of the other important existential questions. Having put those things out of our conscious mind, we can live free from the anxiety they create.

Habits, in this sense, thus make our minds *precedent ridden*. We tend to go with our programming because mental work involves just that—work. Thinking, reflecting, reasoning, and cognizing demands thought and energy. Yet by going with our habituated pattern we can avoid such work. T.A. describes this as our "script," a script which continues energizing and motivating. NLP describes it as our "program." The problem with this lies in how our script may have become entirely outdated, even infantile. Yet we feel safe with the old and familiar, so habits keep our intelligence retarded to yesterday's thinking.

George A. Coe in *The Motives of Men* says that "reason binds us to the irrational" due to the dynamic of habit. He identified social pressure and customs, religion and morals as other forces that tend to reinforce habit. As conserving forces they tend to further our mental retardation to the old. Life thus becomes "set" in concrete. Habits force our patterns of thinking, emoting, and behaving into "ruts. We do little fresh thinking. This stops growth. Infantile values and motivations keep energizing us. So our programming which by its very nature functions in a self-reinforcing way and so commits us to old ways of "being."

"Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They do always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways.'" (Heb. 3:10)

Israel illustrates the tragic power of habit. They developed a certain mental pattern so that they "always go astray in their hearts." They were no longer open to new perspectives, mentally they had "hardened their hearts." Their addiction to their old script blocked them from knowing God's ways and trusting him.

Restructuring Consciousness

"Repent and believe in the Good-news" is Christ's call for mental reprogramming. *Metanoia* (repentance) precedes experiencing his good-news. This reprogramming entails identifying our misbeliefs, exposing

them to the cleansing light of the truth, and developing an openness to fresh thinking.

1) Learning the Mind of Christ

"If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32)

Metanoia occurs as we expose our minds to the revolutionary concepts of the scriptures. To read and ponder them afresh we must approach them in a receptive frame of mind and with the study skills we bring to any literature that we want to master and make part of our consciousness. It is wise to study its contents regularly (daily if possible) and in-depth. Instead of skimming the surface, dive deeply into the words, ideas, values, and insights of the Word. Slowly and subtly it will reorganize your concepts and *metanoia* will be underway.

"Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" (I Peter 2:2)

By filtering our minds with the scriptures we are made mentally new. This leads to personality transformation—a transformation that occurs as our consciousness is resynthesized. We come to "have in us the mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). And as we begin thinking God's thoughts after him, we are given a whole new perspective on life. Our heart thinks as God thinks and our very being becomes as God is—godly. Then our nature changes.

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Col. 3:9-10)

Imagine it. Our consciousness becomes so aligned with Christ's that we begin experiencing his kind of life.) We think his kind of thoughts, we value his values, Christlike insights come to us, and even our mental images begin to correspond with the pictures he entertains. Slowly, subtly, yet progressively the inner operations of our consciousness become one with his. We are making a pilgrimage to the mind of Christ.

"Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 1:13 KJV)

"So then, brace up your minds, keep cool" (Moffatt). "Concentrate your minds with the strictest self-control and fix your hopes on the blessing that is coming for you." (Twentieth Century New Testament). Peter compares mental conditioning and fitness with the way an athlete or soldier exercises his muscles. "Gird up the loins of the mind" provides us a dynamic and suggestive metaphor for the process of learning to

think with the mind of Christ. The word *gird* is related to girdle—and we all know what girdles are for. Fat! We gird a girdle about our midsection to keep the fat in or at least from showing. The girdle also increases our strength; it works as an extra muscle and gives us a more attractive profile.

In the first century a soldier girded up his loins when he went into battle. By tucking some of his tunic into his belt he would gird himself and get some of his clothing out of the way. This would give him more maneuverability in close combat or in flight.

But Peter's metaphor doesn't concentrate on the fat in one's midsection but in one's head. He's address us as fatheads! It's the fat in our heads that creates our need to "gird up the loins of our mind." This is a call for spiritual mental fitness, to discipline and get tough in believing, willing, imagining, thinking, reasoning, and reflecting.

Contextually, Peter's audience were facing "fiery trials of persecution" and were easily tempted to "think it strange" (I Peter 4:12-19). We all have a tendency to regress to infantile thinking, emoting, and behaving when we're under pressure. Peter was concerned that the believers would become sloppy in their thinking. He wanted them to be in good cognitive shape so that they could keep hoping confidently mentally perceiving the deepest and highest realities in the midst of their problems.

Trying times were upon them. Life had become tough. It was no longer easy to be a believer. To face such rough times they needed tough minds so that they would not believe any nonsense like "Our problems must mean that God has forsaken us." To combat such fathead ideas Peter explained the meaning of trials and exhorted them to commit the keeping of their souls to God especially in their sufferings (I Peter 1:3-8, 4:19). Sluggish minds with shabby, trivial, and secular thoughts are dangerous minds for they are full of distortion and irrationality.

But how do we gird up the loins of our minds? Exercise them! Engage in a good mental workout every day. Explore Christian truths and principles and from them deduce how you should live. Exercise burns off the excess fat in our heads. We also gird up our mental loins by grappling with majestic truths, by backpacking into God's high country in the scriptures and learning to breathe the fresh air of that elevation. That's when we get a real perspective—a panoramic view of life—where we have been and where we are going. Girding occurs by studying, probing, exploring, and relating truth to everyday life which adds firmness to our convictions. This "work" enables us to think deeply, to cogitate), "to ponder or meditate on something with intentness and objectivity."

God is Sovereign

- Therefore everything that happens in life occurs with his permission, presence, and understanding (Matt. 10:29-31).
- Therefore even when bad things happen, God is still present and will work all things together for my ultimate good (Rom. 8:28-39).
- Therefore my best option is total trust in God. I can make no wiser response than

C.S. Lewis writes:

"Anyone who is honestly trying to be a Christian will soon find his intelligence being sharpened: one of the reasons why it needs no special education to be a Christian is that Christianity is an education itself." (*Mere Christianity*, page 75)

We learn to "concentrate our minds with the strictest self-control" also by watching our diet. Too many starches, sugars, and greasy foods clog our system and throw off our chemical balance. By avoiding spiritual junk food and proving our minds "the sound (healthy) words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 6:3ff) we feed our minds health-giving ideas.

"Every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil." (Heb. 5:13-14)

Practice enhances mental growth. "Grown men can take solid food; their perceptions are trained by long use to discriminate between good and evil." (NEB). "Faculties" or "perceptions" literally refers to cognitive discernment. This mental faculty perceives, understands, and discriminates (develops through use): by chewing on a thought, by sinking one's teeth into it, by scheduling reading of the scriptures on a regular basis, and by recording our impressions, insights, and questions. This develops our ability to think deductively, to reason from a general principle to specific conclusions. Deductive reasoning begins with some eternal truth and translates it for everyday life. This left-brain type of thinking involves reading, linear reasoning, logic, critical evaluation, and analyzing—other left-brain functions.

Educating our consciousness to *think in terms of principles* restructures our mind. To test your own skills in abstract thinking, get a sheet of paper and make a list of all the basic truths) that determine your life. For instance, if you write, "God is Sovereign" you identified a basic principle. Now deduce. How does God's

sovereignty connect with your daily experience? Brainstorm until you have identified several items:

Don't rush the process. By meditatively ruminating over each principle that you have written, you exercise your mind and search for life applications. Take this procedure another step by making a notebook of your Life Principles. At the top of each page write one Principle, then as you read the scriptures or other literature, hear messages, talk with friends, you can keep deducing from those principles ever-new applications. In this way you keep bringing your consciousness back to your principles and thus program them more solidly in your subconscious. It also gives your mind the time and quietness needed to integrate the Principles with the rest of your knowledge. This procedure sharpens your mental focus giving your cognitions greater content and depth in thinking Christianly. Set a long term goal of reading the Bible from cover to cover, constantly supplementing verses and insights from your reading to this notebook of principles.

2) Value Updating

Meaning and emotion are related; meaning creates emotion. We emote as we attach meaning to people, things, and events. What holds significance to us has inherent power to arouse us emotionally. When we're emotional—a person, idea, or event is holding some significance to us.

The emotional confrontation at between Jesus and Peter illustrates this relation of meaning on our emoting. At Caesarea Philip Jesus raised the question of his real identity. When Peter acknowledged Jesus as God's Son Jesus promised him the kingdom's keys.

"Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things..." (Matt. 16:20-21)

Peter assumed that Jesus' talk about suffering and dying was quitting talk and he didn't like it. He took (*proslambano*: grabbed, picked up) Jesus and told him in no uncertain words that he would have none of his "quitting words!"

"Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying; 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.'" (Matt. 16:22-23)

Peter didn't want Jesus to die. Having spent two years of his life in following Jesus and hoping that he would have a part in ushering in the kingdom, Peter had a lot of vested interest in seeing Jesus' program succeed. He could not fathom the idea of Jesus giving in to the Jerusalem bureaucracy who wanted to kill him. He felt

confused. Moments before Jesus spoke about building his community (church) and even the gates of hell not stopping him. "Why was Jesus now talking about dying?" It didn't make any sense.

"He's probably just discouraged" Peter thought. So the big, lanky fisherman grabbed Jesus with the intent of shaking some sense into him. And while his method left much to be desired, his motive was sincere—an expression of his love. He only wanted to help, to fortify his Master.

Then Jesus turned on Peter and let him have it. He called him *satan*. "Get behind me, Satan!" "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (KJV). "Savour" is old English for cognition. For centuries "savour" effectively translated the Greek word (*phroneo*, which means "to think, to reflect on, to be minded, to understand, and to feel."

Peter and Jesus were antagonists in a controversy of values. One savoured the things of God, the other savoured the things of men. Their value-systems were clashing. Peter saw nothing good or valuable about dying; Jesus viewed it as essential for God's program. It was his way of building his community. "The gates of hell" would not stop him from rising again. Jesus' chief apostle had become a "satan" (opposer or antagonist) to him.

"He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me ... If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'" (Matt. 16:24-25)

Peter's emotions and behavior were out of place because he was misbelieving and mis-valuing. He was savouring (minding and feeling) secular values. He needed to update his values so that he could think Christianly. He needed to see that losing one's life was not necessarily giving up.

Psychologically, *we all believe*. Man is *homo fidere*—man the believer. We cannot help but believe. The only question lies in *what* we believe and the *source* of our beliefs. When we believe in something *we value* it, esteem it to be of worth, and give ourselves to it. By believing we evaluate an idea or person to be of importance in our lives and make the judgment that our life will find its truest meaning only in that idea or person.

Beliefs are regular "thoughts" that are electrified and energized with meaning. If we think it would be nice to have other people's approval, we're thinking accurately. But if we think that we must have other people's approval then we are misbelieving. An accurate thought has become an ultimate life value. What had simply been "nice" has

become essential and crucial—a "belief."

This insight warns us against believing just anything. *Misbeliefs* present a great potential for damaging our lives. William Backus and Marie Chapien point out the tremendous damage misbeliefs do in their book, (*Telling Yourself the Truth*). We must replace misbeliefs with truth. This therapeutic approach to mental distortions is called "Misbelief Therapy." "Don't let misbeliefs have any room in your mind without immediately coming against them with the truth."

Misbelief therapy entails updating our values, evaluating our beliefs for accuracy and holiness, and ferreting out all lies and replacing them with the truth. This renews our minds and gives us a re-synthesized consciousness.

For King David this would mean that instead of lying to himself, "It's terrible to have a son like Amnon." Or, "I can't stand what Absalom did!" David could have told himself the truth. "Amnon has done a wicked and sinful thing. It's not going to be easy, but I must confront him about his actions. I'd rather close my eyes to it all but I love him too much to sweep this under the carpet."

In updating our values it's important that we take a close look at our words). We tend to believe and value the things we tell ourselves. If we keep saying, "I am wasting my life!" we come to believe it consciously and subconsciously. Words are not "mere words" but vehicles of truth or error. More accurate and emotionally motivating self-talk would be: "I'm not redeeming my God-given moments, which is part of the reason I'm feeling that my life is going nowhere. I'm going to stop nursing my self-pity and open my eyes to God's opportunities."

Taking ourselves in hand and learning how to engage in holy self-talk is important. The Psalmist's self-talk focused his mind on God's positive power for renewal:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. My soul is cast down within me, therefore I remember thee ... By day the Lord commands his steadfast love; and at night his song is within me" (Psalm 42:5-5,8)

3) Imagination Dynamics

"Though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and take every thought (imagination) captive to obey Christ." (II Cor. 10:3-5)

The fortress of left-brain arguments and the stronghold of right-brain imaginations must all be brought into captivity to Christ if our whole mind is to be restructured. In this renewing of right-brain functions we must make our pictures and mental dramas *new* as well as our imaginative stories and inductive reasoning. Our right-brain is primarily visual; it looks at life holistically, and reasons from the concrete to the abstract.

Upon awakening each morning the biggest challenge before us is to catch a glimpse of the awe-inspiring drama of life. Our new imagining means looking beyond the trivial, secular, and irritating realities of everyday life. This takes work. It's easier to merely react to the sights and sounds around us. It's easier to allow the demands of work and routine to push us around with its tyranny of "the urgents" causing us to miss the bigger picture of life.

We need to use our power of imagination and begin our days with a vision of the invisible permanent realities (II Cor. 4:16-18). *We need to imagineer*—to picture vividly and graphically those beliefs and values that we want to guide us through the day. Our cognitive power of imagination enables us to be creative in our perception. It allows us to see with clarity, sharpness, and penetration that which is really real. This form of metanoia renews our consciousness on the level of imagination.

James W. Newman emphasizes imagination as a key ingredient in the formula for personality change. He puts it succinctly in a formula: Imagination times vividness equals a new inner reality.

"To the degree that you experience an event vividly in your imagination, it is accepted and recorded in your subconscious as 'reality', something which has actually happened." (*Release Your Brakes*, page 64)

To tap this cognitive dynamic, the gospel offers us *stories* by which we develop and utilize our power of imagination. The encounter stories in the Gospels provide the imagination rich material for they provide us with a world of new pictures, scenes, and dramas. *By walking into these Stories*, lingering there and empathizing with the characters, we can get a feel of their feelings and vicariously experience Jesus encountering us. This is cognitive restructuring at a deep level. By using our imaginative powers we come to see Jesus more vividly and allow his encounter to become *a happening* in our soul.

Imaginative literature contains a tremendous potential for getting around our mental blocks and becoming happenings in our deep heart, thus giving us new emotional experiences. This is the "Psychology of Stories" and explains the appeal of movies, dramas, plays, epic poems, parables, and even gossip. In hearing or seeing a story our imagination becomes filled with visual images that have a longer lasting impact than

receiving information in propositional form. The great architect of our psyche just so happened to fill his Life Manual (the Bible) with all kinds of non-propositional literature (right-brain stuff): poetry, parables, drama, ode, hymns, apocalypse, letters, and satire. These things comprise the literature of imagination and help us to bring every imagination into captivity to Christ.

Imaginative thinking renews our deep minds. It reaches to the depths of our consciousness. Stories become happenings within us. The old English word *fortory* indicates this dynamic of story for it is *a spell*. It has a captivating power that can "cast a spell" over us, enchant us, enthrall us, and mediate God's mystery to us. Hence the origin of our term gospel from "God-spel," God's story about Christ has casts a transforming spell over us.

Stories and especially parables renew our minds in living color and with vigorous emotion. This makes them memorable—another reason they penetrate so deeply. We often remember stories long after we remember who told them or what point they made in telling them. Accordingly, the master discipler came among us telling stories. And though his disciples didn't understand their full significance, they remembered those stories and have preserved them for us. The years do not trivialize those stories but enable us to understand them at deeper and deeper levels, always opening up new meanings and applications. Such stories get into our souls and continue their work of re-synthesizing consciousness.

4) Christianizing the Subconscious Mind

The biblical mandate directing us to "be renewed in our mind" isn't limited to our conscious mind but includes the subconscious. But how do we make something "new" that eludes our consciousness?

Psychoanalysis and other psychologies have developed techniques for probing the depths of our deep heart and bringing into consciousness that which ordinarily lies hidden in our subconscious depths. Free association, interpreting dreams, depth analysis, exploration of meanings, catharsis, early memories, hypnosis, Freudian slips of the tongue and pen, and body language analysis are such techniques.

Is all that necessary? Dr. William Glasser, psychiatrist and founder of (*Reality Therapy*) says "No." He criticizes traditional psychoanalytic methods and declares that "psychological archeology" is seldom necessary. Dr. Glasser believes in a therapy of three "**R**s"—*Reality, Right, and Responsibility*.

Reality Therapy therefore does not delve into a person's psychological roots but tries to understand where a person is *now*, what he is *doing* now, and where he is going now. Following Dr. Otto Rank, Glasser emphasizes the present over the past

because it is what a person is now believing and now doing that's causing the problem. It's this present that's keeping the past alive. Reality Therapy does not seek to answer *the why* questions (e.g., Why are you doing these things, What causes these feelings?). It explores the *what* and *how* questions:

What are you doing now? What thoughts are you entertaining? How are you presently evading responsibility?

Reality therapy's design is to get people to take responsibility for their current psychological condition. Practically this means that the subconscious can be reprogrammed without dredging up all of our misbeliefs, misinformation, and past traumas. This makes for quicker personality transformation and puts a lie to the notion that the past is all-determining. It is not. Simply by learning to believe and value correctly in the present sets new patterns of thought and feeling in our deep psyche. Then the law of the subconscious takes over—actualizing the data we've programmed into it.

Thus the normal process of maturation whereby we learn to honestly face reality, assume responsibility, and care about truth keeps *updating our subconscious programming*. This prevents infantile programming from dominating. It allows us to outgrow our old assumptions and predispositions. Re-programming, of course, takes time and repetition, but it works.

The Bible refers to this kind of deep programming of the mind as *setting of the mind* ("fixing of the heart"):

"To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6)

"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." (Psalm 57:7, e.g. Psalm 108:1, 122:7)

"Fixing the heart" is more than a brief exposure to truth; it necessitates a moral commitment to the truth, a strong focusing on it with lots of repetition, and an "understanding" of it. Research psychologists tell us that it takes between twenty-one and forty days to establish a new habit. This is the time framework for "setting" or fixing our souls to a new way of thinking. The Hebrew word (*kun*) for set is also translated "establish, confirm, constitute, appoint, and direct."

"The way of a man is not in himself, it is not in man who walks to direct (*kun*) his steps." (Jer. 10:23)

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right (*kun*) spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:10-11)

When we set before our minds a direction and fix our interest and attention upon

it—we are making that new data a habitual part of our subconscious. David prayed that God would participate in this setting process: "Put a new and right (steadfast) spirit within me." He wanted to be rightly focused so he utilized the dynamic of prayer as one of the disciplines for re-setting the soul. Getting a spiritual mindset reprograms our subconscious. It pushes the cruise button on the human psyche and habituates within us a new consciousness.

"King Rehoboam ... did evil, for he did not set (*kun*) his heart to seek the Lord." (II Chron. 12:14)

"Jehoshaphat ... walked in the way of Asa his father ... he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. The high places, however, were not taken away; the people had not yet set (*kun*) their hearts upon the God of their fathers." (II Chron. 20:20-21, 27:6, 30:19, Ezra 7:10)

We have the choice about setting or not setting our heart on God. When it comes to this kind of psychological programming, no one can make us do it for it involves our intentionality, agreement, understanding, repetition, and affirmation. This is where we are uniquely and ultimately free as human beings.

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." (Col. 3:1-2)

But What If ... ?

Sometimes there is a need to probe our subconscious depths. There are times when our unconscious values, beliefs, and thought patterns need to be brought to consciousness and exposed to the light of truth. By doing this we can gain insight as to why and how our programming is setting us up for emotional turmoil.

The Vertical Line Method of Exploration

RET's *Vertical Line Method* provides a powerful psychological tool for self-discovery (*Feeling Free, The New Mood Therapy*, David Burns, pages 233-242). With this tool we can ferret out our troubling subconscious programming.

Take a sheet of paper. In the top left hand corner write a short statement of the life problem. For example you might write, "My Marriage. I'm dissatisfied with it and feel like I want to chuck it."

Beneath your statement begin writing down every *automatic thought* you have about the situation. Write every single thing that flitters through your consciousness without censor. "I'm sick and tired of this marriage; I want out of it. I hate Howard. He is awful. He is a chauvinistic pig. I can't stand him. Why can't I have a warm and caring husband like everybody else? It's unfair that I'm stuck with this moron."

Write everything without screening or filtering anything out regardless of how repulsed you may feel at seeing it in print. If you need to, write the words "For My Eyes Only" or, "To Be Burned Upon Completing" at the top of the page. This is to provide you a sense of safety so you won't be afraid to write down all those terrible thoughts.

It's important to give our minds permission to become conscious of our silent assumptions and automatic thoughts that swarm around us. Swat every "immediate thought" and slap it down on the paper. This keeps those nagging anxieties from endlessly buzzing around our heads like a swarm of bees.

Take a new sheet of paper and make six columns and write one of your automatic thoughts in each column (you may need several sheets). Now under each automatic thought draw a vertical line which we'll use to represent these meaning questions: What does this thought mean to me? Why does it bother me or upset me? Supposing this thought is true, what significance does it have to me?

The Vertical Line Method enables us to explore the meanings and beliefs that make up our subconscious scripts. These meaning questions enable us to ferret out our own silent assumptions and beliefs which cause us to feel the way we feel. This psychological "tool" is Socratic in nature and does not force us into any philosophical system. It frees our subconscious to come to the surface. This Vertical Line Method probes relentlessly into your deep, inarticulate meanings. It involves a lot of repetition because our thoughts and values and beliefs are all mixed together. They are more felt than verbalized. Yet by pursuing our meanings we begin discovering the real causes of our emotional turmoil.

The woman in our illustration felt sick and tired of her marriage; she felt ugly and unloved. She blamed Howard for her terrible feelings. Her harsh labels of him helped her ventilate her anger feelings. She was boiling mad. But toward the end of the illustration she was beginning to see that beneath his inconsiderateness (in not taking her out and not helping around the house) were strong feelings of low self-worth. She felt unloved and disrespected. Her problem was not only that she sensed that Howard had no respect for her, but she had little self respect. She was letting him show her contempt. In her emotional turmoil she calls him names and rejects him as she has felt rejected by him. But her insulting words cover up her real feelings.

The Vertical Line Technique isn't for everybody. It presupposes that a person has sufficient objectivity and self-esteem to engage in such an exploration. During times of distress our objectivity and self-esteem are weaker than usual. Disruptive emotions

create so much emotional static that we are unable to think straight or to detect our own irrational cognitions.

At such times, a trusted friend or counselor provides us an atmosphere of support, acceptance, and truth so that we can freely speak our mind. By speaking honestly in the presence of someone who cares and with whom we feel safe, we are allowed to ventilate our feelings and discover what's going on. We cannot really know ourselves without being transparent to another person. God has made genuine friendship a therapeutic experience. It is a taste of grace to have another person hear us out while giving us acceptance, love, and confidentiality. By so doing we alleviate our fears, are enabled to relax, and encouraged to share our burdened thoughts.

The Horizontal Line Method of Challenge

Once our automatic thoughts and silent assumptions are on the table, the Horizontal Line Method provides another tool for dealing with our cognitive distortions. Did you notice the all-or-nothing statements in the previous illustration? Howard's wife engaged in many *cognitive distortions*: she blamed, catastrophized, and reasoned from her feeling. Such things reveal a great deal of her emotional problems. There were several infantile thought-patterns which she had not outgrown.

Misbeliefs caused most of her misery and they cause most of our misery. I'm speaking about the subconscious misbeliefs that were programmed in when we were pre-verbal or perhaps pre-rational. These distortions in our deep heart need to be brought up to date, made more rational and Christian. Here is a list of the most disastrous of the cognitive distortions to give you a sampling.

1) *Over-Generalization*. We over-generalize when we perceive life in terms of glittering generalities. We dejectedly announce, "I am a failure! I will always be a failure!" simply because we failed at some particular thing. Instead we should tell ourselves the truth about failure—that we all fail in certain things and that failure is part of the learning process. Or we over-generalize saying, "I failed in music class. I *never* do anything right. I *always* fail. Dad's right; I'm a good for nothing bum."

2) *Filtering Out the Positive* (Tunnel Vision). We pick out a single detail that's negative and focus exclusively on it. Depression is particularly characterized by filtering out the positive and inevitably leads to a black, gloomy mood. This mood then "proves" to the depressed person that everything is dark and hopeless, that his depression is valid. A negative mindset appraises everything negatively just as red glass gives the whole world a tint of red.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT: "I AM SICK AND TIRED OF MARRIAGE."

What does this mean to you?

"It means I am through. It means I've had enough. I can't stand to live with Howard any longer."

What is it about Howard that bothers you so much?

"He is a chauvinist pig. We are just incompatible. He will never change. I can't stand him anymore."

What does he do that upsets you so much?

"Well, he ignores me a lot. He expects me to do everything around the house. He never takes me out like Susan's husband does."

Supposing that's true, why does it bother you?

"Why? Because he is supposed to help around the house and to take me out. It's unfair that he doesn't cooperate."

Why does that upset you?

"Because it is not fair! Marriage is supposed to be fair. Howard promised to love me and I don't feel loved. I feel mistreated."

What does it mean to you to not feel love? Why does that upset you?

"It means that I'm being treated like dirt. I'm sick

3) *Disqualifying*. This mental pattern rejects any part of reality that one does not want to consider. We disqualify or deny contradictory facts, brushing them off with a, "Oh that doesn't count!" This mindset thoroughly frustrates all would be helpers. Not infrequently it motivates one to play the Game "Yes, But..." "Why don't you try getting up earlier and reading the Scriptures for ten minutes?" "Yes, that would lift my spirits, but I need my sleep." "You've got a lot of good things going for you, you are very talented in art." "Well, that doesn't count, anybody can draw."

Disqualifying allows a person to throw cold water on anything and everything. In so doing it keeps one locked up in his or her emotional prison. (Translational Analysis describes interpersonal relating as "Games." Eric Berne, *Games People Play, What Do You Say After You Say Hello*), Thomas A. Harris, (*I'm Ok – You're Ok*); Art Greer, (*No Grown-ups in Heaven*), and Claude M. Steiner, (*Games Alcoholics Play*).

4) *Jumping to Conclusions*. This distortion of the rational faculty assumes the worst without checking the facts. It's epitomized in the cliché, "Forget the facts, my mind is made up." This mindset doesn't bother to investigate the facts but indulges in mind-reading. And prophecy, "Oh, he will never change!" as if we could read the future and anticipate all contingencies.

5) *Catastrophizing*. In catastrophizing we blow things out of proportion. "This is Awful! This is Terrible! It's the end of the world!" If you really want to use this distortion effective—add a touch of drama. Fall on the floor, roll over, pound the floor with your fists and swear, "It's unfair! It's terrible that I have to face this situation! I can't stand it anymore."

In saying, "I can't" we minimize ourselves or whatever we don't want to take into consideration. It shrinks reality down to a state of insignificance especially one's talents and capacities: "I can't lose weight." "I can't concentrate." "I just have no memory; I can't memorize anything." "When I get angry I can't control myself."

6) *Emotionalizing*. This cognitive distortion reasons from the emotions instead of emoting from one's reasoning. It's a real troublemaker: "I feel disgusted with myself for failing that test, therefore it means I'm worthless and won't amount to anything." "I'm so angry I could punch him out. This means the end of our friendship." The truth is that such feelings reflect our thinking but does not take into consideration whether our thinking is rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate.

7) *The Shoulds*. In this perceptual framework we demand that reality snap to our attention. Our ideas and wants become confused with reality; we begin making demands. "I must have my way." "He should not do that." We develop misbeliefs filled with shoulds and musts about ourselves, others, God, and life. We may moralize about what we or others *should* thinking that we thereby motivate ourselves and them to meet those demands. It seldom works. For instead of motivating we usually create a sense of pressure and bondage.

8) *Labeling*. This pattern of crooked thinking confuses words with reality. It assumes that reality is parallel to our labeling: "She is lazy." "He is a jerk." We thus reduce reality in its complexity and mystery and flatten it out to a one-dimensional quality. This is childish word-magic and leads to dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. When we think in terms of slogans, mottos, clichés, and labels we are really engaging

in a refusal to think, instead of genuine thinking we are merely assigning labels and never encountering reality itself.

9) *Polarizing*. (All-or-Nothing Thinking). Perceiving life in black-and-white categories exclusively. Extreme terms usually alert us to this pattern: all, nothing, everything, always, never, everybody. We polarize or dichotomize by looking upon people, events, and ideas in absolutes: perfect or worthless, success or failure, brilliant or stupid, and are incapable of seeing reality in its multi-dimensional nature. Linguistically this is the problem of "the excluded middle"—the failure of language to give us gray terms. For instance, what word describes a stage in-between failure and success?

10) *Awfulizing and Terriblizing*. We awfulize by labeling something as awful. But what have we actually said? "It's awful to be married to Howard." What does that mean? Bad, painful, unendurable, unpleasant, or what? What does *terrible* mean? Does it mean that we're experiencing a painful emotion? Merely uncomfortable? Do not like something? That the world is coming apart? Such vague emotional words create indefiniteness, and free-floating anxiety. "It's terrible!" creates a mental illusion that blocks us from seeing life's positive aspects and demotivates us from trying to change.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS		COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS
"He's a chauvinist pig."	—	Label, Polarizing
"We're just incompatible."	—	Polarizing, Filtering out the Positive
"He will never change."	—	Mind Reading, Polarizing
"I can't stand him."	—	I Can't-ism, Awfulizing

Now back to the Analysis Sheet. Draw a horizontal line beside every automatic thought and test it for cognitive distortions. Can you identify any? For instance, the statement, "He's a chauvinist pig. We're just incompatible. He will never change. I can't stand him." How many cognitive distortions do you see? To complete your metanoia make another column of cognitive distortions to be encountered by the truth. This will set us free from such crooked ways of thinking.

Thinking Christianly entails learning the truth that frees and grappling with it until we understand how to apply it to our specific life situations. This means *training our perceptions* "through long use." David Burns says, "Twisted thinking is the exclusive

cause of nearly all emotional suffering." It's important that we tell ourselves the truth and apply the truth to our distorted infantile thought patterns.

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." (I Cor. 13:11)

AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS	TRUTH
"He's a chauvinist pig."	Howard is also my God-given husband whom I am responsible for loving and respecting (Eph. 5:21-32). He has been acting arrogantly in some areas and to improve but there are other good qualities that I can reinforce in him (Romans 12:9-12).
"We're just incompatible."	God's design for marriage is that we become one; compatibility is developed through improved communication, trust, commitment, and sharing of feelings (Eph. 5:28-31).
"He'll never change."	People can and do change because the Good-news is God's transforming power (II Cor. 5:17).

To break the power of our own cognitive distortions we must become aware of them and then expose them to the truth. This process matures us. The Greek word for the phrase "I gave up" (*katargeo*, means "to get free from the strangle hold of, to render something inoperative, inactive, to cause something to cease, to abolish, annul, to give victory over." This breaking of the power of the infant within us doesn't simply mean giving up baby thinking, but breaking its strangle hold on our soul and making its influence inoperative.

The cognitive distortions mentioned work as a demonizing influence in the subconscious. They addict us and predispose us to certain emotional needs like autonomy, perfectionism, entitlement, power, love and approval, and achievement. These patterns of perceiving need to be exorcised lest they disease our minds. Christ's health-giving thoughts provide the needed vaccination (I Tim. 6:3-5). When that happens we begin experiencing the metamorphosing power of the Good-news. With minds made new with Christ's revitalizing perspectives and new in its capacity to think rationally and clearly, our emotional experiences of life become new and revitalized too. Our emotions begin to leap! "Where the heart does not leap, the mind has not done its work." (*Jesus and Human Personality*, page 144).

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Our emotional problems and suffering occur because we are living with "a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately crafty." Our burden involves a madness—a madness of living life apart from the healing friendship of God and his liberating truths. Cognitive distortions and misbeliefs wed our consciousness to irrationality. Infantilism in our perceiving and valuing binds us to psychic distortions.

Our journey toward emotional wholeness begins with a reprogramming of consciousness: letting the mind of Christ permeate our mind, seeing life through his eyes and feeling with his heart, girding our minds, cogitating Christianly (pondering life with a Christian mindset intently and objectively), and purging ourselves of those childish myths that set us up for disillusionment.

Renewing the mind is an exciting adventure of learning to imagineer for it gives us a wondrous experience in the gigantic ideas and Story of Christ. Though his Story Therapy we become whole persons and learn to think intuitively as our imaginations are enriched and elevated. Restructuring consciousness enables us to use this "tool" of intelligence in a holy way. This approach doesn't exalt human reason inappropriately nor does it reject reason from emotion. The underlying psychodynamic is—*we are as we reckon in our souls*. This is the principal key that enables us to Christianize our emotions.

Chapter 5

COGNITIVE FOCUSING:

THE DYNAMIC ROLE OF WILL IN EMOTING

"The eye is the lamp of the body." (Matt. 6:22)

"Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before and taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature, either into a creature that's in harmony with God and with other creatures and with itself -- or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God." C. S. Lewis)

C. S. Lewis on Scripture, by Michael J. Christensen)

To keep the mind renewed we must stay in cognitive focus. Our renewed thinking, valuing, and perceiving must keep turning its "central part" toward those goals that correspond to the mind of Christ. This is the Art of Focusing— focusing on the values and meanings that initiate us into a new emotional experience of life. It means attending our beliefs and keeping our insights in clear focus preventing an unclear vision.

Cognitive focusing is the capacity of willing. By cognitive focusing on God's truth our lives are endowed with directionality—a sense that we are going somewhere. In "willing" we organize our minds, make choices, and turn our "central part" toward specific goals. This dramatically affects us emotionally for in focusing the mind we

are indirectly choosing our emotions. We stop experiencing life passively. We no longer merely drift. Nor do emotions, events, thoughts, images, and values shove us first this way and then that, pushing, pulling, tugging, inspiring, enervating, and all without rhyme or reason. By exercising "the Art of Will" we attend our consciously chosen goals and fill our consciousness with the cognitions and beliefs that will program us according to our values. Willing then is the psychic dynamic that enables us to become our own programmers—the architects of our futures.

To be Angry or Not to be Angry

When Shemei blasphemed King David, cursing him cruelly, David did not blow up. David did not get "as mad as hell." He focused with his renewed mind on God's presence and purpose. Instead of seeing an insult, David's focus saw God's hand in the matter. "If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' (II Sam. 16:10).

David calmly accepted Shemei's mistreatment) because his attention was riveted on a higher concern than his own ego. "What is God trying to tell me?" Though David undoubtedly experienced anger as well as some shame and disgust, his main emotion was humility to God and that kept him from getting hooked by his negative feelings. The day David meet Shemei his mind did not play hooky. He stayed cognitively focused. He experienced inner peace in the midst of his trial because his mind was "stayed" on God (Isa. 26:3).

David's concern focused on his relation with God and thus he turned his central part and was becoming the heavenly creature God wanted him to become. David had a choice: to get angry or not to get angry. His response of anger all depended on his perception of his life situation. How would he look at Shemei and his insults? Would he look deeper to see that the Invisible One was trying to get his attention? Shemei did not "make" David feel anything. No body ever *makes* anybody else every feel anything—ultimately it is always our choice.

Though all of us have this power of attention and intention, we all "lose our heads" from time to time when caught up in an emotional experience. At such times we can't even think straight. Everything becomes confusing. Disorganized. We can't make sense of things. We say and do things that we don't really mean. Why? Psychodynamically we revert to our old consciousness in our subconscious where our most primitive programming rests. This explains why an intense emotional state frequently weds us to irrationality. It's an important reason also for staying in focus.

So Mad You Can't See Straight

Naaman was a commander of the alien Syrian army. He was also a leper. One day a little Israeli servant girl dropped a line that hooked an emotional need:

"Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." (II Kings 5:3)

Naaman was interested. Hope blossomed within his soul and his thoughts turned to his life-long dream of new life, health, and social acceptance. He had a strong cognitive focus. All he could think about was being healed. He attended the idea of making a trip to Israel; he concentrated on how to carry out his plans. He paid a visit to his superior, who in turn wrote a letter to the King of Israel. But Jehoram didn't take to the letter in good will. He assumed the Syrian King was looking to start a war:

"I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends words to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." (II Kings 5:7)

When Elisha heard about the King's response, he informed him to send the general to him and he would demonstrate that there's a God in Israel.

"So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and halted at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to his saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.' But Naaman was angry..." (II Kings 5:9-10)

Though the prophet promised him cleansing—the fulfillment of all his dreams—Naaman didn't feel happy. He was angry. He didn't focus on Elisha's good news but on Elisha's failure to live up to his expectations.

"Naaman was angry and went away, saying, 'Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage." (II Kings 5:11-12)

Naaman's anger arose from his thoughts. All he could think about was how Elisha was violating his every expectation. He despised Elisha for not conducting a solemn healing service, for not laying his hands on him or saying any special words, he didn't even bother to leave his study. "The nerve of that guy!" Elisha further insulted Naaman by telling him to dip in the Jordan. Naaman despised the muddy Jordan. "If dipping in water would clean leprosy, we've got Abana and Pharpar back in Damascus that are sparkling clear. Have I come all this way to be treated like a fool?"

What made Naaman so mad? It wasn't Elisha. It wasn't even Elisha's deeds or words. The only thing that caused his emotional response was Naaman's own thoughts. He had made a long journey and had anticipated how the prophet would heal him. When Elisha violated all those expectations Naaman began turning his central part toward

thoughts of angry and disgust.

"But his servants came near and said to him, 'My Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you have not done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean?'" (II Kings 5:13)

These words of discernment directed Naaman to a new focus). His servants spoke a soft word of wisdom which turned away the wrath of their Master (Prov. 15:1). They gently helped him to refocus. They exposed the fallacy of his distorted thinking.

Naaman had been demanding that reality snap to his demands. "I have expectations about what should happen and I do not want to be disappointed!" Naaman's mental distortion was "The Shoulds." But his servants, as good rational emotive therapists, used the Socratic method to help him to see what he was really doing -- rejecting an offer of healing! Naaman looked at his situation in a new way, saw that he was thinking irrationally, and reconsidered.

"So he went down and dipped himself seven times ... according to the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (II Kings 5:14)

The Positive Power of Cognitive Focusing

Focusing the mind means turning our central part, the part that chooses, and aiming our psychic powers in a certain direction. This is the true power of the will. Robert Assagioli writes,

"Will is the unifying center of your psychic life. In fact, a human being is a willing self. Self consciousness exists as the self wills; as it activates itself in choices and directs the other psychic powers in a positive way." (*The Act of Will*)

As conscious and self-conscious beings, we not only experience thoughts but we order) our thoughts. We give our cognitions direction and purpose. This inner *organizing* power of the soul is commonly referred to as our "will power."

M. Scott Fletcher in *The Psychology of the New Testament* writes:

"Will, intellect, conscience, are only names) ... for the different ways in which the one consciousness within us manifests its activities. Every conscious act is a highly complex thing, involving many mental processes including thinking, reasoning, feeling, willing, choosing. These mental elements are not separate and distinct in ourselves; nor can they operate without cooperation with the others."

In every emotion there is will. Emotions do not merely happen to us, but in a very real sense, we choose what we feel. Our sense of directionality, control, and power within our emotions may be weak, but it is there nonetheless. This means that we can

turn our emotions on and off—at will.

The Power that Turns Emotions On and Off

When Israel returned from Babylonian captivity and tried to restore its national life, God sent Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the wall-builder and governor to provide leadership. After the new, but inferior temple had been partially constructed they called a holy convocation. People gathered from all over and assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate a great feast day. Ezra opened the Torah and read it, leading the worship.

"Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen'" (Neh. 8:6)

But there was a language gap. Many didn't understand the original Hebrew. Some men helped out:

"... they gave the sense (read the interpretation), so that the people understood the reading." (Neh. 8:8)

Because they understood, they wept. They wept for their thoughts turned to the pain and humiliation they had suffered, the consequences of their sins. Yet this was supposed to be a day of celebration. Nehemiah and Ezra wanted them to feel God's goodness, not their grief:

"This Day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." (Neh. 8:9)

Do not mourn? Is it possible to command people to turn off their feelings of grief and turn on feelings of joy? This mandate, "Do not mourn" implies such. Nehemiah's additional words explain how one can do that.

"Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.' So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, 'Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them." (Neh. 8:10-12)

Our emotions are responsive to our cognitions. When we change our thinking (the focus of our attention)—our emotions inevitably change. As long as Israel attended to their loss, they felt grief. When they attended Nehemiah's words about that day being a day of honor to God and that God was still doing marvelous things in their presence, they began feeling the joy of the Lord. Thinking solely about how the Temple had deteriorated since Solomon's days triggered depression. Nehemiah provided them new cognitions. He directed their attention to a new mental focus. He gave them specific actions: send portions of food to those without, eat and drink,

focus on God's joy. Taking Nehemiah's advice they had a new emotional experience.

We might say that the people "willed themselves into a new emotion," but that sounds brutal. They did will themselves into a new emotion but not by repressing their grief, violating their nature, but simply by re-focusing. They turned their central part to attend God-centered ideas. That tapped their other psychic powers (believing, imagining, affirming) which actualized their renewed thinking. In that creative and positive use of the will they turned off their grief and turned on joy. They removed their psychic investment and energy in one state of consciousness and invested themselves in the cognitions that created a new state of consciousness.

This Thing we Call "Will"

Since mind is a dynamic phenomenon there is, technically speaking, no such thing as "The Will." Nor are there other actual entities inside of us—things (conscience, intellect, etc.). The old faculty psychology of the Nineteenth Century presented an inadequate model of human consciousness because it pictured it as static and one-dimensional. With its spatial model, it tended to dichotomize personality. There is only one consciousness—a dynamic consciousness that cognizes and wills. The person who complains that he does not have any will-power is telling himself a lie. Of course, he has will power. To the extent that he can choose, attend, and focus he has will power. His power may be underdeveloped, but he has that capacity.

Rollo May gives us a handle on will:

"When we analyze will with the tools of modern psychoanalysis, we find ourselves pushed back to the level of attention and intention as the seat of will. The effort that goes into the exercise of will is really the effort of attention. The strain in willing is the effort of keeping the consciousness clear, of keeping the focus of attention in focus." (*Love and Will*, p. 200)

Identifying the seat of will as attending and intending demystifies "will power." Psychologist May simplifies it. He puts it in terms of attention and intention. Will is understood as a function of consciousness, of intention, and of attention.

Intent speaks of our aims, values, and goals, and it is the psychic power that causes us to "turn our mind" toward some objective. By intending we create within us a "tendency for" that which we are "tending toward." *Intent creates tendency*.

Cognitive intention dynamically moves our whole being to actualize itself. We experience will and its power as we think about our goals and wants. Without such goals we feel as if we're drifting, going nowhere, and that leaves us feeling devoid of will power. Will arises then from our innate capacity to attend something and is

energized as we get our intent in clear focus.

The Positive Power of Willing

We take a step toward strengthening the will and using it creatively in emoting when we restore our belief in it. The emphasis of psychoanalysis on the unconscious determinants of human reality and motivation has caused will to fall into disrepute in American culture. Robert Assagioli goes so far as to say that "the non-recognition of the human will is the scandal of modern psychology."

Up against this denial of will in much of modern psychology, the scriptures assume its power and freedom everywhere. God made man an agent of will with the capacity of choosing his future.

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and cleaving to him; for that means life to you" (Deut. 30:19-20)

"Fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness ... If you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:14-15)

Will enables us to be responsible persons. It indicates that we are *able* to decide our *response*. Without this capacity for *response-ability* we would either be driven beings operating from a program of instinct or we'd be incapable of making any response.

In urging Israel to "choose life" Moses was not pleading against suicide. He was calling upon the people to opt for openness, aliveness, and all of the other positive qualities that life has to offer. William James, father of American psychology, wrote, "The normal opener of deeper and deeper levels of energy in the personality in the will." Choosing life entails far more than merely, "Don't kill yourself," or "Try to survive this thing called life." It means deciding to accept and experience life in all of its glorious richness and potential. Moses' challenge called Israel to choose the godly aspects of reality.

Austin Farrer defines the power of will as "the ability to choose between possibilities." Through willing we become the architects of our own futures for we choose the values and ideas that inevitably transform us after their image. In this way volitional consciousness releases a multitude of personality forces within us which become the motivating dynamics of our character.

Willing is an energy that's closely related to motivation. Walter Studdiford describes the will "the motivational power of personality involving the process whereby we resolve conflicting tendencies and choices and strive to accomplish our goals."

This "motivational power" in will becomes transparent in the original Greek and Hebrew words for will. There *will* not only means "resolution, intention, wish, but also inclination, desire, want, pleasure, delight, and love."

"Thelo", Greek, means "to be resolved or determined, to purpose; to desire, to wish; to love, to like to do a thing, be fond of doing" *Greek-English Lexicon*, Thayer, page 286).

Haphets, Hebrew, means "take pleasure in, delight in, be pleased to do a thing, would do it" HEBREW AND ENGLISH LEXICON, Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius, page 342).

Will is intricately connected with the idea of inclining oneself toward something, being favorably disposed to it, and choosing it. ('Abah, Hebrew, means "to be willing, inclined, desirous.")

Narciso Irala calls the will "the queen of our faculties." He describes it as a glorious and central capacity: "Our inner psychic is comparable to a planetary system: Around the Will, the center of the solar-system gravitates all of our other psychical life—sensations, impressions, ideas, reasoning, imagination." (*Achieving Peace of Heart*, pp. 78-79).

Via this distinctive capacity of willing we experience our truest nature as self-determining beings. Our ability to select goals and our capacity for goal directedness means not only that we can choose, but that *we must choose*. One common biblical expression for willing that corresponds to the idea of cognitive focusing is "setting the face." We talk about "making up our minds."

"Hazael set face to go up against Jerusalem." (II Kings 12:17)

"For the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame." (Isa. 50:7)

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set my face against you" (Jer. 44:11)

The scriptures portray will in terms of "setting the heart" and "setting the eyes." These psychic powers are mental faculties by which we "set" our inmost self. The wicked person thus has no fear before his eyes: "He plots mischief while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he spurns not evil." (Psalm 36:4).

"*He sets himself*" indicates the wondrous and scary existential reality of freedom. To express this dynamic quality of will the Hebrew language is especially equipped. Here the phrase "he sets himself" comes from a single verb (yithyetseb) which is a Hithpa'el verb stem indicating that the verb ("to set") is intensive and reflexive, thus, "He set (in an intensive way) himself." For the Hebrew, life was not passive, will-less, or

fateful. Their very language structure reflects a consciousness that life to a great extent is in their hands to choose or not to choose.

[Two other Hebrew verb stems, the Hiph'il and Hoph'al, indicate the causative mode. Such verbs are indicative of activeness and causation; "he, she, or it caused or was caused to experience something."]

Being a "willing self" with this incredible but frightful existential capacity of will means that we are free beings. We are free to choose, to assess our options, and to determine the way we will go in life. Such freedom of course gives birth to anxiety. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life."

Life is structured consequentially so that our choices carry consequences. We are free to choose, but not free from the consequences of our choices. In our freedom of choice, it is therapeutic and an expression of wisdom to be able to attain a high state of consciousness about the inherent consequences in our choices. This need for wisdom is provided in the scriptures:

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." (Gal. 6:7-8)

The world we live in is one where choices are loaded with inescapable consequences. Discovery of these consequences through human reasoning is science. The unnamed scientist who first discovered that falling off cliffs causes broken bones discovered "the law of gravity." There is a science of morality as well; what we sow in matters of right and wrong are reaped in our character. This inescapability from the consequences of our choices is "the Reality principle." We must align ourselves to it if we are to be psychologically healthy. Those who do not so adjust to the reality their skin suffers neurosis. Job's statement illustrates the positive power of cognitive focusing:

"I made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?" (Job 31:1)

Job affirmed that he had chosen righteousness and had steered a straight path away from "wandering eyes" (II Pet. 2:14). His secret of success sprang from his "cutting a covenant with (his) eyes." Having entered a covenant with his eyes to be God's man he asks, "How then could I look intently ('ethbonen) upon a virgin?"

This verb (bin in the Hithpa'el) means "to mark, to attend to, or to observe" intensely. Job forswore the temptation of another woman because he had entered into a contract with himself about what he would "look" for and what he would be blind to. A passing glance is one thing; "looking intently" is another. As the architect of his

destiny, the elector of his thoughts, Job covenanted with his eyes to "mark" with clearness what corresponded to his values and to ignore what did not. This ability to cut a covenant with ourselves or "making a contract with our Adult" is one of the highest expressions of the positive power of volition.

Rejecting Passivity

Passivity is a great enemy of the will. A passive person drifts along and lacks in both energy and intention. He or she lets life happen. Thoughts and emotions come and go within the soul without giving them direction. Passivity is not a harmless response. It works destructively to enfeeble our executive power of will. It is a disintegrating and disorganizing force that we must avoid. Passivity creeps upon us in this day and time. Our passivity encouraging culture feeds and encourages it.

Eric Fromm describes the Twentieth Century as a era of "the passification of man." Man has become *homo consumens*— "man the consumer." He passively receives, waits to be turned on, to be given health and wealth, and emotional excitement.

"Man becomes the eternal suckling with an open mouth, taking in without effort and without inner activeness, whatever the boredom-preventing industry forces on him—cigarettes, liquor, movies, TV, sports, lectures." "Man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverish 'thing,' dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his substance. ... He always remains the passive and alienated consumer. He 'consumes' ball games, moving pictures, newspapers and magazines, books, lectures, natural scenery, social gatherings, in the same alienated and abstractified way in which he consumes the commodities he has bought. ... Having fun consists mainly in the satisfaction of consuming and 'taking in' ... The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast: we are the sucklers, the externally expectant ones, the hopeful ones—and the eternally disappointed ones." (*The Sane Society*, pp. 114, 124, 149)

We learn to reject our passivity as we identify how we express our passivity and how we feed it. "What am I waiting for? What excuse do I constantly rely on that feeds my passivity? What scares me from taking the initiative and becoming the active determiner of life?" In cultivating passivity we also cultivate its corresponding emotions: insecurity, impotence, victimization, coercion, fearfulness, and laziness.

We reject passivity by accepting responsibility for ourselves, by seeing ourselves as causative agents. Passivity is usually accompanied by blaming and accusing—viewing other people and things as the causation forces of life. "You make me angry. You never listen to me. Things never work out my way! If it weren't for my job (substitute: parents, children, education, background, government, Communists, the

weather, etc.)!" Whenever we catch ourselves shifting responsibility and blaming with these kinds of "You" statements we can take a big step toward emotional health by substituting appropriate "I" statements in their stead.

"I feel uncared for. I wonder how I'm creating or reinforcing that feeling?" "I can't seem to get my point across to you" instead of "You never listen to me!" "I feel uncomfortable when you use those words" instead of "You make me angry when you talk that way!"

One of the most powerful statements about human free will was written by Viktor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist:

"Everything can be taken from man, except that last of the human freedoms, his ability to choose his own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose his own way."

Dr. Frankl penned those words after suffering the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp. Powerful words that ought to impact our feeble excuses for being passive. In the final analysis, if we are passive, we're passive because we have chosen to be passive.

"Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." (Heb. 2:1)

Passivity frequently stems from and is manifested in drifting. When we fail to focus on our destination we let things slip. Careless thinking is the antithesis of concentration and attention. We end up apologizing. "I'm sorry, I just didn't think." This passage encourages us "to turn our minds to" (*prosecho*) the message of Christ. Drifting—letting things slip and slide—destroys direction, it drains us of energy, it avoids the adventures of life, and it encourages irresponsibility. It mummifies people!

Passive people tend to be *externalizers* instead of *internalizers*. They tend to believe that they are but helpless pawns in the hand of fate. They believe that *the locus of control* comes from without. Internalizers, on the other hand, believe that they are autonomous, masters of their own fate, responsible to a large degree in making things happen. "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." Externalizers tend to let life happen to them while internalizers take hold of life with both hands and determine the quality and direction of life.

In a study by psychologist Julian Rotter a much higher death rate was found among externalizers during tornados than among internalizers. Internalizers took much more active involvement, doing whatever they could in preparing when they heard storm warnings. Believing the locus of control was within, they went to storm shelters. The beliefs of the externalizers "encouraged shoulder-shrugging." They predominantly saw themselves as "being manipulated by external forces beyond their control." They

believed that when the day of one's death came there would be no escaping that fate, and until that time, taking shelter would not be particularly helpful! (*Understanding Human Nature*, James McConnell, pp. 300-301).

Passivity can also be rejected by learning to feel the power of will. This feeling of will's reality is experienced by consciously attending what we are doing so that we note what it "feels like." This may involve something as simple as lifting our hand. For since it is a willed act, as we become conscious of the marvelous wonder of how an idea in our mind triggered the whole complex body response that's involved in lifting a hand—we begin to *get a feel* of ourselves as willing agents.

Psychologists say that since most physical acts (exercise, gardening, hobbies) are willed, the more energetic we become the more we develop our intentional capacity. William James suggested the practice of "the useless exercise" for those who want to strengthen their will power.

"Keep alive in yourself the faculty of making efforts by little useless exercises every day. Be systematically heroic every day in little unnecessary things; do something every day for no other reason than its difficulty; so that, when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test. ... The man who has daily inured himself to habits of concentration, attention, energetic volition and self denial in unnecessary things will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him and his softer fellow mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast." (*Personality and Personal Growth*, James Fadiman)

By eliminating other possible motivations and performing *a useless exercise*, its sole stimulus rests in our will. We have to volitionally decide to do it. In that activity we develop that volitional capacity. Boyd Barrett in *Strength of Will and How to Develop It* gives another example:

"Resolution—Each day, for the next seven days, I will stand on a chair here in my room, for ten consecutive minutes, and I will try to do so contentedly. At the end of this ten minutes' task I will write down the sensations and the mental states I have experienced."

While it may seem silly to do such things, the dynamic underlying them is not. It gives a person a renewed sense of inner activeness which overcomes the devastating sense of impotence which permeates many people and causes them to feel that they are not in charge of their lives. The French writer Gillet says, "Gymnastics are the elementary school of the will." This means that every physical movement in a healthy person can be an act of willing—a command given to the body. By deliberately repeating such acts with attention, effort, and endurance we "strengthen our will."

Taking Charge by Becoming a Valuator

Paul W. Pruyser describes willing as "man's ability of self-determination."

"Willing implies goal directedness and therefore attention to one's values. The essential achievement of will is to attend to an object and hold it fast before the mind." (*The Concept of Willing*)

We experience will primarily in deciding and choosing our values then holding those values before our minds. The mind that merely experiences a wild impingement of external stimuli (images, sounds, sensations, and thoughts) without attending them, filtering, evaluating, prioritizing, or interpreting them is a primitive mind. That's the way an animal "thinks." Sights and sounds are perceived, but after fluttering across consciousness they drop off into oblivion. An animal has little capacity for "holding an object fast before the mind."

Without this capacity of holding thoughts and controlling our attention we would be at the mercy of every person, event, word, and image. Our consciousness would flutter and sputter, come and go, be jarred from one track to another. We would truly be "scattered-brained." Our consciousness would hardly be ours. It would be said of one in such a state that he has "lost his mind." Such a person would also be at the mercy of his emotions. Without a central consciousness—an organizing center where values can be chosen and thoughts attended—life would be a high-speed roller coaster of thoughts and feelings with appropriate screams. It would be a nightmare going nowhere. And who wants that?

But God has made us choosing selves. Choose we must for our values are not innate. Unlike animals who are born with instinctual programming so that they intuitively know who they are and what their task is—we come into the world with almost no programming. We suck and cry and have a maturation schedule, but that's about it. Everything else is learned. *We learn how to be human*, how to grow up, and how to live the abundant life as a believer. This is the adventure of being an Image-bearer: discovering our true nature, learning what's real and what's really important, exploring the world of relationships and meanings, and discovering how to live in the Spirit. We have to clarify our values.

"One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal" (Phil. 3:12-14)

"This one thing I do" describes the executive power of will. It describes the power of concentrating one's mind with a forward looking and positive orientation. Paul knew the distracting influence of things done and over with in the past and refused to allow his consciousness to attend them. His statement expresses resoluteness, determination, initiative, and courage. You can feel it vibrating with psychic energy—the energy of Valuation. Paul knew what he believed and where he was

going.

Valuing God

Habakkuk demonstrates the positive power of cognitive focusing when emotional distress shook him to his depths. In spite of the bad news that made him feel sick he found emotional strength that enabled him to endure with a positive consciousness.

"I hear, and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters my bones, my steps totter beneath me. I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. Though the fig trees do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet *I will* rejoice in the Lord." (Hab. 3:16-18)

Emotional turmoil permeated Habakkuk's emotion. National shame, financial ruin, and God's seeming unwillingness to help sent him to the pits. Habakkuk wondered where God was. Yet though things looked and felt bleak for him, he knew that even in desperate times no one can take our ultimate freedom—the freedom to choose our attitude.

"Yet *I will* rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like hinds' feet, he makes me tread upon my high places."

Habakkuk intentionally exercised his executive capacity of choice and turned himself, his central self, to those values and beliefs that transformed him into a heavenly creature. He focused on God's power that would rejuvenate him. He willed to delight himself in God. He sought his joy and energy there. He knew God could make his "feet like hinds' feet" (an expression of high energy).

Robert Assagioli explains the dynamic.

"Images or mental pictures and ideas tend to produce the physical conditions and external acts that correspond to them. ... 'Every image has in itself a motor element' ... Attention, interest, affirmations, and repetitions reinforce the ideas, images, and psychological formations on which they are centered." (*The Act of Will*, pp. 51, 56)

Psychologically, energy is released within us through focusing on values. "Attention, interest ... reinforce ideas, images, and psychological formations on which they are centered." By volitionally turning our attention in a highly focused way to an idea or belief we give that idea greater intensity and energy and it becomes a motivating force within us.

Cognitive attending works in the human personality like a magnifying glass with

sunlight. It focuses, concentrates, and intensifies. As rays of the sun are focused and concentrated through a magnifying lens so that a fire can be ignited, so by organizing the soul around one highly esteemed value we become single-minded and set on fire with a motivating cognition.

Breger says in his book *Explaining Emotion* that a state of motivation does not primarily have to do with more bodily energy, but with the structure of our thoughts. In motivation our thought-structures become constricted and rigid (p. 42). There's inherent motivation in concentrating on "this one thing."

Observe this psychodynamic within yourself. When you are in a state of emotion, note *what* you are focusing on and *how* it tends to dominate as well as restrict your consciousness. What image, idea, or thought are you concentrating on and endowing with energy? What are you saying to yourself? Habakkuk willed himself into a state of emotional joy by changing his focus.

The direction of our focus is all determining. Biblically we are mandated to develop a positive and holy focus (Phil. 4:8). Assagioli asserts that "the first requisite of a creative mental life is positive thinking." Aspiration and hope apparently inspire and motivate; whereas fear paralyzes. Appreciation stimulates creativity, but complaining stifles. Confident thoughts energize us; anxious thoughts tear us down. It's important that we withdraw our focus from negative thoughts and think about honorable, gracious, and excellent things. To "think (logizomai) about these things" means to take them into account, reckon with them, deliberate over them, and meditate on them with a view of obtaining them.

Setting the Heart and Setting Goals of the Heart

"A double-minded man, unstable in all his ways will (not) receive anything..."
(James 1:8)

"Purify your hearts, you men of double mind." (James 4:8)

A photographer cannot focus his camera on his foreground and something in the background at the same time. He can fade out one and contrast the other with it, but he cannot zoom in on the tree at the end of the park and his wife fifteen feet away. So it is with our consciousness. We need a sharp single focus in order to prevent double-mindedness.

The Greek word for double-minded is a fascinating one. It vividly describes a person who is inwardly torn. It comes from *dipsyches* and as you might have guessed means *two* (di) *souls* (psyches), two souls pulling and tugging for dominance. James has a solution for this value schizophrenia; "Purify your hearts." He wants us to clean up our value conflict and develop a single focus.

“Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.” (Luke 11:34-36)

According to Jesus' psychology, *a single focus is having a sound (or single) eye*. The Hebrew mind believed that the eye determined the body or personality. For what we set our eyes upon determines what we become. A single eye creates light—vision. Modern psychology calls this personality integration which indicates that the person knows what he wants and gives his full allegiance to it. Thus his personality "shines." It shines "as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." (e.g. Matt. 6:22-24).

"Do not seek what you are to eat, and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. ... Instead, seek his kingdom and these things shall be yours as well. Fear not ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:29-32,34)

Jesus assumes that we not only such freedom of choice (to be of an anxious mind or not) but that we can direct our fear. By giving us a higher value, Jesus provides us a focus for the mind that does not feed worry. Jesus then explains human nature. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our heart as our center of cognition always focuses on what it considers valuable (its "treasure"). This psychological principle means that our values and goals draw our mental attraction and interest and emotions like a magnet draws iron filings.

This insight enables us to identify our "real" goals and not merely the ones we say are our goals. Consciously or unconsciously our heart always focuses on our treasure. Our attention, interest, and investment of time and money reveals what we really care about. Our treasure, whether it is our relation with God, finances, sports, or getting to the top always draws our psychic powers. Our worry then tells on us. What we get emotional about tells on us. What we spend a lot of time and bother with tells others about our treasures. Herein lies our need for conscious goal setting lest we live blind to our own motivators.

The goal setting process entails become clear about our values and beliefs, gaining insight into our lifestyles and then bringing the two into harmony. Doing this works for integration of the personality, single-mindedness, and greater effectiveness in willing. This experience of choosing and integrating gives us *marvelous experience of inner aliveness*. A sense of being in charge. A person is never more alive than when he is consciously directing his mind and emotions and behavior so that he's moving toward his goals. It's a great feeling, one of emotional vitality.

Our problem in doing this is that we don't know our own minds. We are cognitively out of focus. Our values are blurred. We do not really know what we want. Fear is undoubtedly motivating this indecision: fear of responsibility and fear of making the wrong choices.

Indecisiveness is a great enemy of will for by definition indecisiveness means that we're unable to make up our minds about our values. The subsequent horrendous emotional experience of indecisiveness torments us as we are torn first this way then that way about what we really want. Indecision is emotional confusion—the fusion (blending together) of many thoughts. Out of our ambiguity and uncertainty indecisiveness springs. We are simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by our choice. We are not quite clear whether we should or should not opt for it. Essentially our values have not been clarified so we cannot prioritize them into a hierarchy. We can't tell what's most important.

To clarify our values and objectives it's helpful to write them down. Write them in terms of goals —goals that implement our values. Don't write, "I'm going to jog," write, "I'm going to begin jogging and start with five blocks." *Details make our goals specific.* Goals must also be written in realistic terms, preferably in graduated stages and with target dates if it is at all possible. "I will read four chapters of the Bible each day, just before bedtime, and record my impressions."

Goal setting is made more effective by displaying our goals. Charts, art, and pictures keep our goals before our eyes. Display your goals in such a way and place that your eyes will fall upon them often and so that others can see them. This will provide opportunities for you to talk about your goals with supportive people thus reinforcing your values. *Our goals give us a sense of the future* and this provides us energy for motivation and creativity. James W. Newman explains:

"When a goal is digested or assimilated into your 'reality' structure, it becomes part of 'the way things are supposed to be.' It is the conflict or disparity between that 'reality' and your perception of the 'way things are' which stimulates the creativity to be released, expands your awareness and releases the energy needed to change the environment." (*Release Your Brakes*)

Psychologists have long noted that setting goals is uniquely human and calls forth more of our humanity:

Jasper identified human beings in terms of their capacity for setting goals; "We are deciding beings."

Theologian Paul Tillich identified our ultimate reality in terms of will when he wrote, "Man becomes truly human only at the moment of decision."

Albert C. Outler identified the will as the crucial consideration when he wrote, "The will is the center of the human self, we are responsible selves."

(*Psychotherapy and the Christian Message*, p. 90)

Psychologist Otto Rank departed from Freud and began his own school of psychology "went so far as to say that the realm of willing was the actual ground of psychology." (*Psychology in Search of a Soul*, John W. Drakeford) Alfred Alder wrote, "The key to our mental life is our striving toward goals."

All of these statements lionize our fundamental capacity for making decisions and choosing our values. Ultimately our heart becomes "set" according to our conscious or unconscious decisions and goals. As *Imago Dei* beings, our consciousness is a *consciousness of will*. Otto Rank specialized in will; he even described his form of psychotherapy as "Will Therapy." His writings reveal a belief in a strong correlation between will and consciousness.

"We are aware of the will phenomena only through the media of consciousness." (*Will Therapy and Truth and Reality*, p. 217)

Rank consequently contended that—

"The essential problem of psychology is our abolition of the fact of will and its varying interpretation at different times. This psychological problem, actually *the* problem of psychology ... is therefore a universal problem." (*Ibid.*, p. 10)

"I am almost inclined to look upon intelligence as the executive organ of the will, by means of which the voluntary ruling of reality is accomplished." (*Ibid.*, p. 177)

Consequently, "the education for willing is the essential therapeutic task, for will represents the one unifying force in the individual." (*Ibid.*, p. 189). The problem, as Rank understood it in human neurosis, was *the denial of will*. "We deny will to evade the conscious responsibility." This "great psychic power of will" which manifests itself in our consciousness is repressed and denied because we have not come to accept it as it is nor are willing to face our guilt for wrong moral choices. Rank thus rejected Freud's emphasis on the subconscious as "the most powerful factor in psychic life."

"It is astonishing how much the patient knows and how relatively little is unconscious if one does not give him this convenient excuse for refusing responsibility."

Rank held that it is not a matter of unconsciousness as it is an unwillingness to verbalize the conscious (*Ibid.*, p. 24). This understanding of human will motivated Rank to reinterpret other facets of human psychology. For instance, instead of buying Freud's explanation about "resistance," he explained it as *counter-will*; the clashing of two wills. While the one seeking help has enough will to initiate the visit, resistance arises in the therapeutic relationship (as in any relation between two beings

of volition), especially when one intrudes or threatens. Rank defined *emotion* in terms of will. From this point of view, an emotion is—

"... the breaking or softening of the will. It is not that we subject our will to the will of the other by means of emotion, but rather our own softened will is the emotion itself. The defense against this yielding of self-will is perceived as shame, the affirmation of it as love, and the denial as hate, a kind of hardening of the will. ... Scorn, anger, hate are affirmation, exaggerations of the negative will, which sets itself against the rising softening influence of emotions."

Will and consciousness go together. Will in the final analysis is intention and attention—two expressions of consciousness. Rank writes,

"The dynamic factor which controls admission to consciousness demands consideration— the will." (*Will Therapy and Truth and Reality*, p. 34)

"Even the purely sensory consciousness is not merely receptive, but is guided, restricted by will. I see or hear what I want to, not what is. What is can only be learned by overcoming the tendency to deny all that I do not want to see or hear or perceive."

The Creative Use of Will

Coue and Bandovin are each credited with stating a basic psychological fact: "Where will and imagination are at variance, the imagination invariably gains the day" (or "will gain the day," Bandovin). Will doesn't fare well in a direct confrontation with the powers of imagination. We are too visually oriented. Instead of brutally willing ourselves into a new emotion *we must learn the skillful use of the will* . We must learn how to executively decide what images to display on the screen of our consciousness.

Imagination is like a 3-D movie within—on a wide screen and in technicolor. Imagination operates like M-TV: action, sound, and picture all explode into one jarring, alluring, captivating, and irresistible experience. Yet it is will who holds the key to this Theater of the Imagination. Will is the executive who can pull the switch or replace the cartridge.

When our emotions are very strong there's a corresponding intensity in our imagination; graphic pictures and scenes fill our imagination. But because we have mental habits as well as physical habits, all of us have pet imagination reels—favorite scenes we keep turning on in our minds. Reels of worry, reels of lust, videos of anger and videos of self-pity. What we "see" within determines both our emotional reactions and ultimately our character.

In renewing the mind we must replace our old scenarios of self-aggrandizement and

greed. We must fill our consciousness with positive and holy videos—with images of beauty, grace, holiness, love, and meaning. We need dramas and stories full of color and excitement. Yet here is where many Christians find their inner life anemic. Their only portraits of Christ are feminine and sickly. Their only pictures of holiness are passive and grey.

A renewed mind is a mind where every rebellious and unholy imagination has been taken prisoner for Jesus (II Cor. 10:5). It is a consciousness that has been so restructured in its imaginative powers that it is now alive to the Beatific Vision. To this end the Good-news offers many stories that provide us an ever-flowing stream of images, scenarios, and dramas—stories that fire up our imagination with holy and wondrous images. There's no need for fearing our imagining power and shutting it down, to do such is to become unimaginative people, people without a vision.

The gospel encourages us to turn on our imagination. It discloses colorful characters and vital scenes and softly allures us to walk into its stories. The architect of our psyches came among us telling stories. He knew that we would remember and experience his truth via stories more profoundly than via propositional language. The statement, "Keep things in proportion; do not let peripheral issues become central" is an important truth. Yet it doesn't carry half the impact of Jesus' poetry: "You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (Matt. 23:24).

Jesus' story about the poor, naked, and hungry man who meets us in life and whose plight calls out to our compassion is a Story that pictures one crucial concern of judgment. Jesus says that he himself is represented by such destitute persons. With a picture like that in my imagination I have a hard time driving past hitchhikers. When I do, a scenario begins playing in the theater of my soul. People in need in the real world hook this Jesus' story within so that I am immediately and powerfully made aware of God's thinking about the matter (e.g. Matt. 25:30-46). Another video sometimes plays in my consciousness. Inwardly I see a priest and a Levite walking down a road, mentally engaged in a consuming theological discussion. They come upon a bleeding man in the ditch and don't so much as let their eyes linger upon him—they are afraid of feeling for him and getting involved. They fail to love their neighbor as themselves (Luke 10:27-37).

The gospel itself is a story. It comes to us asking that we reject the world's story and accept *God's Good-Story*. William Kirkpatrick describes Christians as *a storied people*.

"It is important for a storied people to keep their story fresh in mind, for despite their claims to the contrary modern societies do usually have a story line they are anxious to push on us, either Marxism or humanism or consumer hedonism." (*Psychological Seduction*, pp. 120-121)

As a storied people *we have a new story line* about God. As our Father he loves, cares, and wants to celebrate our homecoming (Luke 15:11-32). Yet in order for that portrait to become a felt reality we must direct our imagination to it, attend it, focus on it, and let it enter into our consciousness.

Imagination, though more powerful than will, is yet dependent upon will—it imagines according to the will's direction. We strengthen our willing power by flipping the switch of imagination and directing our consciousness to God's great stories. Or, we weaken our ideals by failing to focus. It's ultimately up to us whether we allow any concept of our Christian faith to remain abstract, colorless and inert in our consciousness. Imagination enables us to see vividly the truths of our faith and allows those truths to come alive. C. S. Lewis confessed this—

"I am a rationalist, for me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning." (*Blupels and Flalausferes*)

No wonder Lewis had a passion for fiction! He discovered objective truth through his rational comprehension of God's revelation and then sought to make that truth captivating by telling wondrous stories. His stories fleshed-out the abstract truths. Lewis created glowing symbols and powerful mental videos, leaving the world a legacy of positive images with which to populate our minds.

"An image formed and held tenaciously in the conscious mind will pass presently, by a process of mental osmosis into the unconscious mind," writes Norman Vincent Peale. "And when it is accepted firmly in the unconscious, the individual will strongly tend to have it, for then it has you! So powerful is the imaging effect on thought and performance that a long-held visualization of an objective or goal can become determinative."

Walking into Stories

For these reasons we need to cultivate *the skill of walking into the biblical stories*. Stories provide the content of our imagining and serve us as idea agencies. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you read stories:

- 1) Is the story vivid to me? Do I have a strong image of story and its action?
- 2) Do I feel the conflict in the story? Does the point of stress in the story touch me? What do I feel?
- 3) Which of the characters in the story do I identify with first? Why? When I intentionally identify with other characters what feelings and thoughts come to the surface?

Imagination makes stories vivid and graphic. By imagining we come to see and feel a story; its pictures begin penetrating us. But we must not rush. Too often we dully pass over a story assuming we know all about it. Yet there are always depths to stories, depths that keep releasing more and more of its secrets for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, for those who take the time to live with the story.

Our imagination can make a story live with color and vigor. It enables us to absorb its events and identify with its characters. In this way *stories become event-ful*—happenings in our souls. We squirm and twist, apply our brakes and lean to one side of the chair in response to the chase scene on television. We've entered the story; and *it has entered us* ! The same occurs when we read a vivid account of suspense as when the man-eating shark is said to be getting close to the swimmer in the water. We can feel the person's terror. We read of Joseph and become teary-eyed as he sends out the Egyptians and announces to his surprised brothers, "I am Joseph, your brother."

Psychologically a story's dynamic moves us via our imagination. It happens because we see its scenes and identify with its people. It becomes an inner experience. The deep emotional and cognitive experiences arise because our subconscious accepts it as reality. Nothing quickens our subconscious like imagination. It "captures" our subconscious and forces it into its service. The subconscious, unlike the ego, does not have the faculty of discrimination. It takes whatever its fed and makes it its subjective truth.

Identification is one of the great psychodynamics involved in story walking. Stories hook us and draw us into them because we see ourselves in them and this corresponds to our many God-given tendency to empathize. In fact, stories cultivate and develop our capacity for empathy. They draw us out of ourselves and our world temporarily as we walk into their world. Imaginatively hearing a story invites us to put ourselves in another's place so that we vicariously experience his life. Stories come alive to us in ways that propositional language cannot. Effectively walking into stories gives us new experiences, new emotions, new perceptions, and new understandings. It's like seeing things from another's insides. Stories thus mediate to us mystery and depth, that which is unthematized. It provides us a deep knowing that transcends words. The skillful use of the will uses this imagining power. It directs, regulates, and taps it. Alexander Whyte called imagination "nothing less than the noblest intellectual attribute of the human mind." It's ours for the using when we intentionally direct it to the images, beliefs, ideas, and values that we want to attend. We can flip the switch of our imagination by focusing on the imaginative literature of our choosing.

Creative Suggesting

The law of suggestion offers us another dynamic of our psyche. In itself, this law is neutral, although used improperly "it can be a source of the most terrible suffering." A positive and holy use of it can affect a "most wonderful deliverance" (*Person Reborn*, Paul Tournier, chapter thirteen). *Suggestion* means evoking or calling forth to the mind thoughts and ideas whether expressed or unexpressed. It takes many forms: body gestures, architecture, music, and atmosphere. Paul Tournier, psychotherapist, writes,

"Fear is the catalyst of suggestion and suggestion implants all kinds of stubborn and absurd fears in the hearts of even the most intelligent and courageous men." (*The Strong and the Weak*)

By suggestion we poison our minds with negative thoughts that focus on defeat, violence, anger, or hate; "I will never amount to anything." By suggestive words and acts we plant thoughts and images that reach our subconscious and become our programming.

Jesus told the story of a rich fool who made autosuggests to himself that were completely egocentric (Luke 12:17-19). He dialogued with his soul about his options. And his suggesting affected his selfish emoting. To change he would have to auto-suggest in a different way.

Suggestion can work for us in restructuring consciousness as we consciously choose the suggestive words, structures, and environments that will reinforce our values. All of us are far more suggestible in certain "atmospheres" than in others. Rituals, music, art, architecture, and words that are meaningful, that makes us feel good about ourselves and safe make us more suggestible "so that an idea can more readily find access to the deep mind" (*Psychology, Religion, and Healing*, Leslie D. Weatherhead, p. 130).

John W. Drakeford gives us another way of making suggestion work for us.

"An emotion attached to a suggestion makes it more effective." (*Psychology in Search of a Soul*, chapter 11).

Thus enthusiasm, joy, hope, and love energize our suggestions giving them power to affect us deeply. Here are some sample phrases that can be used to suggest truth to ourselves:

"This is the day that the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it."
(Psalm 118:24)

"God's love is being poured out into my heart by his Holy Spirit this very moment!" (Rom. 5:5)

"God has begun a great work within my personality and will continue his internal construction job until the day of Christ." (Phil. 1:6)

"God's presence is an ever-present reality; I have nothing to fear and every reason to live with confidence and boldness." (Heb. 13:5-6)

Since it's within our power to executively turn "our central part" toward the images, words, and emotions we want to cultivate, we can make creative and positive use of suggestive environments.

"The officers shall speak further to the people and say, 'What man is there that

is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go back to his house, lest the heart of his fellows melt as his heart.'" (Deut. 20:8)

Moses knew the importance of a reinforcing emotional atmosphere among his soldiers. He didn't have time to develop a therapy for fear-ridden soldiers or bring a psychiatrist in for every soldier who felt faint-hearted. An army must move with courage and confidence. The best way to deal with a contagious emotion like fear was to isolate it. "Let him go to his house, lest the heart of his fellows melt as his heart." Moses structured the environment so that it would reinforce courage.

Each of us knows what affects us emotionally. We know that there are cooling, calming colors and warm, bright, lively colors. Pink cools while bright yellow and warm golds wake us up. Awareness of the suggestive power of colors, art, and structure enables us to exercise more control over our lives. We can change things! We can dispel ugliness, give the places where we live a more cheerful look, and turn on the kind of music that inspires us.

Willing God's Will

Many people who lack a sense of will power yet have *a strong sense of won't power*. Their *counter-will* has been highly developed as expressed in our refusal, resistances, won'ts, can'ts, and denials. They have simply over-developed a volitional habit—one of defensiveness and inertia. Their willing capacity has only been exercised "against" influences and has not been trained to positively exert itself in choosing values. Willing God's will therefore offers us a tremendous therapeutic experience:

"If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17)

"Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:9-10)

"As you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12-13)

Willing God's will draws us toward reality. It draws reality toward us for it invites God into our personality where he fulfills our deepest drives and heightens our most spiritual potentials. He begins operating within us creating a greater capacity in willing ("both to will") as well as creating a greater capacity for response ("and to work"). The wholeness in Christ does not leave us with less will, less initiative or less personality, but more (Phil. 1:6, Psalm 110:2 KJV).

God's ultimate design is that we develop self-control. He wants us in charge of us!

His Spirit works to develop this capacity (Gal. 5:22-23, II Tim.1:7). We cooperate in this adventure by praying "Thy Will be done." This helps us align our volition with his good-purposes. When we are so aligned our emotions no longer get the best of us.

Willing Over the Power of Fear

"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing* rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He *considered* abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:24-27)

Moses' emotional control and vitality resulted from the dynamic images in his consciousness. He "saw him who is invisible." His vision empowered him for suffering; "choosing rather to share ill-treatment." He was no masochist. He had no unconscious need to punish himself. He accepted suffering as a conscious choice because he had a great vision and had single-heartedly committed himself to it. Moses had decided to be God's man no matter what. In volitionally saying *Yes* to God he experienced a strengthening of his will. Now he could "refuse" alluring temptations and "choose" the necessary disciplines as a man in charge of his life.

Moses' renewed mind nullified the devastating effects of cringing fear. "He feared not the wrath of Pharaoh." His skillful use of will prevented fear from demotivating him. Over the years his innumerable decisions for God had gradually turned his central self until he had become a heavenly creature—emotionally energized for God's work. Hannah W. Smith offers a prayer for Willing God's will.

"Lord, you see that with my emotions I love this sin, but in my real self I hate it. Until now my emotions have the mastery; but now I put my will into Your hands and give it to Your working. Take possession of my will and work in me to will and do of Your good pleasure."

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY)

Before we were capable of cognizing reality we were "willing selves" with the power of choice— God made us so. An infant intellectually understands almost nothing yet makes choices and decisions. This capacity of choice is our most essential dynamic that enables us to use our cognitive powers creatively and effectively. Our *directionality* is experienced as we will, choose, intend, attend, and focus. It operates as *our power to choose* a renewed mind and an openness to emotional wholeness. By focusing on our objectives we can turn our central self.

Our choices habituate our souls to certain emotions and forms within our personalities "tendencies." As we "tend toward" a thought or idea we develop tendencies toward its corresponding emotions. In this way we can will our emotions.

To effectively develop our willing capacity we must: reject passivity, stop drifting, refuse to let things just happen, and assume responsibility. By learning to accept positively that the locus of control is within us we begin to clarify our values and avoid double-mindedness. A single-eyed loyalty brings integrity to the soul; it becomes a central organizing force—will power. This gives us a great sense of mastery. By the skillful use of the will we can indeed flip the switch of imagination and emotionalize our beliefs making them deeply felt. In these ways we become more and more focused in our meanings and objectives, thus gaining greater emotionalized vitality. We take charge of our lives and emotions.

Chapter 6

TAKING CHARGE OF OUR EMOTIONS

"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control." (II Tim. 1:7)

The psychologist of Israel wrote about self-control when he said, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (Prov. 16:32) . There is mastery in conquering a city, but the glory of the general who captures a city does not compare with the glory of the person who has attained self mastery.

In our emotions we usually sense that our emotions happen to us. We don't rule them, they rule us. We are but the passive recipients of our feelings. Even our vocabulary of emotion is passive. We say that we were "gripped by an emotion," that anger "seized" us, that we are inwardly "torn" by anxiety. We excuse ourselves from certain tasks by saying, "I'm just not in the mood for it right now." "I don't feel like it." Sometimes we even confess that our emotions are inexorable and mysterious when we say, "I don't know what has come over me, but suddenly I feel very sad."

But emotions are not mysterious forces that fall on us "from out of the blue." There is an inner psychological law by which they operate for as we've noted emotions arise from our cognitions. We feel the way we do because of the thinking of our heart. Our emotions arise reflecting life's meanings and motivating us to take charge. We experience so much love and hate, so much fear and sadness, because we value ideas and persons in our lives the way we do.

This insight provides us a cognitive control over our emotions. It means that we can take charge of them by assuming responsibility for and awareness of our thoughts and beliefs. It's good news that we do not have to be temperamental yo-yos helplessly riding the wave of every emotion that sweeps by us. We can get off the roller-coaster of passively suffering the ups and downs of our emotions. By taking charge—ruling our spirit—we can decide when and how we want to ride our emotions and for how long. Our previous chapter on cognitive focusing described the dynamic of will in our emoting, now it's time to look at how we can use this "will power" creatively and effectively.

Developing Emotional Awareness

Gestalt psychologist Fritz Perls says, "Awareness, *per se*, is curative." Socrates laid it down as axiomatic the idea, "The unreflective life is not worth living." Freud agreed and made reflection or insight the center of psychoanalysis.

"Our therapy does its work by transforming something unconscious into something conscious and only succeeds in its work in so far as it is able to affect this transformation." (*General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*)

Rollo May concurs:

"I cannot conceive of any form of psychotherapy which does not accord the process of awareness a central place." (*Love and Will*, p. 261)

Christ, too, made awareness a focus point of his therapy for the soul:

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. ... If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:31,32,36)

Getting in touch with what is really going on inside and becoming aware of objective truth without, we lay the foundation for emotional control. Thus we begin to understand the rhyme and reason of our emotions, why they arise as they do and how we are responsible for creating them. In becoming conscious of what's going on within we discover the psychodynamics of our emotions and gain inner strength in dealing with them.

So while emotions seem like something happening to us, at a deeper level they result because we have chosen them. In valuing and thinking we set ourselves to feel. Our emotions are mirrors of our cognitions. Our problem is that of distancing ourselves from our emotions. Our emotions are now mostly apart from our consciousness and operate unconsciously; so we experience them as external to ourselves. We do not know how we have created them and are out of touch with the cognitions and choices that have played a part in their genesis.

We tend to call these disassociated emotions *passions*. By definition "passion" refers to ardent affection or love; strong liking for something; sexual desire; or violent, intense, and overmastering feelings. Note the connection between "passions" and "passive." Literally passive means to suffer, to be acted upon by an external agency, to submit to something without being active. As we lose consciousness with our values and cognitions that create our emotions we experience our emotions passively. This weakens our sense of control. Our emotions become alien forces to us.

Yet becoming aware is not an easy achievement. Alfred Alder said,
"The hardest thing for human beings to do is to know themselves and change." (*Understanding Human Nature*, p. 21).

Jeremiah agreed,
"The heart is the most deceitful of all things, desperately sick; who can fathom it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 NEB)

We do not know our own minds for they are deceitful—they won't let us know our own evil. Evil is experienced as repulsive to our very being for it violates our inner drive for holiness. Yet when we repress evil, it doesn't produce a sense of rightness at all. Ironically, it produces another form of evil—deception. We begin rationalizing, blaming, projecting, and regressing because we cannot bear to face up to our own evil.

In this way *we become estranged from ourselves*, from our values, motives, choices, and feelings. A simple forthright registering of rage or emptiness or insecurity becomes too frightening to accept. We discount certain motives as dangerous or unworthy of ourselves and disown them. We do not want to know in what ways we are selfish, greedy, hateful, or insensitive.

Becoming aware begins with a decision—a decision to become aware and reflective, to watch our cognitions and self-talk, to identify our rationalizations, and to register our feelings. We learn self-awareness by observing the workings of our own minds, what we really do value.

Awareness comes also as we learn to identify the objects of our emotions. We never just feel fear or surprise or any other emotion. We are afraid of something and surprised by something. What is this thing? We need to find out; we need to discover what's behind and beneath our feelings. This entails some quiet time so that we can listen to the voices in our heads. It means asking ourselves, "Who is telling these things to me? Mom? Dad? A close friend?" Self-observation takes practice, especially if we are to catch our subliminal "automatic thoughts" for they operate with great speed and are an intricate part of our predispositions.

Awareness comes also as we get in touch with our bodily sensations. This means listening to our bodies. Try to experience where the feeling is located; is it in the stomach? Bruce Larson says that psychosomatic medicine teaches us that the body carries emotional burdens which we are not mature enough or secure enough to face (*The Meaning and Mystery of Being Human*, p. 128). What our minds will not face, our bodies endure. Our headaches, ulcers, heart problems, and breathing difficulties often serve as warning signals of mental stress. Am I tensing my muscles and creating feelings of pressure? Am I pushing my energy down and depressing myself?

Our bodies have been divinely designed as vehicles of sensation. Depending on how we define "senses," God has equipped us with five to thirty-seven senses that send sensory messages by the billions to our brain. These sensory messages provide information about temperature, pain, pleasure, digestion, light, and a million complex combination of external and internal data. The scriptures also emphasize body awareness. The Hebrews talked about their emotions in terms of their bones burning, their flesh crawling, and their loins being moved. Observe how you hold your breathe when you're anxious and breathe fast and hard when angry or scared.

Many people don't feel free to feel. For them the process of awareness necessitates granting oneself permission to feel. For them feeling is a dangerous thing. Deep within may be an injunction to the effect, "Thou shalt not feel!" It could have been put there during childhood by a parent who forbid his children to feel certain emotions. "Johnny, get that scowl off your face." "Johnny, you love your little brother, Timothy, don't you? Now apologize and tell him that you love him." "Johnny, you have no reason to be depressed, look at all the things you have!" Undoubtedly Johnny's parents thought they were doing him a favor by commanding him to straighten up and adopt a new behavior. But more than likely, they taught him to repress his feelings and that some emotions are unacceptable. By not giving a child permission to feel and by discounting his emotions he grows up unsure about his feelings and afraid of them.

Awareness of our unacceptable emotions can be very painful for the simple reason that our early programming may have conditioned us to connect punishment with our unacceptable emotions. Along with the injunction, "Do not feel!" may have been recorded the belief, "When I feel anger I always get punished." Individuals with such programming will have to consciously give themselves permission to feel so that those emotions which were previously banned can be welcomed into the consciousness. The pseudo-guilt feelings of punishment and condemnation will not immediately go away, but through new conditioning and mind renewal they will eventually vanish. Until then, the anxiety must be accepted as part of the growth process and permission needs to be repeatedly given to oneself in order that our defense mechanisms will release our hidden emotions.

There is another reason that awareness is difficult to attain— *emotions are displaceable*. The anxiety and anger that are created at work but which cannot be safely expressed there are often displaced upon loved ones or innocent bystanders. Few work situations are safe places for the honest expression of emotions. Nor are we secure enough in many other relations to deal with our emotions in a healthy and transparent way. So we displace them. This is especially true of emotions that we do not accept and do not want to find within ourselves. So instead of accepting our hatred, we rationalize that our feeling is not one of hatred at all, but strong conviction! Instead of accepting our selfishness or greed, we explain that “we are just wanting our fair share.”

Abraham Maslow writes:

"Freud's greatest discovery is that the great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of the knowledge of oneself." (*Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 60)

Understanding these dynamics of personality makes us realize that we are not as free as we suppose. As long as there are hidden motivations, emotional inhibitions, unacceptable feelings, and a lack of awareness about where our emotions are coming from—we are not free self-determining selves. We are being determined by unconscious forces with which we are not willing to come to terms.

This doesn't mean that our "real" motives are instinctual and unconscious or that the hidden dynamics of the subconscious are stronger than the conscious levels of will and reason. This myth springs from the psychoanalytic theory. They are not stronger, they are just older. They derive their power over us because they are unconscious—which means that we don't know what we are dealing with. We are not free because we are at the mercy of subterranean forces that we do not understand. When we bring these forces to consciousness their power dissipates and we are liberated.

Self-blindness occurs because we find some thought or emotion too painful or threatening to our self-image. To be released from such darkness we need to feel secure enough to get in touch with our depths. In a counseling situation we experience such security through the warmth, care, insight, and honesty of the counselor. His or her own feelings of security also puts us at ease. Sometimes the counselor will verbally grant the other permission to feel. The confidentiality and non-judgmental probing into the person's subjective reality increases the sense of safety so that the person can drop his guard and admit to himself the thoughts, motives, feelings, and drives that's causing the problems.

Jesus exemplifies the ideal Counselor. He is trusting and loving, he believes in human potentiality, and can call forth in us a response of authenticity. Jesus' complete and deep knowing of human nature combined with his love enables) us to be honest with

him (Heb. 4:12-16). And it is this kind of honesty that begins our journey toward mastery of our emotions.

Accept Thyself

The antithesis of repression is acceptance. This doesn't mean approval or endorsement of what we find within, but it does mean that *we face our reality openly*. By accepting our feelings, memories, impulses, and emotions for what they are we prevent them from becoming psychological splinters. Acceptance and repression work paradoxically: by accepting those things we hate and wish were not, we drain them of importance and power. When we reject and repress hated facets of ourselves— we give them more importance and control. Hugh Prather describes this power of acceptance,

"Feelings do change and I do have a hand in changing them. ... They change by my becoming aware of them. When I acknowledge my feelings, they become more positive. They change when I express them." (*Notes to Myself*)

Depression

"By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... to an inheritance which is imperishable ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have to suffer various trials." (I Pet. 1:3-6)

Suffering and depression can be accepted. Peter's letter was written to believers going through some rough times. They were suffering trials that were overwhelming, it was so traumatic that they felt the world was going to end. They became depressed. "You are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (KJV), because of the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you" (I Pet. 4:12). Mental and emotional grief had thrown them into a state of heaviness—a spirit of gloom, a sense of burden, and depression.

Peter acknowledged this reality. He didn't say, "Snap out of it." He didn't tell them to put on a happy face or to repent. He did not discount their emotional experience. Instead of shaming them for having an unacceptable emotion, he validated their feelings and identified them, "You are in heaviness." If they were suffering grief feelings then that's what they were suffering.

Peter further explained *why* they felt as they did. He wrote about their trials. They were suffering reactive depression—grief in reaction to the pressures upon them.

"Though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:6-7)

Peter gives their suffering meaning. He points out the value and significance of their emotional grief and its place in the ultimate picture. He knew, as Viktor Frankl knew, that man can endure any what as long as he has a why.

"Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy." (I Pet. 1:8)

Peter identified for these Christians other emotions that they were experiencing—feelings of joy, love, and ecstasy. In depression we usually develop a tunnel vision and become obsessed with our pain to such an extent that we cannot see the good things in life. But Peter knew about *the phenomenon of ambivalence*. He was not so reductionistic or simplicistic as to suppose that a person can only experience one emotion at a time. He knew about ambivalence and the complexity of the emotions.

Consequently he utilized the fact of their ambivalent feelings to identify an important truth. In depression, depression isn't our only emotion. With regard to their trials they were down, but relative to the Good-news in Christ and their relation in him they had unutterable joy. Peter as much said,

"Just because there's pain in one facet of life doesn't mean that you can't find joy in other aspects. Just because you're in the pits in regard to your trials doesn't mean that the spiritual realities in Christ have been made invalid."

Peter directed their minds in a way that would broaden their perspective. He stirred up their pure minds by way of remembrance so that in spite of their grief they could continue rejoicing in Christ. He wanted them to avoid the usual tunnel vision associated with depression.

Grief

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." (John 12:27)

"Deeply grieved (sorrowful) is my soul, even unto death..." (Matthew 26:37 Greek order)

Jesus accepted his feelings of grief and anguish. Contemplating what was before him in the crucifixion, Jesus became troubled in his spirit. His soul plunged into a deep grief. Despair swept through his emotions and he attempted to share his feelings with Peter, James, and John. But they didn't know what to say. Jesus felt like quitting. He was ready to back out and even prayed for his cup to pass from him. Yet volitionally he chose to accept it because he understood its meaning. Jesus' emotional control in this instance didn't arise because he was blind to his emotions but because he was in touch with them. He felt ambivalent in that he was simultaneously drawn to the cross and repulsed from it. Yet because he was aware—he was free to choose

his course. He was not blindly driven by forces that he didn't understand.

This scenario of Jesus in the garden struggling with his emotions provides us a formula for emotional control. It identifies the importance of awareness, acceptance of our emotions, and the supremacy of volitional choice.

Carl Lloyd notes, "The old song, 'It's my party and I'll cry if I want to ...' candidly conveys some unrecognized truth. We become emotionally distraught at such times because we want to. This wanting may be due to habitual subconscious thought patterns of which we are totally unaware. Or it may be due to the games we play to 'protect' our self-image. In either case, we want and decide to allow such feelings to control us." (*Wineskins*).

C.S. Lewis once commented that Christians need to learn to tell their emotions where to get off. He noted that emotions have their limits; they are inadequate guides in the matter of right and wrong. They provide us energy, but not truth about objective reality. Jesus, standing in the face of crucifixion, aware of his own feelings was able to *decide not* to take the advice of his emotions to run for his life, but to say yes to a higher allegiance—his Father's will. He told his emotions where to get off.

"When Jesus saw (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And he said, 'Where have you laid (Lazarus)?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'" (John 11:33-36)

The verbs in this passage are very intense in the original: Jesus "*groaned in his spirit and troubled himself.*" Sensing the appropriateness of letting his emotions move him, Jesus allowed his consciousness to be flooded with the thoughts and feelings concerning his intimate friend. He cried. He became emotional because he gave himself permission to feel. He didn't keep his feelings under lock and key. He didn't keep a stiff upper lip. As a whole and holy person Jesus was able to feel deeply and to express his feelings. If he had been afraid of his emotions he would have done what some preachers do at funerals—quote platitudes and pass out tracts. But not Jesus. He did what any caring human being does in a moment of loss—he cried. And that weeping communicated much more than a sermon would have

Assuming Responsibility

Accepting our feelings means owning them as our own. This implies that nobody makes us feel anything. Emoting is always our response and our choice. We lie to ourselves when we put the responsibility elsewhere, "You make me so happy!" Or, "You make me angry!" By disowning our responses we actually weaken our sense of will. By positing the locus of control outside of ourselves we victimize ourselves—making ourselves the victims of other's actions, words, and emotions.

But the emotions we feel are our) emotions which have been created within us) by our) cognitions!

"I statements," own up to our responsibility in emoting and help us assume responsibility. Instead of accusing another of making us feel something, we can tell ourselves the truth: "I am feeling angry because I am thinking about how much I hate it when she acts that way!" If am upset, frustrated, disgusted, happy, in love, or joyful—those are my internal, subjective responses filtered through my consciousness. Acknowledging that and taking responsibility for myself enables me to take charge of my emotions.

Understanding that emotions do not just happen and that we do not have to wait around for the mood to hit us means that we can begin cultivating the emotions and moods we want. This happens as we attend the images and cognitions that correspond to the desired emotions. This undercuts our excuses and alibis. It means we will have to live more responsibly. We can no longer excuse our grouchiness, "It's just my nature to be a grouch before my first cup of coffee in the morning."

Nor can we indulge in self-pity saying, "I'm depressed because I lost my job!" Wrong. Some would rejoice if they lost their job. Others would feel relieved. But that emotional response arises from the person's perceptions, beliefs, and values about the job, as well as our sense of self-esteem and even the condition of our body chemistry.

Assuming responsibility necessitates cutting out our escapist language, our words of alibi and blame, and our imprisonment language. Phrases like, "I can't do anything right!" "I have to (must, ought, should) do this or that" are *prison words* that create wrong impressions. "I have to go to work" leaves the subtle suggestion that I have no choice about the matter and that because it is my responsibility, I have to endure it in misery. Wrong.

Choice words and phrases turns this nonsense around and lets us assume responsibility in a positive and life-affirming way. "I get to (want to, have the opportunity to) go to work!" Talking things up in this manner isn't just semantic manipulation, but restructuring of the mind) because our words convey thoughts. Talking our responsibilities up gives us more positive feelings. Frequently we imprison ourselves with "have to" words because we operate from a misbelief: "I have to create pressure on myself in order to motivate myself to do anything. I am basically a lazy and unmotivated person." Lies!

The dynamic of choice (cognitive focusing) leads to the insight that emotions are learned and chosen). Psychologically, the scriptures assume that we have the kind of freedom and control to turn our emotions on or off:

"Do not desire her beauty in your heart and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes." (Prov. 6:25)

"Keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen and lest they depart from your heart so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live." (Deut. 4:9-10)

"Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God" (Deut. 31:21)

These scriptures assume that we can choose to keep some facts before our eyes and "learn to fear." Emotions like fear can be learned.

"I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them ..." (Neh. 5:6-7)

An interesting word occurs here that gives us insight into how Nehemiah took charge of his emotions at a moment when he became very emotional. His state of emotional arousal ("I was very angry") energized him to confront some high ranking officials about their unlawful and merciless practice of charging high interest against some of their own people who were poor. Nehemiah became boiling mad—but he didn't lose his head. He didn't fly off the handle.

The Hebrew word for "counsel" -- "I took *counsel* with myself" -- is *malak* which means "to reign, to be king, to have dominion, or to rule." (melek is Hebrew for King.) Nehemiah took charge of his emotions, using his emotional energy in a controlled way because his "heart ruled within him" (a literal rendering of the passage).

We too assume responsibility by letting our "heart reign as king within us." When this happens our consciousness is exercising lordship choosing the behavior that accords with our values and using the energy which our emotions supply. This is a high level of emotional control. Various English Versions try to convey this controlled willing:

"Then I *consulted* with myself, and I rebuked the nobles" (KJV).

"I *mastered my feelings* and reasoned with the nobles" (NEB).

"I was exceedingly angry ... So after *thinking it over*, I contended with the nobles" (Goodspeed).

"I grew angry, and *decided to act*. I denounced the leaders... (Good News Bible).

A heart that rules within us considers, consults its values, thinks deeply, and counsels itself—these are expressions of directionality and the key to taking charge of our

emotions.

"While Ezra prayed and made confession ... a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; for the people wept bitterly. Shecaniah ... addressed Ezra; 'We have broken faith with our God ... but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God ... Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.'" (Ezra 10:1-4)

Shecaniah challenged Ezra, "Arise, for it is your task!" Ezra had the spiritual leadership, and everybody was supportive of his leading. The Hebrew text expresses this idea vividly and in a way that provides us some insights about our capacity of will. Literally, the text says, "Arise, for on you is the matter" (*dabhar*, word).

Dabhar is Hebrew for *word* signifying word, deed, event, and a concrete object. In Hebrew thinking, when a word was spoken, what it referred to was a reality. Thought and action were not radically separately, but one. "The word is upon you" expresses the idea of being responsible for the task.

"It is your responsibility to act." (Good News Bible).

"Up now, the task is yours, and we will support you." (NEB).

"Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee" (KJV).

In assuming responsibility for our emotions it's important to realize that the duration of most emotions is very short. We feel surprise in an instant; then it's gone. Surprise is one of the quickest emotions. It endures no longer than a second or two. Anger and fear are also quick emotions. They arise quickly and subside—we "fly" into a rage. Sadness lasts as long as any emotion; it might endure as long as an hour. But no emotion lasts very long, our constantly changing consciousness cannot stay that fixed.

Emotions don't last also because our physical sensations keep changing. Engaging in any kind of acting alters our consciousness and explains why activity is often very therapeutic for grief. Then every evening sleep breaks the continuity of our consciousness (and so our emotions). Thus with regard to sadness, we go to a funeral but do not feel "total, absolute, and unremitting sorrow." We feel many things: we laugh, we enjoy memories of past events, we get angry over broken promises, we feel guilty, we experience love and warmth. As our consciousness is directed to different thoughts and memories of our loved one we experience many different emotions. None lasts long.

If however sorrow is prolonged and perpetuated day after day, week after week, it is because we are perpetuating the thoughts and perceptions that create that emotion. Sometimes this is necessary as in the loss of a very dear one. Sometimes it is

inevitable as in the death of a mate because everything we see, touch, and do reminds us of that person. This experience of grief signifies not only a grieving for the person but a grieving over our loss. For we have lost a part of our identity. This grief work represents a major cognitive readjustment. Our feelings of sadness, depression, anger, fear, insecurity, relief, and guilt ebb and flow for days, weeks, and sometimes into months because we are engaged in a major psychological readjustment. We are redefining ourselves and life in terms of the person's departure.

Usually, however, we do not need to keep re-feeling such emotions after the initial grief work. Life goes on. If we keep attending the thoughts of sorrow that keep creating the grief we will eventually habituate ourselves to that mental and emotional habit) and thus create it as a mood within us.

We create moods of anger, bitterness, fear, and depression out of life's experiences this way. When anger becomes a mood it frequently comes out as one of the anger-moods: irritability, peevishness, or unsocialableness. Sadness becomes the mood of depression, and grief may become the mood of "a wounded spirit." If the duration of most emotions is very short, then the emotions which tend to characterize our lives are to a degree the emotions which we have chosen. Realizing and accepting this is an essential element in our journey toward emotional vitality.

Holding Our Emotions Responsible

"Emotions must always been accountable to the faculties of reason and will" writes James Dobson (*Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* p. 11)

That thought needs to be enshrined. Emotions are not equipped to stand on their own two feet, they need the support of reason and will. Without them emotions tend to become blind to reality and warped in impulsiveness.

Our feelings in and of themselves cannot tell us what is real and objective. We would never have arrived at the truth that we live on a round globe speeding thousands of miles per hour through space via our feelings. Nor would we have felt our way to the truth that there are people living some eight thousand miles below our feet—upsidedown in relation to us. That's hard to accept even intellectually. Emotions serve as indicators of subjective reality providing us information about what's going on within. When it comes to information about the external world our emotions are poorly equipped in providing us reliable data. God has given us intelligence, reason, and even intuition for that.

It is irresponsible to treat our emotions as if they served the same function as reason and will. David Head satirically mocks our tendency to overrate our emotions in this prayer for the natural man:

"Lord, give us all a nice feeling this morning. We pray that we may enjoy the preliminaries, and that the sermon may give us all a glow. I know I have offended at least two people this week with my quick temper, but please do not let the thought of that intrude into this spiritual feast." (*He Sent Leanness, A Book of Prayers for the Natural Man*)

Emotional vitality comes as we hold our emotions responsible to the norms of reality and morality. Hazen G. Werner in *Live With Your Emotions* talks about those who manifest a "perennial vacation mood; to them life is continual sunning on a sandy beach. They play fast and loose with reality; they have an anemic view of human struggle." "If it feels good, do it" woefully fails because it doesn't come to terms with the nature of the emotions or their limits. This overrating of good feelings subverts our values and leads to hedonism which dis-values any and all bad feelings. Herbert H. Farmer, "You cannot go against the grain of the universe and not get splinters." Emotions must be accurately evaluated, their limits understood and respected.

Accepting responsibility for our emotions and holding them responsible lies at the heart of mental and emotional health. M. Scott Peck stresses that the refusal to accept responsibility for oneself is the basis of all neurosis (*The Road Less Traveled*). William Glasser made it a major goal in his therapy to "teach the patient to become responsible." Psychiatrist Smily Blanton says this necessitates giving up rationalization because rationalizing is "the great narcotic that people use to anesthetize their consciences."

In learning to hold our emotions accountable to the norms of morality we have to learn emotional assertiveness—how to say no to those feelings that motivate us in ways contrary to our values. Jesus said no to his feelings when grief and despair rushed into his soul and pushed all his inner alarm buttons. He felt like running away. His emotions urged him to save himself; he certainly was not "in the mood" to go through with it. But he did. He told himself the truth. "For this purpose I have come to this hour." Note his focus. Note too how he attended that objective. This was his secret. His reason and will revealed something that his emotions were out of touch with—that he would be made perfect through suffering and that by pouring out his soul unto death he would bring reconciliation and life to mankind. If he had relied on his emotions he would have followed a lie.

Normally, the alarm signal of fear, despair, and sorrow accurately informs us to move away from the source of possible harm. But not always. The fire alarm that signals for us to leave a burning house draws the firemen to it. It is not that they don't hear the alarm or don't understand it; they do. Because they do, they enter cautiously. So it is with our negative feelings.

In fact, precisely because we can say no to our feelings, we can also transcend our situations and our programming. Imagine the sense of bondage of being unable to take charge and intentionally endure some discomfort for a higher purpose. Without that capacity we would be doomed to live like animals. We would eat impulsively when the pangs of hunger gripped us, copulate when in heat, kill when angry, and steal when feeling greedy or covetous. The quality of life would degenerate. Saying no to our emotions is not repression, it can be the healthy control of a person whose emotions works for them.

The Art of Saying No

"The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion, and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in the world ... for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another." (Tit. 2:11-12, 3:3)

The grace of God not only saves us from the domination of passions and lusts but empowers us to say no. It quickens our "counter-will" so we "renounce godless ways." Our glory and genius lies in our capacity to will and to "won't." We can resist the influences that would reduce us to beasts because we can positively choose our values.

When God called Abraham to offer Isaac, the son of promise, as a burnt offering, Abraham had to say no to his emotions. Emotionally it was hard. Certainly Abraham was not "in the mood" to kill his son. His love for Isaac, morality, normal repulsion to human sacrifice made it distasteful and abhorrent. Yet God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. We know that God was "testing" Abraham, but Abraham didn't know it was just a test (Gen. 22:1-18). Abraham didn't like it, but he obeyed. He took Isaac to the mountain, laid him on the alter, pulled out his knife and started to plunge it into his heart when the angel stayed his hand.

Abraham's ability to rise above his feelings because of his faith. He believed God. He even trusted that God would raise Isaac from the dead if it came down to that (Heb. 11:17-19). Faith endowed him with a vision and confidence that gave him the strength to say no to his feelings.

William James speaks of the role of emotions and tells us how to treat them.

"Let emotions come and go, make no account of them. They have nothing to do with the matter. They are no indication of your spiritual state, but are merely indicators of your temperament and physical condition."

"I besought the Lord at that time, saying, 'O Lord God, thou hast only begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand ... Let me go over, I

pray, and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill country and Lebanon.' But the Lord was angry with me on your account and would not hearken to me; and the Lord said to me, 'Let it suffice you; speak no more to me of this matter.'" (Deut. 3:23-27)

Moses wanted to see the Promise Land, but God refused. He prayed because he had a burning desire. Then God said he had talked long enough about it. "Let it suffice you; speak no more to me of this" means, "Drop it!" God knew that if Moses kept desiring and longing and anticipating it would make him fretful and upset. Moses had expressed his emotions and was heard, but God had made his decision. Now Moses needed to adjust himself to that reality.

If we couldn't say no to our emotions at our discretion we could not adjust ourselves to reality. The story is told of one couple being pronounced husband and wife and leaving the church building by way of the front steps in a deluge of rice. She felt romantic. At the bottom step pictures were snapped and he escorted her into the car. That's when she turned to him and said, "Larry, do you *feel* married?" Stars danced in her eyes and she expected to hear something romantic. But he spoke matter-of-factly, 'No, I can't say that I do.' "Well, you are!" she snapped, "And you better adjust your emotions to the facts!"

Whether that story is true or not, its final line is a great one: *You better adjust your emotions to the facts.* Our emotions need to be finely tuned to the facts of reality and are so tuned as we renew our minds—although it usually takes some time for our emotions to catch up. A newly wed husband begins to feel married as he identifies himself as "husband," as he writes, "Mr. and Mrs.," and as he experiences the marriage relationship day after day. His experiences affect his thinking and his emotions. He will begin feeling married.

The “As If” Technique

Psychological conditioning means that we *shape* our souls by repetitively doing the same thing over and over. In that way, we are *re-shaped*. The habituating dynamic can be used positively. We can intentionally direct ourselves to the personality and emotional styles we want to adopt. William James and Karl Lange developed *the James-Lange Theory of Emotional Control* based on the causal loop relationship of mind, body, and emotion that we explored in Chapter Three.

"Action seems to follow feelings, but really action and feeling go together. And by regulating the action, which is under the direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not. ... Thus the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if our spontaneous cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there. If such conduct does not make you feel cheerful, nothing else on that occasion

can. So, to feel brave, act as if we were brave, use all of our will to that end, and a courage fit will very likely replace the fit of fear."

James suggests two things: first we control our actions and behavior which is under our volitional control, and second that we "use all of our will" to bring about the change we desire. Using all of our will means employing our capacity of willing (intention and attention) to put our other psychic powers to work. We use our will to direct our thoughts in a positive way, to affirm the objective truths we've discerned, to imagine our potential, and to reflect meditatively on the ideas that correspond with our goal.

"If you check or change the expression of an emotion, you thereby check or change the emotion itself. Do the thing you fear to do and do it repeatedly until the fear diminishes. Feelings follow action." (William James)

Feelings follow action because our emotions involve our physiology and conversely our actions trigger our emotions. Research has demonstrated that even facial movements can get the causal relationship started. People were coached to raise an eyebrow, to twist the lip, to squint an eye, move the chin this way and then that, turn up a facial muscle, etc. and were then asked to report their feelings. Anger expressions tended to bring on thoughts and feelings of aggression. Sad expressions tended to hook sad thoughts and feelings. Uplifted facial expressions (as if smiling) tended create happy feelings.

The fact is that *everything the body does is emotional*. Its sensations and feelings break into the causal loop of mind, body, and emotions. This insight, which indicates the effect of actions upon our feelings, is reflected biblically in its strong emphasis on right action.

"Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord, and not men." (Col. 3:23)

"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (I Cor. 15:58)

Paul's mandate to "work heartily" comes from the word for soul in the Greek and literally means "soully!" It refers to putting all of one's natural energies and drives (life) into it. This verse calls us to right actions in spite of our moods. The Corinthian injunction says to "always abound in the work of the Lord" without any ifs, buts, or maybes. We are to abound, that is, be vigorous, energetic, without waiting for the emotion to strike. This is the "as if" technique. Behaving *as if* the feeling were there—because of deep spiritual realities which are true regardless of our present feelings.

Willing the Emotion of Love!?

"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart." (I Pet. 1:22)

Here Peter *commands* love. Is that possible? Do our emotions respond to such commands? Can we simply turn on warm and affectionate feelings for another person? How do we obey such a dictate? How can we love someone that we may not even know or particularly like?

Peter answers these questions but we have to look deep into his words to discover his psychological insights. His insights are pragmatically viable. Note that he says that our dedication to reality ("obedience to the truth") and inner cleansing ("having purified your souls") prepare us for warm affectionate feelings (Greek, *philadelphia*, the warm love of brothers). But to attain that we must "love one another" (Greek, *agapesate*).

Is Peter reasoning in circle? In English it sounds as if Peter is saying, "Your new birth is designed to create warm emotional affection for each other so have warm emotional affection to one another." But that's incorrect.

In English the word love occurs twice in the verse, but not so in the Greek text. The command word (*agape*) does not refer to bubbling feelings. Barclay defines it extremely unspectacularly: "benevolent good will."

Will—that quality of conscious intentions. We are to change the direction of our thoughts toward people, even the ones we dislike. We are to will their good. So we agape-love one another by caring, showing good will, giving respect, hoping for their best, and giving up our desire to hurt them or ignore them. Agape-love does not wait around for the emotion, but operates by a higher motives —pleasing God.

Carl Lloyd in an article questioned the validity of commanding our emotions around as expressed in the Victorian-type of statement, "Oh come on, Cheer up! Don't feel that way!" He writes,

"We cannot stop 'feeling that way' until we stop thinking) that way! Better advice would be; 'Stop thinking that way— renew your mind. (*Wineskins*)

Jon Tal Murphree in *When God Says You're Ok* describes agape-love:

"To choose to love is to make oneself vulnerable to the object of love. It includes a reckless abandonment of self-interests in the nitty-gritty of life and a willingness to sacrifice for the interests of the loved."

We agape-love as we renew our consciousness and learn to see other persons in terms

of their sacredness and potential, seeing them as God sees them. To drive his point home Peter tossed in another word, "love one another *earnestly!*" This word "earnestly" means "to stretch" and used figuratively it carries the ideas of doing something "intently and fervently." Showing benevolent good will is not always easy. Sometimes we have to bend over backwards to do it. Sometimes we really have to stretch ourselves in order to move toward them in loving ways.

Love, as an act of the will, stretches us in many ways, but as we take the initiative it warms others up to us. Eventually we begin valuing them as God values them and that changes our feelings so that we experience phileo-love toward them. We can will our way to love; by executively deciding to act with good will we turn our central self toward those who we might not naturally feel drawn with the revolutionary result that we eventually turn on those warm feelings for them.

Won't Power

Some complain that they do not have enough will power to take charge of their emotions. Yet even in their emoting their will is always involved. Instead of being deficient in will, their will is quite active. It simply masquerades itself under the guise of "won't power."

When King Herod slaughtered the babies in Galilee,

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more."
(Matt. 2:18)

Note that the mothers wail and weep for their dead babies and "refused to be consoled." The babies were savagely and unjustly destroyed. No wonder their mothers wept bitterly; no wonder they refused consolation! Emotionally they needed their grief and wanted it. They chose to experience grief by choosing to not receive any consolation from well-wishers. It might seem that grief swept into their souls unbidden and overwhelmed them, while it might have seemed that they were, but helpless victims of their emotion—in reality their grief arose from their cognitions. The death of their babies meant too much to them for them to dismiss it. They needed their grief. So even in the rush of emotion their wills were still active.

The same is true with us even when the strongest emotions seem to have us in their grip. Imagine yourself in a rage with someone who obstinately opposes you about a matter of grave concern to you. You get emotional; angrily you shout. You breathe fast and hard as you try to make your point. Then suddenly the front door flies open and slams up against the wall with a bang. A frantic neighbor tells you that your baby has just been hit by a car.

Do you continue giving your opponent a piece of your mind? Is your anger so strong and overwhelming that you literally cannot turn your focus? Of course not. Immediately you turn off your anger. You drop the whole business of your rage. Now you care about only one thing, to find out what's happened and to take care of your child. New emotions arise: worry, upset, anxiety, fear. Quickly you run out of the house. There's a little body lying in the street. You turn it over and suddenly you discover the child is not yours, but a neighbor's! What emotions now arise? Relief? Thanksgiving? Sadness?

As willing selves we have a lot more control over our emoting than we often realize. One little boy was being chewed out for misbehaving and sensed that his mother was losing control. "Mother, why don't you use your telephone voice?" he pleaded. He had observed the phenomenon of mother answering the telephone with a warm, pleasant voice that says, "Everything is fine here!" when three seconds before she was yelling at the top of her lungs and everything was not fine! Actors are not the only people who can turn their emotions off and on to fit the parts they are playing.

Feeling the Sense of Mastery

Many people feel weak, impotent, and out-of-control. Perhaps they have overwhelmed themselves with unrealistic expectations or have bought into some misbeliefs that undermines self-confidence. As a result they have been conditioned to feel helpless, to view themselves as lacking will power, and to believe they can never change. To take charge of our emotions we need to know experientially that we are in control and feel that control.

James' "useless exercise" mentioned in Chapter Five provides one technique for gaining an immediate sensation of control. It enables us to get in touch with the sensation of will power. People who complain of being devoid of will power can practice getting this feeling by noting how it feels when they engage in the simplest willed acts. They can focus on such small masteries as getting out of bed in the morning, putting food in their mouth, dressing, driving, walking, reading the paper, and turning on the television set. Life is made up of hundreds of willed acts every day.

Setting small reachable goals provides a technique for getting a feel of mastery. Decide to write someone a thank you and mail it. Now do it. Upon doing it, sit down and relish the good feelings the accomplishment brings. Or decide to drive your car with full consciousness for a block. Put both hands on the wheel and concentrate on how effectively you maneuver the car. By bringing your consciousness to such small items you get a feel of volition, a sense that you do determine the direction of your life and that you can focus on the thoughts that you choose to focus on. By beginning with small masteries and working up you will find that you can exercise your capacity for willing. This feeling of mastery is a feeling of power—a concomitant feeling in

self-control.

"In a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (I Cor. 9:24-25)

"A bishop, as God's steward, must be ... self-controlled" (Titus 1:7-8)

The Greek word here is a power word (*enkrateia* from *en* "in" and *krateo* "to have power, to rule, hold, or master"). This word refers to one who has mastered his desires and passions. Paul preached this to Felix (Acts 24:25); he encouraged believers to walk in the Spirit so that they could develop this quality (Gal. 5:23); and Peter urged believers to make it part of their character (II Peter 1:6). Being in charge of one's emotions epitomizes living in the Spirit and results from a healed mind:

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control." (II Tim. 1:7)

A different word is used in the Greek for self-control here. It is a mind word. (*sophonismos*: *proeo* "to think," *phroema* "understanding, thoughts, what one has in mind, and *sozo*: to save or make whole). God grants us the gift of self-control or a "sound mind" (KJV), "sound judgment" (Weymouth), or a "calm and well-balanced mind" (Amplified). Jesus granted the man possessed with a thousand demons this kind of self control. After the healing, the demoniac was "in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). His wild fury, his yelling, his uncontrollable rage and his self-hatred had all been brought under control as he experienced a restructured consciousness—a renewed mind.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

We can take charge of our emotions. As choosing selves with the executive power of choice we can reject passivity and direct our hearts in the way we should go. We can take charge by: developing inner awareness, accepting our emotions for what they are, assuming responsibility for ourselves, owning up to our own responses, holding our emotions up to the norms of morality, adjusting them to fit the facts, using the "as if" technique, and learning to feel emotional mastery in the little choices of life. In these ways we begin experiencing that wondrous and powerful feeling of self-control. In taking charge we get a sense of the energy that results from being focused about our values and having a definite direction in life.

Chapter 7

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN EMOTIONALIZED PREDISPOSITION?

The very idea of "unconscious emotions" may strike you as contradictory. We usually associate emotions with consciousness. Emoting is a conscious phenomenon, isn't it? Upon reflection, however, it's obvious that we do emote sometimes without being conscious of it. Sometimes this lack of awareness arises from our preoccupation with other things. At other times our emotions are unconscious because we are out of touch with our body and its feelings.

Yet primarily our unconscious emotions stem from our "emotionalized predispositions." These emotionalized predispositions motivate us to emote without awareness. We "feel" only that "This is how life is." We sense that we are being objective, not subjective. Yet even this sense of "normality" is loaded with feelings and emotions. Because we are corporal beings we can never get beyond feelings. There are always sensations rippling through our bodies. The fact that we are meaning-seeking persons also eliminates the possibility being emotionless. We emote because we find meaning in life.

Yet day by day life frequently "feels" devoid of emotion. We carry on with our tasks feeling neither ecstasy nor depression. We just feel normal. We do not feel emotional. Emotions feel special. But this sense that our lives are generally empty of emotions arises because of the dynamic of emotionalized predispositions.

“Who was that Masked Emotion?”

I have noted that by repetitively holding a thought in our minds we create its corresponding emotion and thus habituate that state of consciousness. This gives rise

to emotional habits. As we habituate ourselves to certain feelings and cognitions about life, people, and ourselves, we develop a sense of "how life feels." We call this our *emotional script* because it's a human predilection to use our script for "the way life should feel." Once we have become accustomed to a certain set of feelings, we seek them out. The dynamic of habit motivates us to keep perpetuating the thoughts and beliefs that create the feelings we are used to—even if they are painful.

In this way, *emotions grow up and become moods*. A mood is "a conscious state of mind or predominant emotion, a prevailing attitude or disposition." By definition then a mood is a mixture of thought and emotion that has burned a deep impression (or rut!) into the soul. It has become our *comfort zone*. Emotions and thoughts outside of this comfort zone trigger feelings of discomfort.

For instance, one habituated to the feelings of inadequacy, passivity, and inferiority usually does not know how to feel or behave when suddenly confronted with success. If he does something great or says something brilliant the subsequent feelings of confidence, self-respect, and self-celebration will be so alien to his experience that he will tend to deny the feelings and avoid them. "I was just lucky; it was a fluke." He rejects his new and strange feelings and turns them away because they are outside his emotional comfort zone.

When we habituate ourselves by the same thoughts and emotions, day after day, month after month, we lose consciousness of our emotions. They become programmed into our subconscious and operate as "automatic thoughts" and "automatic emotions." They become attitudes). A mood, therefore, results from cognitions and emotions and manifests itself as an emotionalized predisposition; a disposition of mind or attitude ("disposition") that is set ("pre-") and which is unconsciously energized by emotions ("emotionalized"). *Attitudes mask our emotions*. Floyd Ruck in *Psychology and Life* writes,

"An attitude is a relatively stable emotionalized predisposition to respond in some consistent way toward some person or group or situation." (p. 477)

An emotionalized predisposition gives us our basic frame of reference from which we view the world. It gives us our basic disposition of mind that contains our values, beliefs, assumptions, and thoughts patterns, and it is sustained and expressed with specific emotions.

Yet we do not experience our attitudes as emotions. Having habituated ourselves to certain beliefs and feelings we cause them to pass into our subconscious. This is the psychodynamic principle involved in all habits from bike riding, typing, tying a shoe to memorizing the alphabet. We act (or think or emote) without consciousness of our emotions. We feel "comfortable" with them. Some attitudes are obviously loaded with emotion—intolerance, resentment, bigotry, and bitterness. But usually our

attitudes do not give us a sense of emoting.

Consider optimism. Optimism results from repeatedly thinking in terms of ideas, beliefs, and images that are optimistic and consequently induces feelings of delight, pleasure, hope, joy, and faith. Eventually, however, these cognitions and feelings become automatic in the soul. They become "the state of mind" that we constantly live in and seek to perpetuate. Then we lose consciousness of our automatic thoughts, silent assumptions, and specific emotions. All that is left is a basic orientation or predisposition for optimism. It simply seems normal to be optimistic. Specific thoughts and emotions are yet resonating in our nervous system, but we do not feel them.

Transactional Analysis calls our emotional habits—*scripts*. The thoughts and emotions to which we habituate ourselves not only give us a sense of normality, but operate as an internal control center telling us what life should feel like. Hence attitudes are predispositions in the sense that they operate as life scripts providing us direction and guidance (assuming the role of will). It is human nature to be predisposed to what feels comfortable and to see what fits into our pre-set values. Once our comfort zone has been set we always find it disconcerting to think or feel anything outside of that zone. Our emotionalized predispositions operate to keep us in our comfort zone. Carl Lloyd calls these scripts our "life maps"—they orient us to where we are in life and inform us as to life's roads.

Undoubtedly it's obvious that this dynamic of habit works as both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it frees our minds from keeping everything we know in consciousness enabling us to move on to new and creative adventures. On the other hand it locks us into thought patterns, emotion patterns, and behavior patterns that work automatically and powerfully, sometimes to our detriment.

Any cognitive mechanism can be habituated within us. When that happens—it creates a *drive*. Healthy and neurotic lifestyles are born due to this fact. By taking an interest in something, holding it fast in our minds, repeating it in behavior we create predispositions in our subconscious. Psychologists give the term "complex" to such thoughts. A complex that drives us in an unhealthy (neurotic) way usually is "a system of repressed desires and memories that exert a dominating influence upon our personality."

Alfred Alder authored both the concept and phrase "inferiority complex." He described this as being comprised of feelings of inferiority plus memories of put-downs, thoughts of rejections, and a sense of inadequacy. The person with such a complex usually represses such thoughts so that all that's left in his consciousness is a basic predisposition of inferiority.

The Iceberg Principle

Ship captains navigate the treacherous waters of the north and south poles alert for icebergs. They know that the largest part of the floating ice is below the water's surface. They also know that what they cannot see can hurt them.

The subconscious operates in a similar way in the personality. It is an iceberg below the threshold of our consciousness, a present reality though it is not seen or felt. There our attitudes are incorporated. This explains why they do not feel like emotions and why we are not aware of them as emotionalized predispositions. Trafford P. Maher in *Self: A Measureless Sea* defines an attitude as "a habitually, mostly unconscious way of thinking and feeling about persons, places, issues, and things."

If our attitudes are primarily unconscious then we live a great deal of our lives without conscious awareness. Our programming puts us on automatic. Previously programmed beliefs and emotions relieve us from having to encounter every new situation and person afresh; they provide us our frame of reference, values, and motivation. To that degree we are not fully in control of our own thoughts and feelings. Our attitudes, as it were, develop a mind of their own. The principle of habit inhibits us as it motivates us to our status quo. Thus, even in the face of new evidence to the contrary, our attitudes stand unscathed and unshaken. They look for what they have been programmed to see and they find it every time notwithstanding the evidence.

No wonder changing attitudes is so difficult. We not only have to do fresh and deep thinking, consciously re-programming our mind with new thoughts and feelings, changing basic assumptions, but we must also get out of our comfort zone and go against our basic life dispositions. Changing attitudes entails building a whole new foundation—changing basic assumptions about life. Jerome D. Frank M.D. explains in *Persuasion and Healing: Comparative Study of Psychotherapy*:

"The emotional impact of an experience seems related to the extent to which it implies the necessity of a change in the assumptive world. The more extensive and abrupt the change required, the greater is the concomitant emotional upheaval."

Habits are resistive to change precisely because they are a part of our "assumptive world." When we stop doing something that we've always done we are not merely changing behavior, we are also changing beliefs and meanings. When we start changing these kinds of things we are touching the very heart of life which creates a lot of discomfort and anxiety. Insecurity arises because our identity and relatedness in the world must change. It's much easier to stick with our status quo.

Though our emotionalized predispositions are like icebergs in some ways yet in one significant way the metaphor does not fit. Icebergs are not living things, but are inert and static in its substance— ice. But the subconscious is dynamic—thoughts and memories live there. Nor do they remain static, for they are ever growing and changing. They have a life of their own. They energize and magnetize us so that we get out of life what we expect to get. They predispose us for our own scripts.

This is especially true of memories. For memories do not accurately represent historical reality, but keep changing according to our understandings and our emotional needs. Norman Wright explains in *The Christian Use of Emotional Power*: "One of the greatest hindrances to emotional control is the mindset. This means that a person views a situation in a preset manner, regardless of the evidence. ... A person whose mind is set perceives what he expects to perceive." (page 32).

Once programmed, our deep mind lives by its own agenda. Having prejudged what it wants to find and expects to find in the world, it motivates us toward those things that will give us what we're looking for. If I'm in a hostile mood, I tend to magnetize anger and frustration around me. I begin discovering hostility everywhere I turn. Even neutral events (traffic jams, traffic lights turning red as I approach an intersection) become sources for my hostility. My predisposition actualizes itself out of life's raw materials. The thing I fear begins happening (e.g. Job 3:25). What I worry about happens; what I believe in comes to pass. An angry mood filters everything in terms of anger and our predisposition drives us to find things to be angry about.

An attitude molds us in its own image. Since attitudes are holistic phenomenons, they energize every part of us. Make a quick jog to the dictionary and note the comprehensiveness of attitude. An attitude is "the arrangement of the parts of the body, posture; a mental position with regard to a fact or state; a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state." Attitude combines thought, emotion, and behavior into one phenomena.

So attitude denotes a total positioning of ourselves. It means that we approach people, ideas, and events with a basic posture. In cheerfulness we behave as if joyful and energetic; we talk and think in terms of faith and hope. Everything we do exudes joy. When we're angry, we may carry a chip around on our shoulder and behave in an irritating way that invites people to knock it off. Our daring, challenging, and nettling look or sound communicates anger. Everything in our soul is in a posture of peevishness. And that posturing metamorphoses us after its image.

C. S. Lewis applies this principle of human psychology to our feeling that miracles are

unreal. "The mere gravitation of the mind back to its habitual outlook" writes Lewis must be taken into consideration if we are to renew our minds.

"The same familiar room, re-asserting itself as one closes the book, can make other things feel incredible besides miracles. Whether the book has been telling you the end of all civilisation is at hand, that you are kept in your chair by the curvature of space, or even that you are upside down in relation to Australia, it may still seem a little unreal as you yawn and think of going to bed. I have found even a simple truth (e.g. that my hand now resting on the book, will one day be a skelton's hand) singularly unconvincing at such a moment. 'Belief-feelings', as Dr. Richards calls them, do not follow reason except by long training. They follow Nature, follow the grooves and ruts which already exist in the mind." (*Miracles*, p. 167)

Attitudes are icebergs of the soul. They predispose us to our old scripts—a blessing if the scripts are rational and Christian, a curse if they are not. Like our conscious minds our subconscious needs *metanoia*.

Changing Attitudes in the Deep Heart

Attitude change comes only with intention and determination. It demands new thinking, fresh attending, the discomfort of new emotions as we move out of our comfort zones, new commitments, and into a new way of living. Merely entertaining new information isn't enough to effect lasting attitude change. We're resistent to change due to our vested interests and our predisposition to maintain our scripts. Data begins the process but data along is not enough. Something else is needed.

That something else is emotion. The new challenging information that would "*in-form*" (form us on the inside) must be energized with a motive and emotion). Attaching affects (joy, affection, enthusiasm, trust, confidence, fear, grief, etc.) to the new information gives that data the power to confront the old attitudes at deep levels. Attitude change begins with changing our thoughts; being "renewed in our minds" (Romans 12:2). That's only the beginning however. Then we must "be renewed in the spirit) of our minds" (Eph. 4:23). What is the difference then between renewing the mind and renewing the spirit of the mind?

We have already seen that mind refers to our whole range of consciousness including our beliefs, values, philosophical thinking, intentions, imaginations, and inductive thinking. What then does Paul mean with this teasing phrase—*the spirit of the mind*? For "spirit" the dictionary gives several definitions; among them is "a disposition, inclination, tendency, or attitude."

"Put off the old nature which belongs to your former manner of life ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature" (Eph. 4:22-24)

Spliced between the shucking off of the old nature and the clothing with the new Christ-nature is the renewal of the mind's spirit—emotionalized predispositions. Paul believed in the malleability of human nature and identified attitude renewal as the means whereby we experience an alteration in our very nature. But that leads to the big question: *How do we renew our basic emotionalized predispositions?*

Awareness fo Deep Mental Grooves

First of all we must *identify* our basic attitudes, moods, and complexes. Transactional Analysis conceptualizes three ego states (Parent, Child, and Adult) and characterizes each by physical and verbal clues so as to help us identify the ego state we may be in. Becoming aware of our ego states helps us identify our more repetitive emotional habits.

T.A. also provides a scheme for understanding scripts (Script Analysis) looking at basic personality patterns: "I'm Not Ok— You're Ok; I'm Not Ok—You're Not Ok; I'm Ok— You're Not Ok; I'm Ok –You're Ok. These analyses enables us to look at ourselves in ways that help us identify our basic Life Position. Also, by listening for our automatic thoughts we gain insight into our habituated perceptions. Merely realizing that we have unconscious attitudes that determine basic assumptions of life helps us discern them.

Judas Iscariot was a man who lacked awareness of his emotionalized predispositions. He stands before us as an enigma and there's much about his story that's missing. And yet I get the impression that he was blind to his own motives. Assuming that Jesus did not merely "use" him as his betrayer, we must recognize the complexity and multiplicity of Judas' beliefs, motives, and feelings. Why did he betray Jesus? How could he have engaged in such treachery after living at close quarters with Jesus? These are mysteries that go unanswered. The story indicates that only at the end did *Judas truly become aware* of what he was doing:

"When Judas, his betrayer, saw that (Jesus) was condemned, he *repented* and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself." (Matt. 27:3-5)

At the end Judas realized what he had done. He realized in a painful way that he had sinned. He quickly owned up to his own responsibility and took moral action trying to reverse the fate of that day. Did he really think he could talk the chief priests and elders out of crucifying Jesus? Did he really think they were open to reason and persuasion? Apparently he had assumed he would force Jesus to publically acknowledge himself as the Messiah by putting him to the test. That would show all his friends and relatives in Judea that Jesus was for real. Of the Twelve Apostles,

Judas was the only one from Judea, the rest were Galileans. It's my guess that Judas had been playing a game of manipulation. He plotted the betray to force Jesus' hand. He certainly had a gift for finances and served as the group's treasurer. But greed alone was an insufficient motive for such treachery. For one thing, the price was too low—a merely twenty dollar bill in our currency. Judas was after something else.

And whatever it was, he soon realized that Jesus would not play his game. Now he was caught in his own mess—the Jewish elders were going to put Jesus to death. Guilt, hate, fear, and hope all flow mingled together into Judas creating a torrent of emotion and confusion. Perhaps he observed the mock trial and realized that Jesus was not going to save himself. Peter saw it, denied Jesus, and went out and wept bitterly.

Judas saw and took a chance on confronting the chief priests and elders in a desperate attempt to get them to put a stop to the whole thing. They were his only hope. In agony he confessed to them. Desperation etched itself on his face. "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!" he screamed out. But he could find no sympathy in their hardened faces. They had long ago decided that the prophet from Nazareth had to be sacrificed because he was upsetting Israel's precarious standing with Rome. Judas was only their tool. They used him for what he could provide them, now it was time to discard him. They cared nothing about his repentance; nothing for his sorrow. Their words reveal a hellish attitude: "What is that to us? See to it yourself." They would not stop the crucifixion. They would not call off their charges.

For Judas, it was the end. He saw hope nowhere. The priests of his faith cared nothing for him, his Eleven comrades would hate him for his devious plot, and now even Jesus was gone. To whom could he turn? He went out and hanged himself. At the end he became aware, but his awareness was plagued with despair so it lead nowhere as far as personality change was concerned.

Openness to Change

James and John were not much different from Judas. They too were driven by emotionalized predispositions. Jesus even nicknamed them "Son of Thunder" presumably because of their basic disposition—they were hot heads! Did Jesus so named them in order to make them aware of their attitude?

Toward the end, when the days drew near for Jesus "to set his face to go to Jerusalem," a Samaritan village rejected him. They had picked up on his preoccupation with Jerusalem and that jarred with their partisan thinking, so they rejected him. That set James and John off:

"Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:51,54)

James and John exploded because their pre-set attitude of hostility readied them for a fight at a moment's notice. They were ready to destroy anybody and everybody who got in their way. They were redneck bigots. Quick to censure others, they lived by the Iron Rule, "Do unto others before they do unto you."

"But (Jesus) turned and rebuked them, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them.'" (Luke 9:55 footnote)

Jesus challenged Zebedee's sons about their assumptions, values, and emotions. He used a strong confrontational approach with them to jar them out of their mental ruts and get them to re-evaluate their underlying attitudes. By emphatically denying their request and informing them that they were out of touch with their own reality ("You do not know what manner of spirit you are of"), Jesus provided them new information energized by several affects)—shame, surprise, and confusion. He also presented himself as a new model; "The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them."

The redemptive fact, however, in their eventual change was their openness to change). Years later John received a new nickname—The Apostle of Love. This son of thunder experienced such a deep dispositional change that his "nature" changed and all because he was open to change.

King Saul, on the other hand, was not open to change. His basic emotionalized predisposition was an amalgamation of self-righteousness, insecurity, low self-image, and dependence. More than anything else he wanted to look good in the eyes of the people. His ultimate care concerned his image. When Samuel instructed him to kill Amalek and to spare no one, Saul had a better idea. He saved the best animals and King Agag in anticipation of sponsoring a great sacrificial offering in celebration of his victory. Perhaps he thought, "Now that will make a great impression!" But probably the thought was unconscious and Saul really didn't know his own motivation having deceived himself in thinking that he was doing it for God. Subsequently, when he meet Samuel and proudly announced:

"I have performed the commandment of the Lord," Samuel begged to differ: "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (I Sam. 15:14)

Samuel's facts, notwithstanding, could not pry Saul's eyes open to his disobedience. In the face of contradictory evidence Saul's underlying attitude of self-righteousness did not surrender. Saul was able to "explain" everything. He told Samuel about his plans, but Samuel didn't buy them:

"Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord? ... Why did you swoop on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord? ... Rebellion is as the sin

of divination and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king." (I Sam. 15:19,23)

The confrontation didn't effect any change in Saul. Saul's deep hidden agenda predisposed him to another concern—how he looked in the eyes of the people. "I have sinned!" he confessed. But along with the confession came a defense mechanism of blame:

"I feared the people and obeyed their voice." Once again Samuel informed him that God had rejected him. To which Saul replied: "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel; and return with me..." (I Sam. 15:30)

Saul's superiority complex arose from his feelings of inferiority and faltering sense of self-image. His subconscious need was to be valued in public opinion. Without that validation he felt like a nobody. It made him anxious. This emotional need also prevented him from hearing Samuel's words. It blocked him from responding in a straightforward manner. He said, "I repent," but he did not repent. He made no change. In fact, Saul's rebelliousness showed itself in his refusal to give up his position as king. He held on to the throne for another seven years—until the day he died. He refused to accept God's word. During that time he became possessed by an evil spirit which filled him with rage and jealousy. These two facts are related. For when we do not properly handle our deep attitudes and close ourselves against the truth, we find ourselves possessed by forces that we do not understand and which eventually get the best of us.

Rebuke jolted James and John and moved them toward attitude change. Rebuke, however, didn't work with Saul. He was closed to change, unwilling to honestly look at himself. So the "shock treatment" failed. Israel's psychologist explained the conditional nature of rebuke:

"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you." (Prov. 9:8)

"A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool." (Prov. 17:10)

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." (Prov. 12:1)

Nabal was another man closed to change. The scripture narratives have nothing positive to say of him. He was "churlish and ill-behaved." He was "so ill-natured that one cannot speak to him" (I Samuel 25:17). Even his wife, Abigail, explained his railing on David as a result of his foolish disposition:

"Let not my Lord regard this ill-natured fellow; Nabal; for as his name is, so

is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him." (I Sam. 25:25)

Nabal had taken his identity and personality from his name. He became a fool because his predisposition was self-seeking egotism ("foolishness"). The "fool" and his "foolishness" in the scriptures doesn't refer to a low IQ but the lack of spiritual wisdom. Nabal was undoubtedly intelligent—he was very rich. What he lacked was spiritual, emotional, and personal wisdom; "he cared for neither God or man." His egotism consequently prevented people from telling him the truth. They were afraid of his cruelty. He was bullheaded and cared only about himself. In relationships he was such a tyrant that people avoided closeness with him.

Nabal was a fool also because of his self-sufficient attitude which predisposed him to worship the status quo thus delivering him from any need for change. Ironically he became so ill-natured that people didn't want to be around him so that he came to miss out on the best things of life.

The choice is ours. To receive the rebukes of life and open ourselves up to change or hug the status quo. The good news is that we are not stuck with our personality. *We can change.* We do that by adopting a new attitude of mind so that our very nature is altered and transformed.

Using Cognitive Dissonance Constructively

Cognitive dissonance arises when we encounter new information that conflicts with our predispositions. Our attitudes are "set" so that we really do not see new data, but even in our perceiving we distort it and filter much of it out. This means that if we want to effect attitude change that will affect our depths we must take this phenomenon of human personality into account and deal with it in a constructive manner.

Psychologists define *cognitive dissonance* as the dissonant (discrepant or incongruous) cognitions that collide and conflict and which motivate us to reduce the perceived inconsistency. It's experienced in the feelings we get when our behaviors differ markedly from our intra-psychic values. We therefore reduce this dissonance by changing our values, attitudes, or behaviors.

Leon Festinger, a social psychologist, developed the theory and said that our need for consistency arouses a tension-like state of dissonance when we sense that a discrepancy exists between two or more of our cognitions. In *The Social Animal* Elliot Aronson describes cognitive dissonance as—

"... a state of tension that occurs whenever an individual simultaneously holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent."

God made us with a deep craving for harmony, cohesiveness, and meaning. Practically this means that we can't stand absurdity or internal conflict that is incongruent. It drives us crazy. To flirt with absurdity (meaninglessness) results in madness. Emotionally, this flirtation with contradictory ideals is experienced first as ambivalence. And while an appreciation of God's mysteries helps us accept ambivalence, even then it's our human tendency to come up with "reasons, explanations, and beliefs" that give us a sense of integration and harmony.

For instance the problem of pain creates cognitive dissonance for most of us. One of our cognitions says "God is good and all-powerful and does not want people to suffer." Another cognition is our awareness that people do suffer. Result: dissonance. Jarring, conflicting ideas that need) to be reconciled.

Dissonance arises for the smoker who comes to believe that smoking causes cancer but who continues smoking. Dissonance is the felt inconsistency. Until the smoker becomes aware of the danger and accepts that truth—there's no dissonance. But once aware of it, then for him it creates jarring emotions and antagonizing thoughts.

Two factors determine how much dissonance is created within us by our jarring understandings:

- 1) The number of elements that are inconsistent relative to the ones that are consonant. If our basic world view is integrated with a central belief in the sovereignty of God then we can endure more dissonance than if our world view lacks a central unifying belief.
- 2) And the importance of these elements in our belief system.

For instance, a pacifist who enlists in the Army may only feel slightly uncomfortable if there are other cognitions involved: honor, the country's need, fear of imprisonment, opportunity to serve in an army hospital. Our consonant cognitions decrease the amount of dissonance. The more important our value or belief the more able it is to reduce the dissonance. If dissonance and dissonance reduction are basic to human nature then we can expect to find them operating wherever we encounter new information which conflicts with already established attitudes. Our general tendency is to reduce it. "Don't confuse me with the fact, my mind is already made up!"

Peter responded with denial when God introduced new ideas to him and asked him to behave in new and revolutionary ways. Peter's Torah programming had thoroughly convinced him that a good Jew (and Christian) ate only what was kosher. When God unveiled a vision of non-kosher animals and told Peter to rise and eat, Peter was shocked. Cognitions jarred within him so loud you could hear his mental gears clanging. Peter had the gall to tell God that he had never done anything like that and had no intention of starting! "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is

common or unclean." (Acts 10:14). Three times the vision appeared and three times Peter told God "No!" Habits are hard to break. Two miracles later, Peter began toying with a brand new idea.

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35)

Peter's direct refusal to obey didn't arise from a rebellious attitude but from a predisposition about obedience: "The Torah says I should not eat that which is unclean." This cognition jarred with the new cognitions, "God actually wants me to taste non-kosher food!?"

Eventually Peter shucked his old value for the new one. The dissonance aroused was reduced as he began re-evaluating the first belief. The time and trouble it took God himself to break through Peter's thick skull alerts us to the fact that changing attitudes takes time and trouble. It is a process. It doesn't happen quickly. In this instance, the trouble was not the thickness of Peter's skull but in the rut in his subconscious. Cognitive dissonance caused him to discount God's new information at first because it jarred with his subconscious predispositions.

By understanding this dynamic of the human mind we come to understand *the importance of an open mind* so that we can endure the dissonance of our cognitions and emotions until we can consciously and objectively evaluate the new information. This theory however can be used constructively. Mark Abrahamson explains:

"If people *act* in a way which is inconsistent with their feelings, they often wind up feeling the way they are acting." (*Interpersonal Accommodation*, p. 170)

This means that some of our deep subconscious attitudes can be changed *by intentionally acting out our new beliefs*. If we stop waiting around for new feelings, if we act now with energy, our emotionalized predispositions begin changing. The dissonance will make us uncomfortable for awhile as we break out of our comfort zone. That has to be endured for awhile. It can be endured by reminding ourselves that it's a part of the reprogramming process.

This insight explains the wisdom of the "as if" technique described in chapter six. Acting in a way that's inconsistent with our values and opinions creates internal dissonance and our psychic nature will be energized to reduce that dissonance. There are three major ways this occurs: by reducing the importance of the dissonant elements, by adding consonant elements, or by changing one of the dissonant elements so that it is no longer inconsistent with the other.

In addition to the cognitive control we have over our emotions, there is also a

psycho-motor control. Thus according to the James-Lange Theory of Emotional Control we can initiate attitude change by altering our posture and actions.

"The truth is that there is a two way causality between our feelings and our behavior in expressing those feelings" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*, John Morreall).

"Laughing is behavior that expresses pleasant feelings. This behavior is itself pleasant, and so tends to increase pleasure. It is possible, then to break into the loop by starting with just the laughter (performed voluntarily or caused physiologically) which will induce pleasant feelings, which feelings may in turn cause more laughter." (p. 55)

Applying this insight to the problem of laughter in embarrassment and hysteria, Professor Morreall suggests that these pseudo-laughter forms arise from the subconscious mind trying to induce pleasant feelings when reality overwhelms us with catastrophe. Laughter in hysteria is a rejection of reality. Its intent is to give a person some psychic distance, at least temporarily, from the horror.

The causal loop of feelings— thoughts—behavior—feelings—behavior provides us a technique for changing. Since our dynamic subconscious will not tolerate conflicting cognitions, we can, by acting out new thoughts, consciously and intentionally, let cognitive reduction slowly and quietly take place. Our subconscious will work for us reducing the power and hold of its old thoughts.

We can break cognitive and emotional habits by engaging in "as if" behaviors as in role playing. Role playing proves a powerful way for inducing new feelings and attitudinal change in therapy and in life. We act out new behaviors and begin feeling different. At first we simply feel uncomfortable, "unlike ourselves," strange. We are self-conscious because we are out of our comfort zone. But eventually the new feelings begin to feel more comfortable. We habituate ourselves anew. New experiences create emotional and cognitive repercussions throughout our psyche. The "as if" technique confronts our deep habits on a psycho-motor level instead of a cognitive level, but breaks into the causal loop, and thus offers us a way of effecting attitude change.

Story Walking

Attitudes change most profoundly through experiences. What we experience profoundly changes our thinking and emoting, this is true for both first-hand experiences and vicarious experiences. Stories, myths, fairy-tales, movies, novels, and even gossip impact us deeply. It's not merely the new information which is conveyed about life, but the fact that it feeds our imagination and right brain with pictures and dramas. It enables us to experience another world—another way of life with all of its emotions. We thus find ourselves confronted, changed, and renewed as stories sneak

around our left brain mental blocks. Stories inform us indirectly which means the static of cognitive dissonance is avoided to a great extent. Parables, stories, poetry, music, and art can therefore mold our minds experientially in a way propositional language cannot.

If I confronted you directly saying, "You need to change your attitudes and let the gospel evaluate your thinking about social and political issues!" it probably wouldn't help you make a deep attitude change. Even if you are trying to bring every thought captive to Christ and agree with my statement, you probably feel my direct approach a bit offensive and might get into a defensive position. My direct confrontation comes across as preachiness, moralizing, and condescension.

But what if I told a story? Suppose I took you on a imaginary journey to Medieval Europe and introduce you to a bishop or two, a famous scholar and a host of people in that age. I let you experience and feel life through narration and dialogue. I then take you to a courtyard where a heretic is about to be burned at the stake. I let you listen to a frustrating conversation between a bishop who argues for the old ways with a sensitive soul who says, "I don't believe that burning people who disagree with you is a Christian virtue!" The bishop is a smooth talker and marshal his arguments for the inquisition.

What happens? Without telling you whose side to take, you take sides. You're drawn into the conversation and begin identifying with one of the characters. It is inevitable. Soon you realize that the bishop is more pagan than Christian in his views. You sense that the gospel has not deeply purged him of his violent, pre-Christian values and that someone needs to shake him awake to how barbarian it is to burn someone who disagrees with you.

As I tell the story, *you begin experiencing* something that I could not have commanded you to experience. You sense deep within the need for applying the gospel to social and political issues. You feel outraged that a man of God could be so blind to human life and the principle of love which the gospel preeminently preaches. Whether or not you could articulate the principle of the story, you walk away with a deep consciousness of the gospel's applicability for every facet of life.

Stories change our attitudes because they dramatize truth. They don't give us formal philosophical or theological definitions, they give us an experience of reality; they give us feeling and identification with the truth. Via our imagination we enter into someone else's world and vicariously experienced truth directly.

After King David and Bathsheba committed adultery, David tried to cover up the

scandal. He called Uriah, her husband, in from the war and tried to get him to sleep with her. But Uriah felt that it was not right for him to enjoy such luxury when his comrades were enduring the miseries of war. He refused to sleep in the house and chose to sleep on his front steps. David felt trapped and decided to have him killed. He sent him back to the war and had him positioned in a dangerous spot where he was eventually killed. After Uriah's death David struggled with a guilty conscience. Though he thought he had covered all his tracks and was home free, he failed to look up.

Then came Nathan. Nathan the prophet knew what the King had done and entered the Palace to confront him and bring him to a conviction of sin. But he did not stomp in; he did not shout any blazing judgment in an Elijah style. Nor did he write an expose in the Jerusalem Times of David's Watergate. Nathan approached David via a story.

"Once upon a time there was a Rich Man who had dozens of flocks. He had hundreds of sheep and scores of cattle. There was also a Poor Man who lived in a nearby shack. Poor Man owned only one little ewe lamb which he loved dearly. He treated that little lamb as if it were one of his own children. The lamb used to eat at the family table; it even drank from Poor Man's cup. Sometimes it would cuddle up in his bosom when the night air became very cold. He treated it with the gentleness he would a daughter.

Then one day a traveler stopped in at Rich Man's mansion. Rich Man, wanting to treat his company with hospitality, but not wanting to give up as much as one of his lambs, took Poor Man's ewe lamb and had it butchered for dinner that evening."

"Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this and because he had no pity.' Nathan said to David, 'You are the man.'" (II Sam. 12:1-7)

Nathan's Story bypassed David's defense mechanisms and rationalizations and nailed him to the wall. The story cut right to David's deep emotionalized predispositions. He had heartlessly been using what belonged to another man. The story cut David open. Yet David failed to see himself in it until it was too late. His cognitive dissonance did not discount the story because he accepted it as it was presented and entered into the Story with sympathetic imagination. The story passed by his left brain blocks and hooked his right brain emotions. David identified with the poor man even though he had been behaving like the Rich Man! David identified with the "good" guy in spite of his "bad" guy behavior. Consequently he was able to see things from the poor man's perspective and feel the injustice of his plight.

David sensed in a deep way that justice had been thwarted. His emotional experience in listening to the story created the emotions needed to energize his values and thoughts) so that when Nathan pointed his finger and said four quiet but terse words ("You are the man!"), David was deeply touched. He was motivated to look at himself, reverse his purposes and cognitions, and change his ways.

Stories help us see our own attitudes. They help us digest our abstract knowledge and make it real and practical. For lasting and deep attitude change, all we need do is spend some time walking into God's stories. We need to meditate on them, let them become living dramas in the theaters of our minds. By exercising our sympathetic imagination and identifying with the characters we get a feel for how they felt. The wonder of stories is that they communicate to us emotionally and experientially and that they keep on impacting us with their truths long after we first hear them. The Bible comes to us loaded with stories, parables, poems, and other non-propositional language so that we can experience a transformation deep enough to renew "the spirit of our mind."

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

What do you do with an Emotionalized Predisposition? You unmask it for the emotions within it; you take into consideration the iceberg principle of the subconscious and look at your own predispositions to emotionalized habits and complexes. You take your emotionalized predispositions in hand and intentionally "renew the spirit of the mind" so that your predispositions are Christianized.

We take a step toward emotional vitality by opening our spirits to change, learn the art of receiving a rebuke as a form of "shock therapy," so that we can be jarred loose from old ruts in our souls. Cognitive dissonance works within each of us and usually to our harm. But it can be turned around and used constructively. By acting the way we want to feel we can break into the causal loop of thoughts—behavior—and—feelings and make dissonance change the cognitions that hold us back. Role playing can therefore be used effectively and Christianly to effect emotional change.

Walking into God's stories which fill the scriptures also provide us a way of renewing our deep minds. Jesus used *Story Therapy* as a psychological "tool" for encountering his disciples with the truth.

In all of these ways we make our deep mind new and take ourselves off "automatic pilot." We free ourselves from being blindly driven by subconscious powers that we don't understand. The adventure of emotional wholeness becomes something that we can permanently sustain as we incorporate our Christian thinking and emoting as new emotionalized predispositions within our depths. Then the scripture becomes real for

us, "I will put my laws within them, and I will write upon their heart" (Jer. 31:33). This is an in-depth remaking of personality. God fills us with his very disposition ("spirit") so that we have a spirit within us that "causes us to walk" in his ways (Ezek. 36:26-27).

End of Chapter Notes:

1. The Greek word for repentance in Matt. 27:3 is *metamelomai* and is sometimes contrasted with *metanoeo* to indicate that Judas only felt remorse and did not truly repent. Joseph Thayer rejects this contrast in the Greek words,

"The distinctions so often laid down between these words, to the effect that the former expresses a merely emotional change the latter a change of choice, the former has reference to particulars the latter to the entire life, the former signifies nothing but regret even though amounting to remorse, the latter that reversal of moral purpose known as repentance—seem hardly to be sustained by usage. But that *metanoeo* is the fuller and nobler term, expressive of moral actions and issues, is indicated not only by its derivation, but by the greater frequency of its use, by the fact that it is often employed in the impv. ... and by its construction with *apo, ek*" *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 405)

Judas' remorse was deep and strong enough to motivate him to plead with the authorities to stop the crucifixion—a definite change in his moral choice and behavior. Note also the use of this same Greek word in Jesus' parable on repentance, Matt. 21:30.

Chapter 8

EMOTIONAL WHOLENESS

FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Paul offers secrets for emotional wholeness in his epistle to the Ephesians. There he presents practical psychological wisdom for the believer about everyday lifestyle—how Christians should "walk." Paul proffers applied psychology in terms of Christianizing all of life. His concern and stated purpose is to flesh out what it means to "put off the old nature" and to "put on the new nature."

Paul writes about fallen "human nature"—alienated from the life of God. Then he identifies the potential new nature provided to us through Jesus. His words are not abstract or philosophical but eminently practical. Paul's psychotherapy in Ephesians counsels us on how we can put on the new nature, what that new nature looks like in terms of relationships and behavior, and how to tap Christ's vitality. The best way to read this chapter is to have a copy of Ephesians Four in front of you.

De-Paganize: Put Off the Old Nature (Ephesians 4:17-19)

"Gentiles" (Greek: ethnics) describes someone who has life as derived from his biology and nationality but who has no re-birthing experience. Paul mandates that we live in a way that transcends our natural state. He wants us to adopt a supernatural lifestyle. For a Christian to live "as the Gentiles do" is to ignore the fact that Christ expects us to make Changes.

Paul describes Gentile living as life lived apart from the presence and revelation of the Lord. This is how life "naturally" becomes apart from God. It's not a pretty picture for it is one of desperation, mental blindness, and emotional neurosis.

Cognitively, Paul says, Gentiles live in the futility of their minds. Their minds are full of vanity and emptiness. They live with erroneous ideas that permeate their

consciousness, distorted values, and mis-beliefs which leave them disoriented toward reality. Paul begins with one's cognitions because a man knows what he thinks in his heart.

Ontologically our beliefs determine our nature. It was written of Israel,

"They would not listen, but were stubborn ... they despised his statutes, and his covenant ... and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false" (II Kings 17:14-15)

They eventually experienced what their idols were—false and empty. They gave themselves to vanity and that vanity entered into them and made their minds and emotions false. Minds empty of God's revelation lead to darkness. Prior to the advent of Jesus in our lives we are "hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" (Col. 1:21). Hostility and anger arise from our guilt. Our deep conscience knows that we have sinned. We thus hide those things from ourselves and subconsciously choose to be in the dark about our wrongness. Consequently we are motivated to cling to futile reasonings and beliefs to avert the pangs of conscience. Futility dominates life and ushers us into a world of disillusion. Our ignorance of God's plan and love separates us from his kind of life.

"Their wits are beclouded," (New English Bible), "they are strangers to the life that is in God, because ignorance prevails among them, and their minds have grown hard as stone."

Because their minds are not renewed to a God-consciousness such persons eventually experience a mental hardening against God. If they claim to be atheists there is almost always a moral need within them to deny God's presence; seldom is atheism an intellectual problem.

Spiritually, Gentiles are separated or alienated from God's life. They are out-of-touch with vertical reality. This explains why they do not understand where they came from, who created them, whose nature they share, what they are here for, or where they are going. Emotionally, "they have become calloused." They are "dead to all feeling, they have abandoned themselves to vice, and stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desires" (NEB).

On the surface these statements seem contradictory. People who abandon themselves to vice and who stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desires do not sound like people who are calloused—dead to all feeling. Those "greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness" do not seem like those who lack emotion and motivation. They seem to have too much emotion and motivation—in the wrong things. They seem to have lost control over their emotions and have gone off the deep end in hedonistic emotionalism.

Yet Paul says that they have become calloused and are dead to feelings. The Greek word for "past feeling" (KJV) literally means "incapable of feeling pain." (*apelgekotes*: elgeo "to feel pain," hence to become *insensible* to honor and love.) Because they've given up the proper use of emotion they have lost the capacity to authentically feel. Perhaps they misbelieve thinking that only certain positive self-centered emotions are acceptable thus they cut themselves off from feeling by refusing to accept emotional pain. This injures their capacity for feeling.

So they become calloused. With their callousness comes the need for more extremes in order for them to be aroused emotionally. As normal emoting is cut off, to feel anything they have to give themselves more and more to greediness, covetousness, and shamelessness. God designed us to feel but when we cut off the natural and good use of our emotions we have to run to extremes in order to arouse our hardened feelings. This creates what is unnatural.

Simple pleasures no longer satisfy. The joy of a baby's smile, the playfulness of a little boy, the wonder of a starry night, the awe of a sunset, the loveliness of a mother nursing her baby, the delight of a hug, the satisfaction of a job well done—these things no longer create wonderful feelings. Dulled to them, life itself no longer evokes deep emotions. Natural positive emotions of joy, surprise, praise, and love in relation to life's simple pleasures evaporate. The problem goes back to the Gentile mindset.

Gentile living devalues the pangs of conscience, the hurt of sympathy, and the discomfort of self-awareness. Normal emoting gives way to that which is unnatural. We become greedy for the affair, forbidden sex, bigger and better houses, cars, boats, degrees, positions, violence, aggression. Eventually these things become old hat so we have to run to further extremes in order to excite our emotions.

The cycle is a vicious one. "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." (KJV). It happened in ancient Rome on a culture-wide basis (Rom. 1:18-32), and Paul predicted that it would characterize the last times (II Tim. 3:1-5), we might add that it pathetically characterizes many today.

This analysis of Gentile life is a description of psychological and spiritual neurosis. Without Christ we do not function well mentally or emotionally. Without Christ's enriching grace on our emotions we become irrationally emotional and become greedy for things that do not satisfy and calloused with regard to normal emotions.

But the Good-news saves us from such hardness. God works a work within us so that we can feel. It is not the Gospel that leaves us "dead to all feeling" but paganism.

The Gospel turns on our emotions in a healthy and holy way. This is important as many believers still live under the notion that to be spiritual means to be less emotional. As if emotional equates with irrationality and ungodliness. But Paul describes the Gentiles, not the Christians, as "past all feeling."

Behaviorally Gentiles give themselves up "to licentiousness, and become greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness." Shameful immorality is their big turn-on. This "manner of life" is corrupt. It is dying—decaying. In other words, it is self-destructive inasmuch as it is unreal. "Corrupt through deceitful lusts." "Give up living like pagans with their good-for-nothing notions," (4:17 NEB), because there is a much better way.

Experiencing Jesus Christ

"You did not so learn Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:20-24)

In de-paganizing we exorcise the secular spirit—putting off of the old moral and psychological nature. This frees us up so that we can be receptive for a holy infilling with the spirit of Christ. Merely putting off the old nature of erroneous beliefs, emotional callousness, and immorality isn't enough. We must also put on the new nature.

Paul describes this as *a discipleship experience*—a deep learning of Christ and his truths. For the Hebrew mind "learning" was an in-depth experience; to "hear" about Jesus did not mean abstract listening, but the listening of acceptance and responsiveness. Being disciplined to Jesus involves *learning how to live* and how to grow up psychologically into the image of Christ.

Theological truth and psychological truth are not antithetical. One does not belong to the domain of God and the other the domain of man. Cecil Osborne says in *The Art of Understanding Yourself*:

"Many people mistakenly assume that Christianity is concerned solely with spiritual matters. But all truth is divine in origin, whether it be a scientific law, philosophical principle or a biblical statement."

Augustine in the fourth century wrote, "Wheresoever I found truth, there I found my God, truth itself." (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Trans. by John K. Ryan, page 253).

Here Paul declares that "the truth is in Jesus." And inasmuch as Jesus entered totally into the human experience and shared the totality of our psychological nature (Heb. 2:14-18), part of Christ's truth involves "human nature"—how to be *fully human, fully alive*.

In context Paul argues that Christians are to live not like Gentiles, past feelings and confused about life's meaning. We have not "so learned Christ." Jesus wasn't beyond feelings. Joy and humor delighted his heart. Grief and sorrow cut deep grooves into his inner being. Awe and appreciation kept his spirit sweet. Warmth and concern enabled him to build deep emotional relationships with people. Anger and zeal inspired him to vigorous actions. Even loneliness and frustration were not uncommon experiences especially toward the end of his work. Jesus was not given to cool detachment. He knew how to feel and how to keep his feelings in proper balance.

We experience emotional wholeness today by being disciplined to Christ's way of life. We learn how to "put on the new man" and develop psychologically after Christ's image. This kind of learning is discipleship. But discipleship doesn't mean being lectured to; it is more of an apprenticeship. It means entering a relationship with Jesus, becoming his apprentice and learning through identification and imitation his spirit and style. We "learn" Christ by following his style of relating and emoting. As our discipler he provides us a model with which we can identify:

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 4:32, 5:1-2)

We are to adopt Christ's emotions and attitudes as our own: "As God in Christ forgave you ... as Christ loved." By identifying with our discipler we therefore Christianize our emotions and experience the kind of emotional vitality that characterized his life.

Tucked in between the mandate "Put off your old nature ... put on the new nature" is a call for a deep renewal of the mind. "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds." This "spirit" refers to our deep emotionalized predispositions, attitudes, moods, and complexes. Psychologically this statement urges us to go deeper than merely thinking new thoughts. Paul wants us to engage in a total reprogramming of our consciousness, to capture every thought and imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. He wants us to *make new* (renew) our basic assumptions about life, people, and God. He wants our depths to be programmed Christianly. Without our cognitive beliefs being made new there can be no lasting personality transformation. Our "nature" cannot change if there's not a corresponding change in our scripts about life.

Adjust Yourself Relationally

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (Eph. 4:25)

Nearly every emotion is directed at another human being. Even when we are alone, we have people in our minds. It's toward them or with regard to them that we emote. Relationships are therefore highly significant to the subject of our emotions for there's a relational quality in all our emoting.

This explains why our early relationships) with parents and peers effect us so powerfully. Via those relationships we learn our first patterns of feeling—what feelings to feel and how we handle our emotions. Those relationships "disciple" us to emotional styles and attitudes. To experience the new Christian nature, it's necessary that we adjust ourselves relationally in every aspect of life so that our present emotions can develop in a healthy and holy ways.

Paul first urges that truthfulness characterize our relationships so that above all there is emotional honesty. "Speak the truth ... for we are members one of another." Emotional dishonesty hurts emotional development. By repressing our personal truths and not being transparent with others we create emotional disintegration and/or coldness. Paul says, "Put away falsehood, let every one speak the truth." Openness and vulnerability before others opens the door for our relationships to become deep and real. We no longer have to hide. Speaking "the truth in love" is the norm that enables us to build each other up in love (Eph.4:15-16).

"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger ... Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." (Eph. 4:26, 28)

Apart from Christ anger destroys relationships. Yet anger doesn't have to ruin friendships if it's handled aright. Relationships that cannot accept anger and tap into its positive energy are fragile and shallow things—unreal. People in such relationships walk around on egg-shells. They never confront each other in love; they never face issues nor are they able to be straight with each other about conflicts or differences.

In one sense they cannot really love. For where there's love, there is anger. Our relationships, in fact, *need* anger to be authentic. Those with whom we're in relation need not only our warmth and unconditional love, but also our anger. An anger that can and will get mad when something threatens them and will energize our friend to act on our behalf. Without anger we're just fooling ourselves about our love and hiding behind "nice" masks. But anger must be dealt with in a holy way or it becomes destructive.

Paul further says that stealing wounds relationships. It violates the rights of others, demonstrating a lack of respect. Taking what doesn't belong to us may arise from fear, hate, jealousy, or greed and creates emotional poisons between us and others—even if we never steal from them. Such motives are destructive of trust. So instead of competition we need cooperation.

"Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear."
(Eph. 4:29)

Communication is another area that makes or breaks our emotional development. Evil talk must be exorcised from our mouths—sarcasm, negative words, put-downs, coldness, harshness, and filthy talk. In its place grace should adorn our lips so that we build each other up. By looking upon our conversation as a ministry of grace we consider the emotional impact of our words. Relationally, then, we adjust ourselves to the people in our lives in such a way that our behavior, words, and genuineness of approach helps us mature emotionally and cultivate a rich and deep emoting.

Responsibly Own Your Own Emotion

"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil ... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving." (Eph. 4:26-27, 31-32)

Paul urges us to feel our feelings— "be angry ... be tenderhearted." We are not to repress or pretend when it comes to our emotions. We're not even to repress a highly explosive emotion like anger. If we're angry, we are angry. "Be angry"—get in touch with that emotion. Own it as yours in a responsible way. "Be angry but do not sin." Anger is dangerous; it lures us into sinful actions. It energizes us to act rashly, foolishly, and thoughtless. For these reasons we need it under our conscious control.

Paul warns, "Give no opportunity to the devil." The consequences for misusing our anger are serious. If we let the sun go down on our anger, if we keep on nursing our anger, brooding on it, meditating on it, and not releasing it at the end of each day—it soon begins to dominate us. "Do not let sunset find you still nursing it; leave no loop-hole for the devil." (NEB).

Any negative emotion that's perpetuated and held close to our being for an extended period of time habituates that emotion and allows our "dark side" to gain dominance. The demonic is given opportunity. Paul's dictum, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger," provides a significant insight for handling our negative emotions. Negative emotions are not to be lived in. "Be angry," but don't stay angry, use it as a warning signal and as a motivating source of energy, then release it and get

on with life.

Paul ends the paragraph with a statement that sounds contradictory to his opening statement about being angry: "Let all ... anger ... be put away from you." Both statements are equally valid. They complement each other because we need both to get angry and to put the anger away after we've felt and utilized it. Along with the other hostile emotional states (bitterness, wrath, clamor) anger must be put away lest it becomes one's character. This is the responsible use of our emotions. Be honest about them, hear their message, adjust our cognitions, use their energy, and release the state of consciousness the emotion creates within us.

Bathe Your Emotions in Christian Meanings

"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." (Eph. 4:28)

Gentiles walk in selfishness. They "look out for #1," and they use manipulative techniques playing games of One-up-manship. Gentile-thinking tends to look upon other persons as competitors, not brothers or partners. Others are viewed in terms of what they have, their prestige and honor, their importance, and whether they can be used to further our standing or are competitors to be eliminated. This leads to strained relationships. Using the problem of stealing which preeminently exemplifies selfishness, Paul advocates a new way that exorcises our old nature of greed and competitiveness: "Let him labor, doing honest work with his hands."

Paul takes it one step further. He urges that we bathe our work with Christian meaning: "So that he may be able to give to those in need." This is radical thinking that goes far beyond good ethics and honest work. Paul has a vision of a "new humanity" (Eph. 2:15) where people no longer think about ripping others off, manipulating others, or beating others out in competition. Paul dreams of a Christlike people who make it their business to be other-centered.

Frankl's logotherapy says that man has an innate need for meaning and purpose. Logotherapy says that people are psychologically enriched when their ordinary life tasks take on meaning that transcends themselves. We all need a Cause bigger than ourselves to which can devote ourselves. It is therapeutic. It excites us about life. Paul doesn't merely quote the Eighth Commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." Getting rid of evil isn't sufficient. Paul's logotherapy goes further: "The thief must give up stealing, and instead work hard and honestly with his hands, so that he may have something to share with the needy)." (NEB). This provides us a new life-orientation so that subtly but effectively it dissipates the selfishness of our old nature.

Grace People with Words

"No bad language must pass your lips, but only what is good and helpful to the occasion, so that it brings a blessing to those who hear it." (Eph. 4:28 NEB)

Life and death reside in the tongue. Via evil words we plant paganism in our heart and spread the disease. By words of grace we disinfect the poison and minister a sacrament of kindness. The exorcise of filthy communication should be followed by a Christianizing of our everyday talk so that it becomes a ministry of uplifting words. Out of our mouth should flow ideas and images that are good— "to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace) to the hearers" (KJV). Ugly words insult and put people down. They make fun of other's vulnerabilities and rudely trample their souls. Positive and godly words overflow with praise and kindness that turn on the spirit and invigorate dissipated hearts. Holy words that accurately describes reality enrich our relational skills. We then become nurturing people for our gracious words make people feel safe in our presence and accepted even when confronted.

The Greek word for grace (*charin*) is a word pregnant with many depths of meaning. It can signify favor and beauty, splendor and graciousness. It often describes a person of charm. It also describes unconditional love. We speak words of grace when we give support and love to another without accusation.

Some people will have to be educated in gracious words for they have been conditioned against being affirmative, charming, and gracious. For them to straightforwardly say, "I love you," or "I'm sorry," or "You did an excellent job," nearly makes them gag. Such emotional language makes them uncomfortable—it's outside the realm of their comfort zone. Nor do they know how to take a compliment. Their first reaction is to reject the affirmation, to say it was nothing, that anybody could do it, and that it doesn't count.

Keep on Good Terms with God's Spirit

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30)

What connection does this have to all of the psychological and personality mandates surrounding it? Paul lists specific attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that are to be exorcised for they manifest the old nature. He warns that we open the door to the demonic by nursing anger. It's possible therefore that he's urging Christians to a greater awareness of the indwelling Spirit of holiness who's the agent of psychological growth and spiritual development). After all it is the Spirit who transforms us to bear the image of Christ (II Cor.3:17-18); it is the Spirit's power that makes us abound in hope (Rom. 15:13); and it's the Spirit who becomes in us the flowing river of living water (John 7:37-38).

If the "Spirit" described here by Paul is God's Spirit then the implication is that when we misuse our emotions we grieve the Divine Spirit and hinder our development. If, however, the "spirit" in this statement refers to the *holy* disposition that God grants us to replace our prior defiled and secular spirit, then the spirit that's grieves is our new, God-given sense of morality—our *conscience*. In other words, we violate the very gift God grants us and which restores our emotional capacity for optimum living when we don't walk in the loving lifestyle of Christ.

Whether this *spirit* is God's Holy Spirit or his gift of a new spirit of conscience that enables us to be morally and emotionally sensitive (for both ideas are true), the passage urges us to live Christianly and to handle our emotions properly so that we don't hurt this spirit of holiness that enables us to experience the new nature.

Turn On the Light of Morality

"But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light ... Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." (Eph. 5:3-14)

Paul continues his exorcise metaphor in this passage. He says we should remove old pagan "habits" (garments) which reveal and create the old nature. Now he directs our attention to the area of morality.

Shame and guilt are the concomitants of immorality. They ruin emotional vitality. By violating moral reality we damage our conscience and become alienated from the life of God. Paul mentions humor in particular since humor by its nature is a de-valuing phenomena. Humor needs to be Christianized with the joyful spirit of thanksgiving lest it degenerates into jokes with double meanings ("foolish jesting" KJV).

The character of evil is dark and shameful; it causes people to cover-up and become deceitful. The end result of immorality is emotional stupor and blindness. Paul recommends that we turn on the light—to *be* the light—and to let Christ radiate his light all around us. The line of demarcation between moral and immoral ought to be clear and salient. In delivering us from "all impurity" Jesus not only saves us from

"the wrath of God" that comes upon "the sons of disobedience," but he also chases out all the darkness in our soul so that we experience the emotional exuberance of being "light in the Lord."

There is a moral dimension to emotional vitality. Emotional wholeness occurs when our conscience is sensitive to the pain of evil, yet clean in itself. Guilt and shame are cancers in the conscience. They lie at the root of insecurity, anxiety, and inferiority feelings. Accordingly, the scriptures make "a clean conscience" a high priority (I John 3:19-21, Heb. 10:22, I Tim. 1:5).

Live in the Light of Christ

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:15-21)

A sleeping person doesn't need light. Darkness suits the sleepy state well for the sleeper doesn't regard the light. He is unconscious to it. Paul thus sounds the alarm: "Awake, o sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Christians are to wake up to reality, to become fully conscious about life and this moment, and to shake off the stupor of sleep.

"Look carefully" literally means to look all around oneself in every direction (circum-spectly, KJV), to see the whole panorama. This prevents us from rushing in where angels fear to tread. The light Christ gives enables us to "redeem the time." We are to market our moments. With sanctified ingenuity ("wisdom") we are not to dawdle or let life slip through our fingers like water but "buy up" our timely moments (Greek: *kairos*) and makes the most of our time.

Nor do we have to wait for opportunity to come knocking on our door. Paul's shocking phrase "because the days are evil" sheds marvelous light on our mis-belief that evil external circumstances make us depressed or angry. Timely moments are always before us. Neither blah Mondays nor bad experiences prevent "opportunities" (*kairos*). But we must have the wisdom to see them. If we wake up to the Moment and not sleep through the revolution of God's grand plans, our awakened and enlightened consciousness will see it. With a wide-awake sagacity we then experience fullness of life—"Understanding what the will of the Lord is" we become filled with his Spirit.

The ultimate in emotional exuberance is *being filled with the Spirit*. This is written as a mandate. In other words, we must keep on being filled (the force of the present tense). This command skillfully implies that we leak. That's why we need constant renewal of God's spirit. This infilling positively replaces the immoral spirit of the world that we have put off and leads to a magnificent emotional experience. Paul identifies what this experience involves. Being filled with his spirit sets our heart singing, it puts music in our bones, it enables us to see praise in everything, and it even vanishes self-centeredness and inspires a holy cooperation.

The metaphor used is a dangerous one—being filled with wine. Alcoholic intoxication powerfully affects a person in negative and destructive ways. It causes personality changes, inhibitions of morals, and the breakdown of self-control. A person's discernment is reduced in drunkenness; it also depresses a person's whole being. Drunkenness leads to debauchery. The original Greek word means "*un-savingness*" (asotia) and has been translated dissipation, prodigality, and recklessness. Personality falls apart and is dissipated through drunkenness causing a person to become less whole.

Spirit-intoxication on the other hand provides an emotional high that is a divine exhilaration and which brings wholeness. It involves true ecstasy and spiritual joy. It brings a gratitude that deprivations and trials cannot destroy. It gives one an inner strength that can be thankful in the midst of anything!

Beautify All of Your Relationships

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her ... Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church ... 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.' This is a great mystery ..." (Eph. 5:22-32)

Nourishing relationships and emotional vitality go together. There can be no Christianizing the emotions without a simultaneous beautifying of our relationships. As go our relationships so go our feelings—they are that interdependent. Relationships are always pregnant with emotions and emotions are almost always directed at somebody. What therefore desecrates our relations devastates our emotions.

We beautify and make our marriage bond sacred by consecrating every mundane act "as to the Lord." This orientation provides us a perspective that transcends what we see in another that might irritate or peeve. Paul describes the model of Christ's supreme love of self-giving and offers it as a pattern of how we are "to learn Christ."

"Nourishing and cherishing" our life partner means caring preeminently for the other's welfare and potentials. There's no littleness in this kind of love, no possessiveness that uses them. We beautify our marriage by devoting ourselves exclusively to and for the other. This is a great mystery—the depth and wonder of that kind of relationship cannot be narrated. It transcends words.

"Mystery" (*mysterium* in Greek) was translated as *sacramentum* in Latin in the fourth century— sacrament. Marriage was recognized as a visible and outward expression of an inward experience of grace. Eventually this created the idea that marriage is a sacrament in a theological sense. While there are some problems with translating *mysterium sacramentum*, there is some truth in it. The holy relation of husband and wife comprises a holy and wondrous mystery—a visible expression of an unseen reality of grace and love. We beautify our marriages by reverencing our life mates and learning to submit to each other. These actions cultivate the positive feelings of affirmation and security that makes relationships grow.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother ... that it may be well with you ...' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Eph. 6:1-4)

The parent-child relation is another central bond that makes or breaks us emotionally. A child's psychological development depends on his ability to develop attitudes of respect, cooperation, and thoughtfulness. He must develop a "social interest." Yet many children are deficient in these qualities. Some are given to infantilism which they carry into their adult years, others have been traumatized and feel indignation and resentment toward their parents, while others suffer from the lack of correction. They now believe that they ought to be pampered, amused, and given whatever they crave. These problems arise in part from errors in parenting.

Paul beautifully blends the need for firmness with gentleness and demonstrates his wisdom about human nature. He accepts neither the laissez-fair policy of turning kids loose nor the authoritarianism that prevents them from being kids.

Children need a loving atmosphere of unconditional acceptance for who they are and where they are. They need supportive parents who will gently challenge them to develop their gifts. "Do not provoke them to anger" warns against demanding too much as well as against treating kids as idiots who can't do anything. We are to take their emotions seriously and not discount their feelings. Children are provoked to anger if we do not create an atmosphere where they can express their feelings in a healthy way and learn to handle them. If we do not allow them to be angry or frustrated, we teach them to repress and pretend.

A father provokes his child to anger by authoritarianism, by being too logical or too exacting. Fathering demands tenderness and warmth as well as straightforward counseling (admonition). "Do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged," (Col. 3:21) reveals the relation between anger and depression. Freud said that depression was "anger turned inward," Paul in similar fashion cautioned fathers against coming down too hard lest the children become de-motivated.

"Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord ... Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." (Eph. 6:5-9)

We all know how work relationships emotionally effect us. Conflict with the boss frequently spills over into conflict at home, sick-to-the-stomach feelings of indigestion and heartburn, as well as other psychosomatic problems. What do we do when we're stuck with a head-strong, obnoxious, and authoritarian boss or associate?

In a day when most workers could not change jobs, the only alternative was to make the most of the situation and keep Christ centered. Reverence, single-mindedness, and eagerness are always appropriate responses for the Christian. Instead of trying to evade boring tasks, we beautify the most brutal drudgery by doing everything "as to the Lord." This sweetens the spirit. This orientation turns what otherwise would be drudgery into something sacramental. "Rendering service with a good will as to the Lord" is a perspective that redeems our most antagonizing work situations.

These verses give us a new focus in life. They give us a new person "to play our lives to" (Keith Miller). We're able to have *good will* because our focus is singular. It gives us also a new consciousness about justice. Instead of poisoning our minds with statements of unfairness ("It's unfair that I have to work for Hitler!"), we renew our minds. "*Knowing* that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord."

The boss must also think Christianly about his responsibility. A deep spiritual knowing that he is accountable to his Master in heaven helps motivate him to eliminate ruthlessness, arbitrariness, or favoritism. The most radical words spoken to this social issue are: "Do the same things." The bosses must show reverence to those below them, work in singleness of heart, do everything as to the Lord, be earnest and humble. Their social position *per se* gives them no license for meanness.

Paul urges that everybody adopt an attitude of "fear and trembling." This isn't a call

for fawning servility. Paul uses the same phrase elsewhere to describe his own ministry (I Cor. 2:3, II Cor. 7:15). "Fear and trembling" suggests meekness and diffidence that treats people reverently.

This is revolutionary. Slave and master are to own their own emotions, adjust their thinking and behaving, and thereby turn even their work relations into things of beauty. The healing word of the gospel begins a social revolution quietly in the hearts of men and women. "Forbear threatening" mandates the boss not to exercise his powers of manipulation or to use his authority selfishly.

Even more revolutionary, the slaves are addressed as they have never been addressed. *They are treated as if they do have a choice in the matter.* That flew in the face of first century cultural thinking. Paul did not remind the slaves of their place. He spoke to them as free men and women with the power of choice. He pleaded with them to submit voluntarily out of loyalty to Christ. Most of them probably (mis)believed that because they were slaves they had no choice in life, that fate was against them, that they had to submit, and that life was unfair. Paul asks them to obey not because they are slaves but because they want to make the most of their situation in order to please Jesus. In other words, he gives them a brand new motive—one that transcends their earthly situation.

Resources for Emotional Energy

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor ... Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness..." (Eph. 6:10-20)

God's panoply provides us psychological resources as well as spiritual ones. Life is a holy war. We forge our own weapons but must rely on God's arsenal. The first piece of gear mentioned is the girdling belt of truth. It covers our *loins*—the source of our emotions. "Truth" here refers to personal truth (integrity of character and sincerity), which is derived from the truth of the Gospel. Integrity braces us for the battles of life and gives us confidence, resoluteness of soul, and solid convictions. With it we have nothing to fear for there are no lies or fraud within us.

The next piece of armor for our emotional wholeness is the breastplate that covers our vital organs and gives protection to our thinking and emoting regions (heart and bowels). What provides our defense and bulwark against hostile missiles is not our righteousness but the gift of his righteousness that secures us. Now we can boldly

venture into life for we are safeguarded by his impregnable cover. E.K. Simpson with F.F. Bruce write:

"The Epistle to the Romans settles the question of what it is that inspires the Christian trooper with inextinguishable confidence and unflinching fortitude. His impenetrable mail consists of a righteousness enthroned at God's right hand in the person of His well-beloved Son" (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 147)

Other parts of the panoply that effects our emotions in the conflict include the footgear and the helmet. The footgear of the leather shoe enables us to move out with courage. With our feet shod with the good-news we have no Achilles' heel to worry about. The helmet of salvation is our hope which keeps our eyes focused on what is above and beyond us. We are not defenseless emotionally for the conflicts we must fight but have plentiful resources in God's panoply.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

At the heart of the emotional vitality is "putting on the new nature." To tap this psychological dynamic we must: exorcise pagan thinking and emoting, learn Christ, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, relate emotionally to others with integrity, helpfulness, and grace, own up to our own emotions, bathe our lives with Christian meaning, grace people with our words, turn on the light of morality, live in Christ's life, turn all of our relationships into things of beauty, and utilize the energy-resources for spiritual and emotional stability with God's armor.

He who designed our inward parts knows the principles that make us function and those principles for psychological health have been designed into the very framework of the Christian faith— for "the truth is in Jesus."

Chapter 9

FEELINGS I HAVE

ABOUT MYSELF

Irenaeus wrote in the second century that "The glory of God is a man fully alive." It is also true that when a man feels fully alive he experiences himself as a reflection of God's glory. Feeling fully alive entails experiencing glorious feelings of splendor:

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!" (Psalm 57:7)

The Hebrew text literally reads, "Awake, my glory!" *Kabod* is Hebrew for glory and splendor. Surprisingly it's sometimes used in the scriptures to refer to our psychological nature designating our heart, soul, and mind.

"I bless the Lord who gives me counsel ... I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul (*kabod*) rejoices ..." (Psalm 16:7-9)

Most of us, however, do not have such feelings of glory with regard to ourselves. We feel inferior and inadequate, not glorious. We struggle with feelings of guilt and shame. We experience deep doubts about our worth and are motivated by the fear that we will be nobodies. We consequently strive to become *Somebodies*. This striving shows up in our greed to possess things so that we become *Somebodies* and in our arrogating to ourselves qualities that we believe will make us *Somebodies*.

Deep within us is *a drive for dignity*, yet nothing in this world can satisfy the drive. Though we are by nature dignity-seekers, we find our lives plagued with feelings lacking glory: worthlessness, disgust, dislike, contempt, sadness, and anger. These

feelings we have about ourselves make us feel miserable and undermine any possibility of emotional vitality. For some these feelings demotivate and for others they push toward self-destruction. When our central feelings are bad feelings we cannot sense any self-celebration, the sense that "It's good to be me!" "I'm glad God has made me who I am!" Yet that is the emotional sense of the Psalmist who felt like awaking his inmost self with music and shouting: "Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn!"

Without positive self-image feelings, the emotions of self-esteem, self-appreciation, joy, respect, and love for self, there can be no emotional wholeness. Our central feelings about ourselves influence all of our other feelings and thoughts, relationships and behaviors.

Self-image feelings are pivotal. And they must be dealt with. This means that our thinking, valuing, and emoting about "who we are," "what we can do," and "what we are worth," affects and determines all of our other thoughts, values, decisions, and emotions. If we dislike ourselves, feel contempt toward ourselves—we will inevitably throw a kink in all of our emotions. Our contempt will be projected onto others, events, and even God. It will permeate our spirit and bleed-over into everything we do and say. With self-depreciation at the center of our being there can be no celebration of life. The cornerstone of all mental and emotional well being is a healthy sense of self-esteem along with a generous dose of self-appreciation, confidence, and optimism. But where do such qualities and feelings come from? What prevents such attitudes from degenerating into unhealthy pride?

The Common Cold of Psychological Problems

Low self-esteem has been called the common cold of psychological problems. Negative self-image feelings inflict on us existential pain, it calls our very being) into question. Nathaniel Brandon writes,

"To the extent that we lack self-esteem, we will feel driven to fake it, to create the illusion of it, to condemn ourselves to chronic psychological fraud." (*The Psychology of Self-Esteem*)

John Powell writes,

"Nothing is more psychologically fatal to man than to lose his sense of personal worth." (*Why am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*)

H.H. Farmer writes,

"I suspect that a very high proportion of individuals today are oppressed by a sense of their personal insignificance."

Alfred Alder built his school of Individual Psychology around this central concept of inferiority feelings, identifying many of its expressions and sources.

"To be a human being means to feel oneself inferior. All human beings have this sense of inferiority, which in turn, influences all their deeds, and is at the bottom of all human striving." "No human being can long tolerate a feeling of inferiority without being thrown into a state of psychic tension."

Theologically, the doctrine of creation provides us insight into this deep, desperate, and irrepressible drive for self-value. Our drive for dignity and glory arises from the fact that *we have been created in God's image*. We have been designed to share in "the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Dignity is our birthright. Without it we become something less than human. Our spiritual makeup hungers for significance.

"Thou hast made (man) little less than God (*'elohim*) and dost crown him with glory (*kabod*) and honor." (Psalm 8:5)

"No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church." (Eph. 5:29)

Our instinct for self-esteem arises within because we are image-bearers of God. We cannot long endure negative self-image feelings without disastrous results. Our "natural" identity isn't a fallen one but a glorious and self-respecting one.

Self-respect and self-care, in fact, are assumed by the scriptures as normative. We nourish and care for our own flesh, says Paul describing human nature in its optimal state of health. This doesn't mean that we do not sometimes come to hate our flesh, let it go, or neurotically inflict ourselves as the possessed man who called himself Legions (Mark 5:1-5). Paul speaks rather about the basic design of the human self, one that nourishes and cherishes itself, "as Christ does the church." There is nothing inherently wrong with self-respect, self-affirmation, or self-love if it is a healthy and holy appreciation of one's Self as a reflection of God's handiwork. It is self-contempt that is not normal; it is self-depreciation that is not healthy.

I once saw a cartoon in a doctor's office that illustrates. The artist sketched a patient sitting before a large executive desk awaiting his doctor's analysis. Before the doctor are several reports. "Well, how am I, Doc?" the man inquires nervously. "This is a serious case," the doctor solemnly announces, "I'm afraid that you are allergic to yourself."

Many people act and feel as if they were allergic to themselves. They know that something is irritating and diseased in their life and they feel that it is their self. The self-image they carry about is loaded with negative feelings. They feel awful about themselves and those awful feelings motivates them to act in awful ways. When a person cannot stand himself, he tends to discount his good parts and projects his contempt onto others. He even (mis)believes that they, too, hate and despise him. This then spills over into his relationships. When one feels inadequate and ugly inside,

the person will view the world and other people negatively. He will assume that others do not really want to be around him, that deep down they despise him, and that behind his back they are laughing at him.

"Any person who hates himself, has, in a very real sense, disqualified himself from an experience of God." (*Your God is Too White*, Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm)

Negative self-image feelings motivate us to project our feelings of rejection and dislike ultimately unto God. "How can a good God love such a worthless bum like me?" Low self-esteem and its attendant feelings is not only the common cold of psychological problems, but also a deep and devastating disease that wounds the soul.

Psychologically negative self-image thoughts and feelings create all kinds of havoc. They stand at the root of most repression because we are unable to accept some aspect of ourselves. Defense and escape mechanisms function as a kind of self-salvation so that we can escape from reality or defend ourselves against the ugly truth. In addition to projection, there is rationalization, reaction formation (acting the opposite way to one's true feelings as in acting boastful or superior when one actually feels inferior or insecure), cynicism, and denial. Sometimes people escape into fantasy, drugs, alcohol, work, or gambling to evade their negative self-image feelings.

Behaviorally these emotions have the effect of motivating people to become somebodies by attaining power, money, position, rank, fame, or achievement. These myths almost always depend on achieving something, that is, on earning the respect of others. The irrational logic is that if we look good in their eyes then we have permission to look good in our own eyes. The trouble with this is that it makes our self-esteem perpetually contingent upon winning the favor and approval of others—and that puts us on a legalistic treadmill that creates forces which tempt us to compromise our integrity and become desperate for their approval of others.

As *dignity-bearers*, we cannot bear to feel insignificant or inadequate. Our deep intrinsic drive for dignity cannot be turned off. If we cannot find it legitimately, we're drive to find it illegitimately. If we cannot attain it by the pseudo-methods of ownership, fame, or achievement, we spiritually degenerate—we become contemptful, cynical, hateful, irrational, and destructive.

Our self-image feelings are central which means that when they are diseased with guilt and shame, all of life deteriorates. Conversely, when we have a holy sense of self-respect, even the most devastating events of life can be handled with dignity and optimism. A strong positive consciousness about ourselves gives us a center of strength from which to work, a central core that makes us emotionally alive.

Why Do We Struggle with such Negative Feelings?

Underlying our low self-esteem and self-image are misbeliefs. Misbeliefs fill our minds with screwy ideas and images and create negative feelings. Chief among these misbeliefs is the one that posits worth on achievements. It dares to assert that our value as a human being is dependent, conditional, and must be earned. This secular mindset afflicts many Christians even though they intellectually believe that they are image-bearers of the divine. The trouble lies in our Christian thinking—it is abstract and surface while our deep predispositions believe in conditional self-esteem.

We (mis)believe that we have to *do* something, *be* something, *possess* something, *attain* something, *create* something in order to be important or loved. This conditional concept arises from our culturalization and comprises the Great Cultural Myth that deceives our minds. It is the Gospel of Good Looks, Powerful Body, Great Knowledge, Degrees, Popularity, Fame, Social Importance, Financial Security, and/or Power. These are the things we've been told will endow us with importance. These gods give us our worth and consequently good feelings. It is to these things that we give our devotion: soul, body, and mind.

The media tactlessly dramatizes this myth by continually preaching that we must measure up to its prefabricated ideal. We're told that we are *nobodies* without the right deodorant, shampoo, or car. Pimples, bad breath, B.O., and dandruff are the things that make us unacceptable and friendless. To feel good about oneself and to be recognized in other's eyes as *a real somebody*, we must wear the "in" styles, shop at the expensive stores, and conform to fads.

Over and over the message comes that we are Not-Ok as we are, that our worth is not a given in our spiritual nature, that there is no special glory in being a spiritual being reflecting God's image, and that we had better measure up to the opinion of others if we want to have any self-respect. This last factor is subversive for healthy psychological functioning. For when we become dependent on what people think it becomes *an approval addiction*. All of us are susceptible to this misbelief since it is a cultural myth that's pounded into us from our earliest learning. We learn early to depend on parents, teachers, and peers and to highly value their opinion of us.

Our subconscious sense of self and our self-worth grew out of trying to please people and make them think well of us. But what might have been appropriate at two years of age isn't appropriate twenty years later. To the extent then that we live to earn other's approval, to that extent we are infantile in our thinking about our innate worth.

"When they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." (II Cor. 10:12)

"Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and of no repute?" (I Sam. 18:23 David)

Our negative feelings with respect to our inner self springs partially from our culturalization. From the first day we are conditioned to experience life as competitive and conditional. We learned that we are Not-Ok as we are and that Okness comes by achieving good grades, scholastic honors, athletic conquests, and social acceptance. Few persons or situations grant us the grace of being ourselves or accepting ourselves unconditionally. Seldom are we affirmed for our innate worth.

During adolescence the pressure for conformity is at its highest. At the same time our drive for independence and autonomy arises creating more jarring conflict. We grow up striving to be valued for ourselves yet seldom experiencing it. In our drive to please people, to be Ok in their eyes, we become blind to our true nature and dignity.

Life experiences comprise another cause for negative self-image feelings. We feel bad about ourselves due to failures, rejections, ridicule, teasing, embarrassments, and punishments. When working with groups I frequently ask people to list all of the things that trigger low self-esteem in them. Each person in the group takes turn sharing his list of painful low self-esteem triggers.

The week I wrote this chapter I did the exercise with a group of teens in a local church. Two boys "passed" when it came their turn. They said they couldn't think of anything that made them feel inadequate. Afterwards one of them approached me privately. He wanted to tell me what he could not tell the group. He said there were several things that made him feel inadequate but he couldn't admit them to his friends in the group.

We explored his fear and it became evident that two motivations prevented him from telling the group. First, he had been laughed at a lot when he was younger and had vowed that he would never be laughed at again. That decision had become such a powerful predisposition within him that at sixteen he found it almost impossible to be open about any weakness. Second, during the past year he had attained the position of a "jock" at school and feared that sharing his reality with his Christian friends would ruin his newly found role.

Alder identified organ inferiority (real or imagined inferiorities in one's body), spoiling and neglecting, and scolding as four central early life experiences that set people up for feelings of inadequacy. Some might add such experiences as physical abuse, sexual assaults, and other traumatizing experiences.

So at an age when we lacked the intellectual acumen to understand what's happening or why, we begin believing that we must be worthless, bad, or unacceptable. Bad things happen to us and we misread them as omens that call our worth into question. It's not the experiences *per se* then that causes our terrible feelings, but *our*

perspectives and beliefs about those happenings. Our experience of pain serves as the precipitating trigger and motivation. It is our "reckoning in our soul" and believing the lie that we are inferior that creates the bad feelings.

Finally, the phenomenon of guilt play a major role in low self-esteem. Both true guilt and pseudo-guilt will do it; accurate moral evaluation of right and wrong triggers feelings of shame, judgment, and self-depreciation, and so do inaccurate evaluations of morality.

It's important to *distinguish guilt from guilt feelings.* Though they are not the same, they are often confused. True guilt is an objective fact. It refers to someone doing something wrong—violating a law and becoming culpable before the law. It may be intentional or accidental; it may be in wickedness of the heart or from a good heart that misunderstands the law.

The man charged with killing another man is either guilty or not guilty. He killed him or he did not. He may have done it intentionally because he was angry or bitter, or accidentally because an axe head flew off when he was cutting timber. He may be aware of his responsibility or he may not. He may feel miserable about it or he may have no sense of wrong-doing.

The man who accidentally slides into a pedestrian during an ice storm and kills him will be charged with manslaughter. The external fact is that he ran a man down and killed him. But if the pedestrian was going against a red light, in the middle of a dark stormy night in dark clothes, then it was more his fault than the driver's. If the driver was neither drinking nor intending to kill, the state will not hold him responsible. He may be guilty of the deed he is not held as guilty before the eyes of the state.

But that same man's conscience may not let him off so easily. It may be tormented within for months. If he has a tender conscience and doesn't work through his guilt feelings he may live under a sense of condemnation for years and eventually develop an unconscious need to punish himself. Though a free man his moral feelings will accuse him of stupidity, recklessness, and murder.

Feelings of guilt are given to us in order that we might be motivated to be moral and live up to our values. Feeling convicted alerts us to the fact that we've violated important values. A mind accurately attuned to moral questions enables our conscience to operate as an alarm system. It goes off when something is wrong. But it can be improperly "set" so that it responds to things that are not wrong. An over-sensitive conscience goes off at the slightest imperfection while a conscience-hardened person seldom feels any tinge of conscience.

Guilt feelings *per se* are not ultimate indicators of morality, they only reflect our values. Some early Christians believed that eating of meats offered to idols was sinful. They could not eat such meats without feeling condemned. Their feelings were real, but the guilt was not (Rom. 14).

We all experience true guilt. Because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), we have failed to experience this "glory" that we are created for. Many of our horrible self-image feelings result from our guilt. We have thought, desired, and/or acted in ways that violate God and our nature. Our moral feelings rise to testify against us. They convict us, prick us and give us a sense of being a fugitive from justice. We have a sense of this "moral imperative" within and yet none of us can long live under a sense of judgment. We are image-bearers with a capacity for knowing good and evil about ourselves and have a built-in drive for wanting to know good about ourselves. It pains us to know evil.

Some secular psychologists deride Christian morality tend to lump all guilt into one category: pseudo-guilt. For them genuine guilt is a nonexistent reality. They don't want to deal with "morality" as such. Yet they have their own definitions of "good and evil." So while they don't care about divorce, affairs, live-in arrangements, etc. they do eventually draw a moral line against some things—child abuse, rape, murder.

Our spiritual capacity to cognize values and morals enables us to discern good and evil. Though our "knowing" of guilt against ourselves violates our very being and causes us to deny it, repress it, or project it, there is no ultimate hiding from it. Our subconscious conscience demands that evil be punished. It's moral imperative demands evil be either forgiven or punished.

Dimensions of Self-Image

SIGNIFICANCE	—	Personal	— Am I Important?	— Self Worth
SECURITY	—	Social	— Do I have Friends?	— S e n s e o f Belonging
COMPETENCE	—	Task	— What can I Do or Contribute?	— Self-Confidence
WORTH	—	Spiritual	— Am I Acceptable?	— Conscience

The chart indicates that self-image is a general concept and includes many different facets or dimensions.

Self-Significance:

Am I Important? Is there any meaning in life? Where am I going in life? This facet the self focus on what we perceive to be life's purpose and in what direction we are going. They give us an inward feeling of assurance and meaning. The meanings we attribute to life and our place in it greatly affects our self-image. It either validates us and makes us feel important or it invalidates us and triggers desperate feelings of emptiness.

Without a sense of self-significance all of life takes on a feel of futility and despair. If we are no more than self-conscious blobs of dirt that chanced into consciousness only to be extinguished by death, if the things which mean most to us in life (truth, love, beauty, honesty, openness, etc.) are illusionary and going nowhere -- then "Vanity of vanities! All is Vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). But if life is going somewhere and we do have significance beyond our days "under the sun," then everything is meaningful. Our self-significance arises from our vocation and religion. It's reflected in what we do with ourselves when we don't have "anything to do." It becomes extremely critical in times of unemployment and retirement.

Self-Security:

Do others love me? Will they prove true to me and not reject me? Will they show the same integrity and faithfulness that I invest in them? Do I have the capacity for being a companion to a life mate and a friend to others? The security we feel in relation to others determines our social life and determines either satisfies or fails to satisfy our deep hunger for being accepted, loved, appreciated, needed, and a part of something. It also determines our identity for as our self-concept arose in community with others, so it continues to be powerfully affected by our relationships. Our social skills are thus intricately related to our emotions and identity.

Self-Confidence:

What can I do? What skills, talents, gifts, and capacities do I have? What can I contribute? This task dimension of our self-image gives us a feeling of confidence in ourselves as we become more and more proficient in certain areas. Aptitude plus training gives us a sense of competency, challenge, adventure, fulfillment, and creativity. These feelings, in turn, give us a sense that life is exciting and good. We don't feel so helpless, incompetent, or inadequate because we have some field of interest that we have "stirred up our gift" and can boast in.

Self-Worth:

What is my "ultimate standing" with the ground of all being—God? Does he accept me? This is the existential dimension that deals with those questions of our existence: origin, identity, destiny, nature. These are the religious concerns and satisfy or frustrate our God-given drive for transcendence and self-actualization. It deals with our relation with good and evil, of worth and value, as well as with our relation with Him who is in, through, and beyond all things.

Renewing Consciousness about Human Worth

In transforming our negative self-image feelings there must be a rational and biblical understanding of ourselves—that *we are image-bearers of God*. We reflect his image. In a mysterious yet wondrous way we have been made "a little lower than God" himself.

Human nature is *not* fundamentally depraved. *Human nature is fundamentally God-like*. God did not originally design us as worms in spite of the song that says "for such a worm as I." Instead of a "worm theology" scripture presents a "made in the image of God" theology and argues from that fact that all should be treated with respect (Jas. 3:9). Our origin stems from God's creative urge to create beings like himself (Gen. 1:26-27,31). This means that each and every human being is an unique and unrepeatable miracle, a spiritual being loaded with potential. We have been wonderfully and fearfully made which means that there are mysterious depths and dimensions of human potentiality and personality that have yet to be tapped (Psa. 139:13-16).

Who am I? Who are you? We are all sons and daughters of God—beings made for another world (Acts 17:25,28). Even "pagans," as the context of Acts Seventeen indicates, are made in God's image. And this in spite of their intellectual misunderstandings and moral failings. Not even sin destroys our basic God created "nature." One day man the sinner will judge the sinless angels (whatever that means; I Cor. 6:2). We excel angels because it is unto redeemed human beings that the world to come has been committed (Heb. 2:5-18).

These truths serve as *a foundation for a healthy sense of self-esteem*. Christian theology says we reflect God's nature. This informs us that we are each "original creations" and derive our being from God. Our worth is thus *a given*. It does not have to be earned, achieved, proved, or bought. It exists by virtue of who created us and what he created us. God's masterpiece in creation which he celebrated affirming it was very good was beings made of clay who were in their essence like him! "Self-denial" therefore cannot mean that we despise God's original creation. What we are by Creation) we are to affirm, value, and thank God for. Even after the "fall"

scripture continued praising man's innate worth and identity. By "nature" we are still the sons of God (Psa. 82:6, John 10:34).

To incorporate this image-elevating truth into our deepest being, we must open our minds to these scriptures, allowing them to infiltrate us so that we come to "deeply know" that our worth is a given. We must reflect on them and let them enter into us. We need to meditate on them so that they reprogram our subconscious.

God equipped us with powers of imagination so that we can learn to see these revitalizing truths. Be creative in your imagining. Note the creativity that C.S. Lewis applied to this idea in his mind-teasing story of the next life (*The Great Divorce*). The spirit creatures from heaven were Bright Beings, transparent, and gigantic. The pitiful beings on the bus ride from hell to the land inbetween were but vapors of persons who found the grass in the inbetween land very painful to walk upon and were blinded by the brilliance of the spirit beings.

By walking into some Jesus' encounter stories we can experience Jesus meeting individuals who felt like nobodies and experience how he worthed them (John 4:1-20, Luke 15:11-32, Luke 19:1-10). Their rendezvous can become ours as we let the biblical truth help us see our real identity, origin, and destiny.

In both counseling and in groups I encourage people to study such verses and then translate them into "I am..." statements. For instance, Genesis 1:26-27,31 can be translated and personalized as: "I am God's unique unrepeatable miracle!" Or, "I am an image-bearer of the Heavenly Father." A familiar verse like John 3:16 can be translated into its significance for self-esteem by writing, "I am a loved and valued person. God so loved me that he gave his only begotten son for me. Regardless of what others may think; He loves me supremely!" By translating verses into quotable affirmations and using them to tell ourselves the truth we take a big step toward healthy self-esteem.

Does that language strikes you as strange? Do you feel uncomfortable reading it? Do you fear that if you talked that way about yourself that you will become an egotist full of pride? Consider then John Powell's words.

"Conditioned as we are by our culture, we seem to be emotionally allergic to the very vocabulary of the love of the self. The thought of celebrating our own unique goodness seems like a very distant and alien thought." (*The Secret of Staying in Love*, p. 14)

The truth of the gospel itself is that we are special. You are important! You are a reflection of God. Your worth stems from your creator. God's verdict about you is that you are worthwhile. The good-news is the incredible message that even when

we were ungodly and antagonistic to God— he unconditionally loved us (Rom. 5:5-8).

Carl R. Rogers writes,

"If I were to search for the central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them, it is that in the majority of cases they despise themselves, regarding themselves as worthless and unlovable."

It is because we regard ourselves in that way that we fall into pride, selfishness, arrogance, narcissism, and self-idolatry. Such things are but defenses, cover-ups. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. emphasizes that narcissistic pride does not result from a healthy sense of self-esteem, self-affirmation, and self-celebration, but from the lack of these things.

"Any view of man which regards pride, selfishness, self-love, or self-idolatry as the major cause of man's problems misses the crucial fact that these are often symptoms of deeper causes -- anxiety, self-hatred, inner conflict, and blocked growth. Pride is a symptom-level defense against these unbearably painful feelings."

"Narcissistic pride arises from anxiety and self-rejection but it becomes a malignant symptom which produces greater anxiety and self-rejection. A vicious cycle is thus established." (*Mental Health Through Christian Community*, pp. 52-53)

The gospel is Good-news to our despairing feelings of worthlessness. It comes and amazes us with God's love which values us in spite of our sin, making all things new. The gospel surprises us because though we are guilty God our judge becomes God our vindicator. What God had demanded of us in the law and which we could never satisfy, he now provides through Christ. This is the Gospel. Reconciliation means we have a new life script, that we are Ok with God, under no condemnation, and have been created afresh so that all things can become new (II Cor. 5:17, Rom. 8:1).

Because of these redemptive truths we can celebrate ourselves. We belong to the Father of spirits. We are somebodies! I can affirm that I am forgiven, cleansed, reconciled, and made new. Christian theology speaks directly to our self-image telling us that we are a "second creation" made anew in God's image (Col. 3:10). What is more, we are not only loved persons but constantly being filled up with God's love (Rom. 5:5). It's an ongoing process. God graces us in Christ giving us great feelings about ourselves for we are loved for ourselves. We can now pass those feelings on to others. God doesn't want a bunch of groveling, sniffing, apologizing, and self-despising people who sing about themselves being worms. He wants a family of sons and daughters who have been elevated to the glory they had always fallen short of (Heb. 2:10, I John 3:1-3).

Nor does God want us apologetic about our abilities. Through creation and redemption, our Father endows each of us with various capacities and gifts. He encourages us to "stir up" those gifts so that we can be a blessing to others. He equips us for special purposes in life. He places us in the Body as it pleases him so that what we have is needed. He wants us to be useful as we develop our capacities.

Many people lack a positive and holy sense of their own value because the doctrine of sin has been abused. "Original sin" is emphasized to the exclusion of original righteousness). "God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices." (Eccl. 7:29). Before man "fell" his human nature was upright or righteous. A "fall" has occurred, a fall that even involves the world (Rom. 8:17-25). But man's *imago dei* (image of God) has not been eradicated. Our spiritual nature may be tainted in every part by sin, but has by no means been exterminated.

Emotions follow cognitions as night follows day so as we restructure our thinking about our worth and learn to accept God's verdict we begin feeling the esteem he gives us. We are enabled to celebrate ourselves and to hold our heads high knowing who we are. Grace provides the dignity our nature craves. *This grace* identity provides us a center of strength from which we can live and in which we can stand regardless of what life throws at us. With a deep sense of knowing that we are loved persons we can even stand against rejection, deprivation, and the forces of hell (Rom. 8:35-39). With this sense of dignity we can graciously accept the ill-will of others, love them in spite of their meanness, affirm them, and grace them as God did with us when we were ungodly. A holy sense of self-esteem is that powerful and motivating.

Focusing on Your Real Identity

Jesus' first temptation questioned his self-image. The Spirit led him to the opposing antagonist who kept throwing his identity back in his face, "If you are the Son of God" (Matt. 4:3-6). Hell threw everything it could at Jesus in that wilderness. Hell tempted him to doubt God's verdict); "You are my beloved Son."

The accuser assailed him when doubts and questions. He tried to get him to demonstrate his sonship. But Jesus refused. He focused on the reality of God's declaration. As far as he was concerned, the matter was settled. Though he was famished and fatigued, he held on to God's word tenaciously. He refused to let his negative emotions call into question the higher reality of God's declaration.

In like manner negative experiences tempt us to question our worth and identity as God's sons and daughters. That's when we need to stay focused bringing back to our consciousness those thoughts, beliefs, and images that reinforce God's verdict about our identity. Refuse to buy into any self-esteem lie. Come against all such lies with God's liberating truths. Negative experiences and emotions will inevitably come our

way. Let them. Let them go just as easily without making a big deal about them. They do not have to call our identity into question.

"Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

Every person has an inner essence overlaid with secondary and tertiary characteristics. Our primary characteristic or "nature" is our *Imago Dei*; we are image bearers of God. From this glorious fact arises the sacredness of all human life.

Then comes the secondary characteristics which distinguish us from each other. One of the exercises I enjoy leading in Life Affirmation Seminars on Self-Esteem is an Identity Search. The exercise can be quite frustrating. I ask everyone to describe himself or herself in ten or twenty words. Upon completion, we examine our lists examining them first for the peripheral identification marks—hair color, job, degrees, clothes, possessions, ranks, etc. These peripheral characteristics partly determine who we are, but are not at the essence of our "being." We can lose our job, get a new mate, dye our hair, and/or have our face lifted and without losing our identity. We are still essentially the same.

We then look for secondary characteristics. Psychological, moral, emotional, temperamental characteristics—kindness, warmth, selfishness, stubbornness, sensitive, intelligence, transparency, secretive, talkative, thoughtful, good hearted, etc. These are the qualities that comprise our psychological and behavioral identity, qualities that are also in a state of flux but which change at a slower rate. When these characteristics change, we become different persons. We can grow out of our selfishness for example and become generous and caring.

HUMAN NATURE

Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Image-bearer	Kind	Male
Spiritual Being	Caring	5'10" in height
Psychic capacities (will, intelligence, reason, emotion)	Thoughtful	Caucasian
Conscientious	Shy	Own a master card
Moral Being	Studious	Drives a Pontiac
God's Child	Decisive	Rents an apartment
God's Creature	Impetuous	Father to a child
God's Heir	Oriented toward Power	

"Who am I?" is a question with many dimensions. Each of us have many different selves. Relative to the third category the gospel urges us to accept who and what we are) in our social context:

"Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freeman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ ... So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God." (I Cor. 7:21-24)

The gospel addresses the second category providing us the psychological profile of Jesus as the model of an integrated and emotionally healthy person. His spirit is a spirit full of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. These are the qualities that make for a positive self-confidence. The good-news speaks to the first category by giving us a definition of our true "nature" and mediates to us God's gift of a reconciled relationship (Rom. 5:17).

Differences between Self-Esteem — Self-Confidence

Self-Confidence

Based on abilities
 Earned and developed
 Temporal, transitory
 Comes from within
 Circumstantial
 Sense of your effectiveness
 Cultural
 Concerns what you do

—

Self-Esteem

Based on God's Word
 Given and unearned
 Permanent, enduring
 Comes from without
 Cosmic, universal
 Sense of our essential self
 Transcultural
 What you are

Though speakers and writers frequently employ self-confidence and self-esteem interchangeably, they are not the same. Self-confidence refers to those good positive feelings that we have about ourselves due to our achievements, gifts, success, and effectiveness. We are *confident* in what we are *doing*.

We all begin life with absolutely no self-confidence. We are totally and absolutely dependent and can do nothing. Then out of that incompetence we develop, inner abilities and aptitudes arise, and we learn how to effectively adapt to our world. We discover God-given gifts and as they unfold in our developing life we develop

independence, self-awareness, social and work skills. These are the things that feed self-confidence. We become competent persons able to not only cope with life, but master various aspects of it.

"If any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each man will have to bear his own load."
(Gal. 6:3-5)

If I thought of myself as *a somebody* (a "something") when it comes to music, mechanics, or art— I would be deceiving myself. In those areas, I am a "nothing." I have almost no aptitude for music, my understanding is almost nil in mechanics, and my experience in art has been filled with rejection, frustration, and heart-break.

Paul recommends that each of us prove ourselves. We are to discover and test ourselves for our areas of ability, interest, and aptitude. "Let each man test his own work." Then we can become somebodies. "Then his reason to boast will be in himself alone"—we will feel confident and competent in our areas of giftedness and be able to take pride in our achievements. We won't have to be dependent on others for confidence. "My self-confidence rests in his music talent, her ability to organize things, my group's ability to get things done." Taking pride in things external to ourselves creates a pseudo-confidence. It makes us anxious to arrogate to ourselves the qualities of others since we feel such an inner lack in ourselves.

By developing self-confidence in our own skills we can "boast" (exult) in our own giftedness. *Feeling good* about our competency in music, public speaking, understanding of physics, working with a computer, artistic ability is a valid experience. Paul recommends it! Such pride is not the evil pride of arrogating to ourselves qualities we do not have or the pride of living independent of awareness that it is God who has so gifted us. Our "natural endowments" are God's gifts and should be stirred up for his honor.

Yet these good feelings of competency should not become the basis for our self-esteem. Our worth as a human being does not rest upon our productiveness, thank God. Our worth is a given. It results from *oufmago Dei*. Even when we are totally dependent upon others, as when we entered the world, when others clothed us, fed us, nursed us, and even wiped our behinds, we had all the worth that the most skilled and productive person has ever had.

Imagine self-esteem as a constant line that never fluctuates. It was 100% the day we made our debut into the world and it holds at that level to the day of our death. It is total and permanent. That's because it stems from the value that God attributes to us as his proteges.

Our self-confidence is a different story. It begins at 0% progressing upward throughout life with fluctuations due to sicknesses, accidents, failures, life experiences, and beliefs. Then in the last years of life it begins dropping rapidly. At death, we leave the world with the same amount of self-confidence that we began life with—none.

"No man has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death; there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it." (Eccl. 8:8)

100 Self-Esteem Line

50 Self-Confidence Line

0 _____
Birth

"By the grace given to me I bid every one of you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith, which God has assigned him." (Rom. 12:3)

Proper evaluation of ourselves and our gifts enable us to handle ourselves and abilities with more realism. That increases our effectiveness in life. What the scriptures identify as stirring up our gifts, psychologists call *compensation*. We compensate for our weak and inadequate areas by investing more of our energies and time into those areas in which we have aptitude and interest. This focusing on our forte prevents us from getting involved in those things at which we are "no good" and which only frustrate us. Nothing fails like failure—it demotivates, depresses, and takes the spirit out of a person. That's why we need to stir up our gifts to excel in our forte and experience self-actualization through that gift, actualizing the potential God put into us.

"What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (I Cor. 4:7)

What we are by creation is God's gift to us. For those talents and aptitudes we should praise him and we do that by making the most of them. It's important in the process that we keep our self-worth feelings separate from our feelings of self-confidence. This saves us from the arrogance of thinking that we are better than others (worth more) because we have gifts and capabilities that they lack. It also keeps us from depending on our experiences and successes for feelings of worth. When our senses begin fading in old age (and they will) and we lose many of our capacities, our thoughts and feelings of worth as a person will not be affected. We will have a clear focus on what gives us validity as persons. This capacities to enjoy our feelings of self-confidence without confusing them with the source of our importance is an important key to emotional vitality.

Permission to Fall on My Face

Imagine a skiing school that forbade falling. What if they punished people for falling down in the snow? What if they expelled those who did so? Who would ever graduate? Who would ever turn in a perfect performance—before they learned how to ski? With that kind of pressure there would actually be more falling. The fear of falling would paralyze potential skiers making them more nervous and their increased anxiety would create more imperfection.

So it is when we do not have the grace to forgive ourselves when we fall down in life. Unlike law, the gospel does not expect the impossible. God, knowing that we would fall, provided us a sacrament of forgiveness which prevents us from falling in such a way that we cannot recover. We can if we will. Forgiveness keeps us renewed, forgiven, and energized to keep on.

Failure for those who live in a vital relationship with Christ does not blow everything. Christ puts our failures to good use so that we learn from them and not be caught in a trap of self-depreciation. He does not toss us out on our ear we fail. Failure then is not the worst thing in the world. Failing and learning nothing is much worse.

The sacrament of failure keeps us motivated. It provides us the confidence and security to take risks and maintain a positive outlook even when we have to confess and start over. We can live affirmatively in the face of the most non-affirming experiences. Even severe threats to our well-being as persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword can be faced with optimism because we are more than conquerors in the long run (Rom. 8:35-39). In the face of failure we stand undaunted. Our identity having been established, allows us the freedom to fail. Nor do we have any need to flog ourselves when we fail. Even in failure we can show ourselves respect and care. The blood of Christ keeps on cleansing us from all evil, thus we can continue walking in the light (I John 1:7-10, 2:1-2).

How we perceive ourselves when we fail is crucial. Nehemiah's enemies heard about his good works and feared. They feared because it meant that they had failed to stop him. Consequently, they "fell greatly in our own esteem" (Neh. 6:15). The word in Hebrew for "esteem" is literally "eye." Literally, they fell in their own eyes. Their self-perspective dropped to the floor. When they didn't succeed in their evil plans they viewed themselves as failures and thought of themselves as "no good failures."

There's another option however that's a lot healthier. Instead of interpreting failure as a lessening of our worth, we can recognize it as simply an action that failed, learn from it, give ourselves permission to be human, and get on with life. By granting ourselves the grace of falling without redefining our worth we can fail *without being a failure*. Then we won't "fall in our eyes." The gospel gives us resources for not being so hard on ourselves for it pictures God as a father who loves us and who stands always ready to give us a new beginnings.

So What's the Story about Self-Denial?

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24)

Is self-denial inimical to self-esteem? Is Jesus teaching that human nature is basically evil and must be denied? Some interpreted it in this way with the result that they understand self-esteem and self-denial as opposites. They accordingly think that the disciple who denies himself cannot have self-esteem.

John R.W. Stott distinguishes self-esteem and self-denial detailing how they actually complement each other and are not antithetical.

"Whatever we are by creation, we must affirm; our rationality, our sense of moral obligation, our masculinity and femininity, our aesthetic appreciation and artistic creativity, our stewardship of the fruitful earth, our hunger for love and community, our sense of transcendent mystery of God, and our inbuilt urge to fall down and worship him. All this is part of our created humanness. True, it has all been tainted and twisted by sin. Yet Christ came to redeem and not destroy it. So we must affirm it."

"But whatever we are by the Fall, we must deny or repudiate; our irrationality; our moral perversity; our loss of sexual distinctives; our fascination with the ugly; our lazy refusal to develop God's gifts; our pollution and spoilation of the environment; our selfishness, malice, individualism, and revenge, which are destructive to human community; our proud autonomy; and our idolatrous refusal to worship God. All this is part of our fallen humanness. Christ came not to redeem this but to destroy it. So we must deny it." (*Christianity Today, Am I Supposed To Love Myself Or Hate Myself?*, April 20, 1984)

When we truly love ourselves we deny those things that are destructive. We lose our lives intentionally so that we can save ourselves (Matt. 16:25). Self-denial is not for the sake of self-denial. It's for the sake of finding one's true self, developing one's true self, and actualizing (saving) that true self. Robert Schuller writes,

"Historically, the church has not done a very commendable job in its efforts to purge sinful pride without insulting, demeaning, and bringing dishonor to God's beautiful children." (*Self-Esteem, The New Reformation*. P. 57)

Self-denial is not a contradiction to self-affirmation, it is actually part of the process. In self-denial we purge out those elements within our secondary, fallen nature that sin has warped. Then we can experience the good feelings of being God's beautiful children.

Validating the Self-Esteem of Others

The feelings we have about ourselves originate from our early interactions with people. We learn to feel good or bad about ourselves according to how the emotionally significant people in our lives communicated respect, worth, love, and significance. We absorb their attitudes and build our self-image out of our reflection in their eyes.

This day no less than that influences our self-concept via our relationships. Today we can rebuild our self-image in a healthy way by giving ourselves to a group of persons who will affirm us unconditionally and give us an experience that reflects God's truth. In fact, nearly any intimate relationship where there's love and respect, transparency and acceptance, enables us to readjust our values about our worth. Jesus drew disciples to himself by this very method. He enabled people to respect themselves by treating them as significant and worthwhile persons. He practiced "Love Therapy." He loved the put down, ridiculed, and those labeled worthless ("unclean") in a healthy and holy way.

By giving worth to others we reinforce our own mind-renewal about the self-esteem given us by God. For as we give others *a taste of grace* we open our lives further to God's grace becoming a vessel for it to others. Everybody profits when we live redemptively enabling others to see themselves as God sees them. We become self-esteem catalysts. By loving unconditionally and without reference to what another can do for us, we give them an experience of God's unconditional love. C.S. Lewis provides a renewed perspective about people.

"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. ... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to

a mere mortal. ... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit -- immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. ... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." (*The Weight of Glory*, pp. 14-15)

Practically this means that as we validate and worth others, taking the time to listen attentively, accepting their emotions seriously, and eliminating all negative labels (clumsy, stupid, jerk, dumb, turkey). Giving esteem to others means that we approach every person fully aware that there are depths and mysteries that can never be fathomed. Goethe once wrote,

"If I treat you as you are, you will remain as you are. If I treat you as if you could be; that is what you will become."

Seeing people as immortal splendors and heavenly possibilities helps us see beyond other's faults to their potentials. It inspires us to treat them with the dignity and freedom they deserve as bearers of the divine image so that they can feel their innate worth.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Christianizing the feelings we have about ourselves is crucial for emotional wholeness and motivational vitality. Our self-image feelings are central. Without an authentic and intense sense of self-celebration ("It's good to be me! Praise God that I bear his image!) we are tormented by thoughts and feelings that eventually warp human personality—feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and contempt that create demons within. A poor self-image and its attendant feelings affects us all and arises from our spiritual nature. We are dignity seekers. We hunger for significance. We have a built in drive to know that we are needed and valued by others.

Christianizing these feelings means: exposing our misbeliefs about our worth to the good-news, receiving God's forgiveness for our guilt, thinking God's thoughts after him about our value, keeping our self-worth separate from our self-confidence, compensating for our inadequacies, giving ourselves permission to fail, denying only what we are by the fall, and passing on the validation to others by loving and respecting them. By focusing on the awesome truth that the dullest person you meet today may one day be a glorious, unapproachable, heavenly Splendor vitally renews our consciousness about God's gift of dignity.

Chapter 10

WHAT TO DO

WHEN YOU'RE FEELING NEGATIVE

Life is too short to be imprisoned by negative emotions. Yet many people are imprisoned, enervated, and blown away by negative emotions which they have not learned to control. Unable to employ them for growth, "bad" emotions are mismanaged. The result: our emotions begin victimizing us.

By living in such negative emotions we create moods that get a strangle hold on us. We tend also to repress our negative feelings. Most of us believe we could do just fine without the problematic emotions of anger, fear, worry, guilt, shame, sorrow, sadness, depression, jealousy, contempt, tension, irritation, bitterness, repulsion, and self-pity. We need the secret for handling negative emotions positively.

Danger: Negative Emotions — Handle with Care

Eric Pritchard tells of a baby who died because his mother poisoned him. During World War II, a woman watched a fight between her husband and a soldier and became so angry and scared that she threw herself between the men. Eventually she wrestled a sword from the soldier's hand, broke it in pieces, and threw it away. The whole experience was a terrible mental shock to her as the reality of war, life and death, pressed upon her. Hearing her baby crying, she went into the house and began nursing the child.

"But inasmuch as there had been a toxic change in his saliva, the baby died."
(*Infant Education*, quoted by Leslie D. Weatherhead in *Psychology, Religion, and Healing*)

Ah, emotions are powerful! Every emotion produces chemical and neurological

changes in the body. Various glands prepare us for action by secreting chemicals into our blood stream; these are the catalysts for total mobilization of our physical resources. In times of intense emotion, people have been known to perform feats that extend far beyond their normal capacities. Mothers have lifted cars off trapped children, in wartime pilots have maintained consciousness for hours though severely wounded. The problem is that we cannot perpetuate a strong intense emotion over a long period of time without suffering damage. Intense emotions create a wearing state. Psychosomatic medicine warns about the danger of prolonged stress on our whole being.

Our negative emotions serve a purpose, but *they are not to be lived in*. Anger and fear provide immediate energy to fight or run but if either emotion becomes chronic (marked by long duration) it becomes habitual and destructive. Chronic negative emotions become habituated moods. They stop functioning as mere warning signals and develop a life of their own. We become predisposed to the thoughts-beliefs-situations that create and trigger those emotions. We develop a subconscious need for it. The emotion then becomes our very "spirit." Our thoughts predispose us to seeing things that trigger that emotion. If anger is habituated, angry thoughts come easily and we become irritable and bitter. Resentfulness might begin dominating our personality and anger thus becomes an evil spirit possessing us body and soul.

God gave us the ability to experience negative emotions so that we could utilize their energy, hear their message, and then release them. Without releasing them we habituate them and create emotionalized predispositions out of them. By holding on to our negative emotions and perpetuating the attitudes and beliefs that correspond to them—we trigger emotional poisons within our system, poisons like jealousy, vindictiveness, maliciousness, frustration, anxiety, vanity, depression, emptiness, quarrelsomeness, negativism, and pessimism.

James W. Newman says negative emotions serve as a braking system in our personalities. Their primary function involves getting our attention—screaming at us that *something is wrong!* They work as Red Lights. They sound off the alarms that potential danger is confronting us. Negative emotions brake our positive motivation so that we can "*Stop, Look, and Listen.*"

Newman says our positive emotions are our inner Green Lights, our accelerator that gets us moving positively toward our goals. This metaphor of the human energy system is oversimplified but it provides a panorama of understanding about our emotions. By paining us, creating discomfort, and screaming in our guts—negative emotions warn us of danger and motivates us to use our God-given rationality before we hurt ourselves. If our values and beliefs have been programmed aright—our

positive emotions inform us that we're on the right track. They reinforce our thinking and provide us constant energy and drive as we accelerate down the highway of life.

The Positive Side of Negative Emotions

Both negative and positive emotions spring from our cognitions. We worry, hate, and feel tension because we interpret our situation in terms of worry, hate, and stress. Negative emotions provide a self-revelation—revealing how we have been thinking.

In emoting, both body and soul tell us how things are going. For instance, in anger, we're informed that something is threatening us. Perhaps a value we hold dear is under attack. Perhaps a goal is being blocked. Perhaps something we treasure has been lost, a hope is thwarted, or someone we care for is suffering. In fright we sense eminent danger. Feelings also reveal how we're taking care of ourselves. When we don't get the right nutrients, sufficient sleep, enough exercise, and positive mental data we feel fatigue, boredom, and out of sorts. For those with ears to hear, emotions bear the gift of messages for self-revelation.

Emotions also make us human. In experiencing warmth, love, joy, tenderness, enthusiasm, awe, and empathy we become authentically human. Even our negative emotions contribute here. Without grief there would be no true love. Without worry we'd be deficient in concern. Without anger we'd lack dedication and a sense of justice. Sorrow and regret pain us yet in their pain they humanize us. It's because we value people and want the best for them that we hate everything that dehumanizes them. It's our capacity to hurt with others that creates within us the capacity to rejoice with them and to feel proud when they succeed.

"The deeper the sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven. When you are joyous, look deep in your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy."
(Prophet Kahlil Gibran)

Emotions energize. Fear, anger, guilt, lust, and jealousy create a general state of arousal. Psychologically emotions quicken our whole being. Our pulse steps up, our pupils dilate, our glands activate chemicals and pour hormones into our blood stream. There is increased breathing and muscular tension. The very word "emotion" indicates a "moving." The word is derived from *ex* (out) *movere* (to move). The original French word signified moving out—being stirred up.

Negative emotions put us in motion as well as do positive ones and create bodily readiness although usually in the direction of counteracting our present movement. There is a difference in the nature of the energy produced by positive emotions in contrast to that produced via negative emotions. The first is like aerobic energy. It

allows us to stay in the state of emotion for a long time without causing fatigue. Negative emotional energy is like anaerobic energy—it's the kind of energy expended when one sprints a hundred yards. Within seconds we are exhausted—out of breath. No one's uses anaerobic energy to run a marathon. Negative emotions are for the short run. They provide us intense and rapid energy.

Imagine what it would be like sprinting a marathon! The runner's energies would be expended within the first mile. Living *in* a negative emotional state is likewise wearing. It's true that the emotion first gives us an immediate sense of great power, but it does not last. It cannot. Negative emotional energy must be used and released.

Positive emotional energy on the other hand enables us to pace ourselves for a long run. We can *live in* that kind of energy without running out of breath. It's a self-renewing kind of experience. We can and should let the sun go down upon this kind of energy. Living in positive emotions habituates their corresponding state of consciousness in us making them resonate in our whole personality so that they become our basic mood or spirit.

"Negative" Does not Mean "Bad"

Describing emotions as "negative" doesn't mean that they are wicked). Morally, emotions are neutral—neither good nor evil per se. Primarily they reflect our thinking, valuing, and willing and those are the things that determine morality. A negative emotion can reflect holiness or immorality, so can a positive feeling. When our thinking becomes warped we may experience positive emotions in immoral situations and negative emotions in godly situations. Morality isn't determined by the emotions themselves but our attitudes and beliefs prior to the emotion and our actions afterward. The statement, "be angry" validates even the emotion of anger that has the possibility of being violent and dangerous. And the statement, "and do not sin" warns us against using that emotional energy sinfully.

Most emotions are momentary experiences—flashes of feelings. To take note of those feelings involves no wickedness. To experience a flash of hate, revenge, a swelling of pride or lust per se does not make us evil. Wickedness arises according to the content and use we make of the emotion. Martin Luther compared the alluring feelings of temptation to the birds of the heavens. "We cannot prevent birds from flying through the skies, but we can prevent them from building nests in our hair."

Even emotions that arise from unsanctified thoughts do not corrupt us until we give ourselves to them, nurse them, and feed them. What flits through our consciousness at the speed of light is one matter; what we welcome, entertain, and support is another. Understanding that *our emotions are amoral* enables us to more fully accept and acknowledge them without having to approve or endorse them. The permission to honestly face our feelings and registering what they are enables us to discover their

sources without fear or guilt.

This understanding gives us the grace to accept even the negative feelings of others instead of being repelled by them. When someone we care about tells us that he's angry (depressed, afraid, etc.) we can accept him and that emotion. We don't have to nervously point our index finger and moralize, "You shouldn't feel that way!" When someone honestly reports that he feels angry—that is what he feels. Why deny it? Why argue with the fact? He may not even want to feel that way; he may wish those feelings didn't exist, but if that's a true reporting of his emotions—then that's how he feels.

We may feel an urge to tell him that his feelings are irrational. "There's no need for you to feel angry." We may provide him seventeen good reasons why he shouldn't be angry. But our explaining won't make the emotions go away. Our explaining usually is experienced as a discounting of the person so that he doesn't even feel understood.

By judging emotions as good and bad we judge ourselves and others to moral and immoral, righteous and wicked, according to their emotions. This is irrational. There's a good and holy use of every negative emotion. By granting grace for people to get in touch with whatever emotion they have we enable them to understand and articulate them which drains off much emotional tension and gives us more control over our feelings.

Holy and Unholy Anger

A plot was underway to kill the rabbi. When he entered the building and made his way to the front, he didn't know that a snare had been laid. A decoy had been set. The traditionalists were baiting him to violate the law. They had brought in a man with a withered hand and now "they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him." (Mark 3:1-2).

They wanted to get something on him—something they could use against him. Jesus called the man forward, laid his hand on his shoulder, and then posed some questions for the church:

"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger), grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." (Mark 3:3-6)

Jesus got angry! Narrow-minded traditionalism frustrated him and disgusted him. The lack of compassion in the leaders drew his anger and he didn't hold back. In

contempt of their hardened hearts he broke their precious traditions in order to obey a higher law of compassion. Anger is one of the most explosive and dangerous of the negative emotions. It's an Emotional Red Zone. It energizes and motivates. Child abuse, fights, assaults, arguments, vindictive ness, murder, and many other ungodly things spring from unchecked anger. Yet the Bible encourages us to be angry: "*Be angry and do not sin.*" It is possible to feel without acting.

"Know this, my beloved brethren, let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20)

Anger that hasn't been sanctified by the holy thinking of a renewed mind and tempered with self-discipling which *slows* anger down is unholy anger. It's "the anger of man." It's selfish anger that cares only about "My rights" and "My wants."

"A man of wrath stirs up strife, and a man given to anger causes much transgression." (Prov. 29:22)

"Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools." (Eccl. 7:9)

"Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil." (Psalm 37:8)

Fret is an anger word meaning "to burn, to be kindled, to become hot, to be angry" (*harah*). We fret by letting something "burn us up!" The Psalmist warns against fretting about the good fortunes of the wicked.

"Be not envious of wrongdoers ... fret not yourselves over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!"

To worry and fret in a negative way "tends only to evil." Such is the nature of selfish anger. It becomes irritable temper, verbal abuse, and wounded pride. Anger is) dangerous. Mishandled it turns us into explosive and irrational people. One important control on anger is to "not let the sun go down upon" it (Eph. 4:26). By nursing anger, brooding upon the stupid things people do to us we develop anger moods: hostility, violence, irritability, cynicism, depression, bitterness, passive-aggressive personalities, coldness, and chronic complaining.

Yet anger can be used positively. Purged of selfishness it enables us to experience godly grief which purges and cleanses:

"See what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!" (II Cor.7:1)

Without anger we couldn't get mad at sin. Yet is it from our capacity for anger that our capacity for love arises. The rage response is a built-in defense that readies us to *fight for* our loved ones. Throughout the ages it has been anger made holy in a godly

consciousness that has fought for social reform, human rights, and a world where there can be justice. The raw rage response arises in the infant when it screams, cries, shakes, and turns red. The infant senses that something is wrong.

The more we love the more we're able to get angry. The mother who could care less if her child is molested, hit by a car or kidnaped is a mother who doesn't love. Love arouses our anger against those things that violate our loved one.

God unashamedly identified himself as a "jealous God" full of wrath to give us an indication of how great his love is. His is not the vicious, vindictive, or capricious kind of wrath. But the wrath of love. His intolerance of idolatry sprang from a holy love that hated what would poison his people. Biblically, God is "slow to anger." (Compare Neh. 9:27, Psalm 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jon. 4:23, Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18.) He never "blows up" in the sense of losing control; his anger is always just and loving.

Anger is sanctified by unselfish love . Authentic love purges anger of manipulateness and hostility as it helps us release our anger through honest and kind confrontation. This prevents anger from being squelched in repression. Such love reports the emotion without allowing it to harm the relationship.

Anger's energy can be used positively when it is turned into constructive energy to transform ourselves and our world. Here are three quotes about this:

Dr. J.H. Jowett: "A life incapable of anger is destitute of the needed energy for all reform. There's no blaze in it, there's no ministry of purification." *The Christian Use of Emotional Power*, by Norman Wright, p. 113)

Spiros Zodhiates: "Meekness is the sanctification of anger. It includes patience and long-suffering for personal affronts, with the willingness to speak out vigorously in the defense of the Gospel. To get angry at what we should and when we should is a definitely Christian characteristic." (Ibid.).

Leon J. Saul: "No friction occurs in mechanics without heat and no friction occurs in the emotional life without anger." (*Emotional Maturity*)

"While Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols." (Acts 17:16)

Paul's anger is the anger of reformation. It arose from his perceptions as filtered through his Christian valuing. Though he walked the streets of a famous Greek city known for its intellectualism he was no tourist. He had eyes for one thing—the glory of God in people's lives.

"So he argued in the synagogue ... and in the market place every day" (Acts 17:17)

Paul's anger motivated him to confront. He cared that much. The same anger that

once breathed "threats and murder against the disciples" was purified in love. He tapped his emotional energy and channeled his turbulent waters of anger making it a constructive force.

There's a subtle danger that lurks in anger, even holy anger. We become addicted to it, hooked on the sense of power that it gives us. Anger does, after all, rev up the body and mind and put us in high gear. It makes us feel powerful. Used skillfully it can give us a manipulative edge over others. For these reasons it must be handled with care.

The Pangs of Conscience and Grief

Grief and pangs of conscience can stir us from our apathy and motivate us to a new experience of earnestness (II Cor. 7:11). Lot felt "vexed in his soul" in observing the wickedness of Sodom and he found grace in God's eyes (II Peter 2:7-10). Fulton J. Sheen describes the positive use of negative emotion saying, "Remorse is the negative presence of God in the soul ... as grace is the positive presence of God."

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." (Rom. 12:15)

"God ... comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (II Cor. 1:3-5)

Jesus' life was bracketed by tears, first, the tears of the mother's whose babies were slaughtered and then the tears of his own mother's. He too "offered up prayers ... with loud cries and tears ... and was heard for his godly fear" (Heb. 5:7). Mourning is a painful and negative emotion but it is also a healing emotion.

The Positive Power of Dread

"Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." (Isa. 8:13)

Fear is usually paralyzing and crippling, but not always, sometimes it can be used positively. Paul Tournier's psychology is built around the supremacy of fear. He says what we do not fear fails to hold meaning for us. Fear arises from our beliefs about what is important—what we should take with seriousness.

Love casts out the kind of fear that "has torments" (I John 4:18 KJV). This fear is fright apart from a deep trusting of God. Faith in God, on the other hand, fears him in a healthy way which makes our fear the essence of Wisdom (Prov. 1:7). Tournier says fear energizes love. Mismanaged fear becomes irrational and obsessive—a phobia. Then it grows morbid, exaggerated, and inexplicable. It assumes monstrous dimensions and eventually possesses us. Then it has torments. It is that kind of fear

that love expels. Fear that arises from a renewed mind is the kind that inspires holy awe and worship, sets us on the path to wisdom and motivates us to treat God as our ultimate concern (Heb. 12:28-29, I Pet. 1:17).

Letting Negative Emotions Go

"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." (Eph. 4:26)

When night after night catches us still dwelling upon some negative emotion, we are not merely sleeping on that emotion but building it into our subconscious as our emotionalized predisposition. Slowly our personality forms to the shape of that emotion. Our character is shaped in its image. When that happens then the emotion *has* us.

The stress diseases of our time indicate that many are living in negative emotions. The sun sets while we are still fuming and fretting, uptight with frustrations, and rattled with insecurities. Such emotions take vengeance on us by erupting somatically as headaches, backaches, and stomachaches. They surface in our character. We become "Type-A's"—driving, perfectionistic, obsessively goal oriented, irritable, uptight. Our negative moods also tell on us. They announce to all what negative emotions we've not been releasing. The mood of depression indicates that we've been living in a state of grief, sadness, self-pity, perfectionism, fear and/or anger.

Yet negative emotions are not to be lived in. They are inner alarms that give off nerve racking screeches, and they bear messages for us. But once we've taken note of their message and used their energy we must not nurse the emotion. To use our negative emotions positively we should use them and *release* them. A telltale sign that we are living in them is demotivation. They reduce our willingness to venture into life, to take risks, and to experiment. They drain us of emotional vitality, and rob us of creativity.

1) Get Physical

Because the energy and tension of our emotions have physiological sources and expressions— emotions can be worked out physically. We can dispense with excess emotional energy by putting our bodies to the test. I prefer running. Dr. Kenneth Cooper says that a person cannot run and stay mad. That's true for me. I can run full of anger for a couple miles, three if I'm steaming, but after four miles I always mellow. Thirty-five minutes of running means that the expenditure of energy and the changes in my blood-sugar level has a positive effect on my mind and emotions. I relax. A mental calm comes over me so that my angry scenarios lose their appeal.

If you don't care for running, then walking, biking, swimming, then even raking leaves

can help. By vigorous activity you dispense bottled up nervous energy. Any vigorous activity will do it. Play chase with a two year old. If you don't feel like doing anything physical—*do it anyway*. Your sluggishness and fatigue is but additional evidence that you need it.

A person who's only half alive physically limits his emotional vitality. Our emotional vitality is derived from our physical health, fitness, and energy level. A sluggish body sets us up for emotional sluggishness. Whether we like it or not, our physical fitness level is directly correlated to our mental and emotional fitness. As holistic beings it can be no other way. God made us bodily creatures out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into us. We are breathing souls— beings whose vitality is related to breath. Our cardio-vascular health cannot be ignored when it comes to living at our optimum mentally and emotionally.

Our mental and physical natures are so interrelated what affects one affects the other, for good or ill. Yet many treat the finely tuned instrument God gave them as if it were indestructible. They pump it full of food that is not nutritious, foods empty of vitamins, high in fats, exercise insufficiently, burn the candle on both ends, worry, give themselves no quiet times and then wonder why they feel so lousy. Jess Lair says,

"At the bottom of most fears will be found an over-active mind and an under-active body. We generate fears while we sit, we overcome them by action." (*I Ain't Much, Baby, But I'm All I've Got*)

Our bodies are gifts too, and we should treat health and physical vitality as delicate gifts that need to be stirred up. Even a minor thing as a headache can interfere with our joy in worship. So can the feelings that colds produce: tiredness, depletion of energy, and a short-tempered fuse. When Elijah was depressed he was ministered to via fresh bread and a challenging task (I Kings 19). The physical is important. There's little said about exercise in the Bible because people then didn't suffer from the lack of physical activity—everything they did was physical.

2) Cathect

We use the word "catharsis" to refer to an elimination of a complex or intense emotions; it happens as we bring our thoughts and emotions to consciousness and afford them expression. This releases built-up inner pressure and frees us from the dominion of negative emotions. Catharsis may take the form of confession, drama, or story. The Psalmist spoke of the purging power of catharsis:

"I said, 'I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will bridle my mouth, so long as the wicked are in my presence.' I was dumb and silent, I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse, my heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue..." (Psalm 39:1-3)

Repression didn't work for the Psalmist. It only intensified his distress. Thoughts boiled in his mind. Finally he let it all out as he spoke of his pain and found relief from his emotional turmoil.

Elihu knew intuitively that expression has the power to drain off tension caused by emotional upset. He had listened to Job and friends debate the problem of Job's evil for thirty chapters. "They're all were wrong!" he told himself. Frustration grew within him as did anger. Finally he spoke up:

"I am full of words, the spirit within me constrains me. Behold, my heart is like wine that has no vents; like new wineskins, it is ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer..." (Job 32:18-20)

"Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." (James 5:16)

Articulating sins, difficulties, problems, and confusion in the presence of someone who cares, non-threatening, and non-judgmental provides us an excellent way to release negative emotional tension. Talking out our troubles in a safe atmosphere frees our mind to clarify itself. Talking allows our emotions to come out into the open which gives us opportunity to deal with our unconscious assumptions and energies. Psychoanalysis, Freud's "gospel," has been summarized using his own words, "Where Id is, there let ego be." (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 112).

In catharsis we learn to feel again. Giving ourselves permission to feel and a place to feel frees up old repressed fears and hurts, as well as present confusions. Confession helps us gain insight into how we have been responsible. It enables us to deal with automatic thoughts that have been working outside of conscious awareness.

Spinoza said that "only through emotion can emotion be cured." This explains why emotional re-feeling in catharsis and the understanding of our feelings dissipates its negative energy and utilizes its positive energy.

Yet we must truly confess. Merely telling another person about our bad feelings or describing how rotten we feel is not confession. O. Hobart Mowrer labels that "pseudo-confession."

"We can go on forever about how bad we feel, what we need is to be concise about how bad we have been in what we have done."

To confess authentically means not blaming others for our problems or attacking but honestly describing our own role in our messes. We must discuss how our thoughts,

values, interpretations, feelings, relationships, and actions helped to create our problems.

Confession is unmasking. It's dropping our secrets and coming clean in the presence of someone we trust. Confession in a small Christian group indicates a willingness to live under the judgment of that support group. This demands transparency and vulnerability which makes us stronger people. The freedom to own up to "the sin which does so easily beset us" strengthens our will power.

Mowrer says that temptations lose much of their allurements once we go public because we are invigorated to live more responsibly. Conversely secrecy and anonymity shields us from group sanctions and higher morality. A group provides enablement, enrichment, and strengthening of our inner resources because we are accountable to the group and the group to us. We look out for each other. Confession needs to be to the significant people with whom we live. Mowrer:

"Merely being honest with a professional in an office isn't going to cut it!"

Confession gives us an experience of grace when it occurs with caring, non-judgmental people. The one who hears us out and doesn't moralize or argue provides us emotional first-aid with their understanding spirit. By sympathetic listening the listener helps us clarify our minds. If the person holds us morally responsible without putting us down, healing occurs. We are "graced" not only through sympathy but also by the way our will is strengthened. We gain resolution to avoid those things that undermine our emotional and spiritual welfare.

Formal confession doesn't exhaust the subject for there is also the confession of friends who confess by sharing the totality of their lives and by holding each other responsible. Their transparency and openness is the grace of confession in a trusting relationship. Husbands and wives ought to have that kind of emotional openness so that negative tensions are released daily in their communion. Viewed from this perspective, confession includes our "small talk"—owning the irritation we felt in traffic, how stupid things went at work, and how hurt we felt when our neighbor ignored us.

Sublimation is one form of catharsis. We cathart by sublimating our emotional energies into appropriate channels. Fenichel called sublimation "the successful defense." In contrast to repression which denies reality, and suppression which puts emotions on hold, sublimation uses our emotional energy in constructive ways. Art, drama, music, sports, stories, games are common forms of sublimation. Writing, building, learning new skills, and tinkering with hobbies are other ways we re-channel the motivational energy that comes with our emotions.

4) Stop the Production

Remembering that emotions arise from cognitions, we can effect personality change and emotional control by dealing with their source—our thoughts. Discomforting emotions usually tell us one thing or another—we are either mis-believing (thereby setting ourselves up for disillusionment) or the emotion is alerting us to some danger.

If you're finding yourself constantly filled with a nerve-racking tension that leaves you upset, ask yourself, "This is frustration a Warning Signal alerting me to something I'm doing wrong or that's threatening me, or am I frustrating myself with some misbelief?"

Look for self-talk that involves statements like, "The World owes me...!" "I should never be blocked!" Believing such lies sets us up for frustration. Observe also how you might be discounting the good things in your life, "Oh, that doesn't count!" By focusing on the negative things and overlooking the positive features we are sure to become deficient in appreciation and more frustration prone.

Most of our negative emotional experience arise from mis-believing. By viewing life narcissistically, by making global demands on life, by expecting the world to revolve around us— we create negativism. The resulting negative feelings are signals alerting us to our need for cognitive renewal. Even in authentic loss and grief, after mourning the loss we need to release it, accept reality, and move onward, least we habituate the grief feelings. Don't lie to yourself, "I'll never get over this!"

Renewing the mind is therapeutic. It turns off the irrational cognitions that create unnecessary emotional pain. Loren Fischer writes:

"The steam of behavior is only visible proof that the fire of thought is boiling the water of emotion. A heavy lid may curb the stream of action but unless we curb the fire of thinking the heaviest lid possible will blow and high will be the blast of it. Obviously, therefore, we lose spiritual battles not by failing to restrain our action is with heavier lids, we are defeated because we do not change our flaming thoughts that boil the waters of emotion." (*Highway to Dynamic Living*)

5) The Releasing Dynamic of Prayer

"Rejoice in the Lord always ... Let all men know your forbearance ... Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:4-7)

Prayer releases built up emotional tensions. Honest emotional communication with God works as a catharsis for we are able to "cast all our anxieties on him" (I Peter 5:7). Before God we have no need for covering up. "All are open and laid bare to

the eyes of him with whom we have to do ... Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need." (Heb. 4:13,16).

The Imprecatory Psalms demonstrates *how completely honest* we can be before God. Today we are shocked and repulsed at the things the Psalmists prayed for: they prayed that their enemies be destroyed, their pregnant women ripped up with a sword, and their babies dashed on the rocks (Psalm 137:9, Psalm 2, 37, 69, 109). That's how they felt. Before Him who searched their deepest thoughts and knew their every motive they also felt free to honestly report their feelings. Prayer provides us an atmosphere for truthfulness, grace, and change. It discourages pretense and role playing. This means we don't have to live with our anxiety; we can release it and replace it with *a spirit of thanksgiving*.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight ... It will be healing to your flesh, and refreshment to your bones." (Prov. 3:5, 8)

Prayer allows us to align our insights with God's mind in trusting reliance which brings healing to our flesh and refreshment to our bones. We can release our emotional hurts and hangups and ask God for wisdom in coping (James 1:3-5).

6) The Importance of Relaxation

Narciso Irala describes the tension involved in a negative emotion.

"In fear or anger, the eyes become hard, staring, and blink scarcely at all. The road to victory in moments of irritation is to relax the eyes deliberately, blink often and try to smile with the eyes. . . . In a state of emotion the voice tends to be hard and trembling. So, in a moment of wrath, you should keep quiet or answer very softly ... When the face smiles, the sun comes out in the heart." (*Achieving Peace of Heart*, p. 93)

We can't live in a state of tension and relaxation at the same time. So when negative emotions create tension, intentionally relax to decrease and dissipate that tension. Try yawning—it's an excellent relaxer. Push away from the desk or whatever you're doing and take deep long breathes. Fill every inch of your lungs with air, and then some. Then expel it all.

St. Francis de Sales wrote, "Every morning prepare your soul for a tranquil day." We prepare for tranquility by intentionally practicing the presence of Jesus, said de Sales. Look for Jesus' face in the face of people. Consciousness of Jesus' presence in our daily lives makes all of life sacramental and tunes our spirit to the height dimension.

"Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

Laughter is another great relaxer. It puts us in a good humor, softens the blows of life and enables us to attain psychological distance from the things that pain us. We overcome our dead seriousness. Humor gives us a childlike, playful spirit that reduces tension. "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." (Prov. 17:22).

Slowing down our pace helps us relax. Much of our emotional tension comes from our desperate pace. With full schedules we experience life as a fast, demanding, and stressful treadmill. Afraid that we will miss something, we overbook ourselves and end up missing the best thing of all—this moment. Actually Type-A people shorten their life span and miss much of the joy of life's simple pleasures.

Slowing down entails simplifying—reducing our demands for material things. Most of us will need to renew our minds so that we can be satisfied with a smaller figure on the bottom-line of our 1040 form. Many negative emotions (depression, frustration, grief, jealousy) arise because of money and possessions. The mis-belief at work says that self-worth and good feelings automatically come with more money. They do not. Even two millenniums ago Jesus counseled people to simplify life, to slow down and focus on the purpose of living (Matt. 6:18-34).

Hypertension and anxiety robs us of many simple joys. This very evening will see some nineteen million American swallowing sleeping pills in order to slow down and get to sleep. People are living in emotions that were never designed to be lived in—greed, fear, anger, upset.

Meditation relaxes. "Action without meditation becomes a disappointing scramble." writes Paul Tournier. Like Martha frantically scrambling about her kitchen trying to cook up a meal for Jesus and his Twelve—we scramble about trying to make things just right. We hurry, worry, and panic. The pressure of deadlines put the squeeze on us. We run into Jesus' presence demanding that he send someone to help us. But when Martha did that, Jesus questioned her hurry-up spirit.

"Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things. Mary has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her!" (Luke 10:38-42)

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Nothing de-vitalizes life more than perpetuated negative emotions. Such feelings become poisons within. They imprison us to bad moods. They become inner demons. This doesn't mean that negative emotions are "bad"—only painful. To positively use negative emotions we must release them after hearing their message, tap their energy for constructive use, become aware of how we create them, and understand their allurements. Releasing negative emotional tension entails giving ourselves permission to feel the emotion, learning the positive power of confession, sublimating pent-up energy into positive channels, halting the production of the cognitions that create the emotion, tapping the art of thankful praying, and learning a more relaxing pace. We can do something about our negative feelings.

Chapter 11

POSITIVE EMOTING

"The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of the glory of God."

Irenaeus

Jesus affirmed "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). This abundant or full life is God's ultimate design for our mind and emotions. Abraham Maslow identified this experience of being "fully alive" as the peak experience of a self-actualizer. In other words God is not glorified when we are emotionally malnourished or tapping only a fraction of our potentialities. Jesus came with good-news in order to ennoble life—to enrich our emotions, energize our motivation, heal our hurts, deepen our relationships, and renew our minds. God wants us to feel good.

"At thy right hand are pleasures forever more!" (Psalm 16:11)

"Charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy." (I Tim. 6:17)

"The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit may abound in hope." (Rom. 15:13)

Feeling good is God's idea! C.S. Lewis describes God's design for joy via a dialogue between two demons. Screwtape, a minor league demon, instructed by a superior demon is informed about the real purposes of their Enemy (God).

"He is a hedonist at heart. ... There are many things for humans to do all day long without His minding it the least—sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. ... He talks of their losing their selves, He means only abandoning the clamor of self-will; once they have done that, He really gives them back all their personality, and boasts ... that they are

wholly His they will be more themselves than ever." (*The Screwtape Letters*)

God designed us with feelings and emotions so that we can feel life. Our senses put us in touch with life, with love, with reality. They provide us motivation energy. Experientially the sense of being alive and feeling good comes from our emotions. Everett L. Worthington, Jr. describes our feelings as "the exclamation points of life" (*When Someone Asks for Help*)

The sense that life is genuinely and deeply meaningful arises when we cognize life's meanings and feel those meanings in our bones. Out of such vital emotional experience our sluggish sentences and question marks are transformed into exclamation points! When we feel the wonder of being alive in God's world praise spontaneously breaks forth from our lips.

"The Lord shall guide you always, and satisfy the dry places of your soul and brace up your bones and you shall be like a watered garden." (Isa. 58:11)

"He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37)

Experiencing the positive emotions of joy and love, peace and confidence, excitement and meaningfulness waters our soul. It refreshes our dry bones and sets our heart to the music of celebration. Beliefs that are not felt are cold and sterile abstractions without the power to move us. It's only when we emotionalized our values that our cognitions become dynamic and personalized. A gospel unfelt is a pathetic thing, existing only as an abstraction in the mind for it fails to stir our depths.

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (Phil. 2:1-2)

Paul knew there were emotional resources in the gospel and wanted his readers to not only believe the good-news but feel it and live in its positive feelings. He knew that if we cultivate the emotional richness of the gospel we'd be energized to live more Christ-like. By feeling the good-news we're motivated to live its truths.

"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2:3-5)

Positive emoting isn't an end in itself. To make the experience an end is hedonism and subjugates the higher psychic powers (believing, willing, valuing) undermining morality. "In the last days ... men will be ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (II Tim. 3:1-4). Living in positive emotions is designed to reinforce holy

thinking and behaving. Good feelings are given to motivate us to keep on valuing and believing in godliness.

"We work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith." (II Cor. 1:24)

"We are writing this that our joy may be complete." (I John 1:4)

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

Thinking Christianly

We tap positive emotional power by restructuring our consciousness along Christian lines. Positive Christian emoting is based upon filling our minds with the magnificent and awe-inspiring ideas of Christ.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Col. 3:16)

Christ's word invigorates our whole personality and tunes our spirits musically. His thoughts about the sacredness of personality, the joyful anticipation of the new world, and the good-news of transformation inspires us with a new song in life. Robert Assagioli explains the psychological dynamic:

"Images and mental pictures tend to produce the physical conditions and external acts that correspond to them." (*The Act of Will*)

The quality and depth of our Christian thinking directly determines the quality and depth of our Christian feeling. The Gospels are given us to provide us thoughts, beliefs, and images for the renewing of the mind. Why not develop a "Magnificent Gospel Thoughts" notebook? Read the inspiring literature of Jesus' encounters and words discovering those cognitions. Then multiply those ideas via interest and repetition.

Chunk Your Passivity

I've already described many of the detrimental effects of passivity on emotion having emphasized the causal loop between cognitions, activity, and emotions. This implies that we can substantially change our feelings by changing our behavior. It is not a matter of whether we should think or act—both are needed. Once the mind has been renewed and our imaginative powers tapped—we must act.

William James describes the psychodynamic.

"When a resolve or a fine glow of feeling is allowed to evaporate without bearing practical fruit it is worse than a chance lost; it works so positively to hinder the discharge of future resolutions and emotions."

Passivism must be rejected as we vigorously translate our beliefs and emotions into concrete actions. Otherwise we suffer a sort of psychological paralysis.

"Never should we suffer ourselves to have an emotion at a play, concert, or upon reading a book, without expressing it afterward in some active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world—speaking genially to one's grandmother ... but let it not fail to take place." (*Psychology: A Briefer Course*)

If Professor James' advice has a biblical ring to it, you might be remembering the words of another James: "Only be sure that you act on the message and do not merely listen; for that would be to mislead yourselves." (James 1:22-25 NEB). Merely listening dulls our psycho-emotional nature and deceives our minds. The deception lies in the fact that we equate mental awareness with *the kind of deep knowing* that comes from experiencing.

"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves ... a doer that acts ... shall be blessed in his doing." (James 1:22,25)

"If we let our emotions evaporate, they get into a way of evaporating," William James added. Not responding actively to our own resolves and feelings can become a habit—a habit that soon has us within its grip. This insight shows the ugly side of procrastination. "It is worse than a chance lose; it works so as positively to hinder the discharge of future resolutions and emotions."

Charles Darwin illustrates the atrophy that occurs within.

"I have said that in one respect my mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds ... gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare. ... I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and much very great, delight. But now many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost any taste for pictures or music. ... I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did. ... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. ... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature." (Charles Darwin in his autobiography for his children, quoted by Virginia Stem Owens, *Christianity Today*, Sept. 2, 1983)

Failing to act on our emotions and resolves "enfeebles the emotional part of our

nature." Sitting on our emotions (feeling without acting) turns them into toxins within personality. It's worse than putting a car in neutral and letting it run for days, that merely damages the engine, this injures our psychological nature.

When we sit on our feelings they become *weak sentiments*—soft, mushy feelings. Feelings that lack the vitality to move us into the arena of life and energize us there. T.W. Pym writes,

"The man who feels pity often and does not discharge its obligations may one day become pity-hardened. The emotion so constantly evoked to no end will come less easily as time goes on. He will see and hear pathetic things and cease to care, for Pity has passed him by. Emotion of any kind, spontaneously evoked, is God's spiritual energy to be harnessed to the chariot of life." (*More Psychology and the Christian Life*, pp. 122-123)

"The soul of the sluggard craves, and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. ... A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber ... The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! ... The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.'" (Prov. 13:4, 24:30-34, 26:13-15)

We strengthen our feelings by expressing them. Actions energizes us, gives us a sense of vitality, and overcomes our passiveness. By acting we reinforce our subjective energy which gives us a greater sense of the expansiveness of life. We thereby put the lie to the idea that people have a natural lazy streak. Nonsense. God didn't create anybody lazy. Laziness is a learned response, not an irreversibly innate part of our nature. Procrastination and passivity are habituated responses.

By acting promptly we somatize our feelings. That is, we extend our emotions to body and incorporate them bodily into our being. Since actions come from intention a concomitant result is the strengthening of our will power. By acting we prevent the feelings from evaporating, instead we give them somatic permanence. Jesus used this principle in his encounters—it was his *modus operandi*.

"Stretch for thy hand." (Mark 3:5)

"I say to you, rise, and take up your pallet and go home." (Mark 2:11)

"Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)

"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (Luke 5:4)

"Go, call your husband, and come here." (John 4:16)

"Take up your pallet, and walk." (John 5:8)

These commands aroused the inner aliveness and participation of people. Jesus didn't want them passive recipients, but participants in the miracle. He didn't give them

complicated orders. His was the "bits and pieces approach." He gave them little things to do to initiate a new way of life, to give them a sense of positive momentum—to break the lie that they can't do anything.

Acting on our emotions gives us a deep knowing. It results in experiential learning. It's the same kind of knowing that one develops with regard to riding a bike. One knows by doing. One learns love by loving, respect by showing honor, kindness by being kind. We emotionally understand worship by worshiping. Behavior is crucial in emotional development. Without it we are impaired: passive, sterile, weak. This is why many lack emotional vitality; their passivity has spoiled their capacities. They have sit too long with their feet propped up mindlessly watching TV.

"The desire of the sluggard kills him for his hands refuse of labor. All day long the wicked covets, but the righteous gives and does not hold back."
(Prov. 21:25-26)

The powerful impact of this passage is missed in most English translations. Actually the Hebrew word for "desire" (*taavah*) is employed three times:

"The *desire* of the sluggard kills him ... all day long he desires with *desires*."

Here's a picture of passive emoting. The man wants something, feels a longing to do something, cognizes his wants, imagines them, but he never gets around to doing anything about his cravings. He just sits on his emotions. His emotions thus become obsessive, soft, and distorted.

Acting positively and energetically vanquishes childish passivity and gives us a sense of control. By habituating ourselves to this style, our feelings of being trapped, impotent, hopeless, and victimized disappear. The next time you have a feeling that you want to hang on to—act on it. The next time you experience a resolve that you want to keep—do something! Even if you don't feel like it, act anyway. Do something positive about the direction you want to go.

Act with courage and energy knowing that you are breaking in the causal loop and thus programming your whole being for a new way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing. As you move out in the new role you will find that the simple act of walking through a part reinforces you emotionally and provides ever new motivation.

The Positive Power of Touching

"Let the expression be the least thing in the world," William James wrote and what simpler yet more vital expression of emotional warmth is there than a touch? Jesus made physical contact with people. By touching, embracing, and hugging Jesus made himself felt as a warm and caring person. Uninhibitedly he demonstrated his love and compassion.

"Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.'" (Mark 1:41)

"Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them" (Matt. 19:13, e.g. Mark 8:22-26)

The famous terry-cloth monkey tests and research have demonstrated the almost magical power of touch on personality. Baby monkeys whose only mother was a cold wire mommy became neurotic, cold, harsh, self-punitive, and unloving adult monkeys. They were actually incapable of showing warmth to their babies. Some became so violently aggressive that they killed them. The monkeys who at least had a warm terry-cloth mommy monkey were able to express warmth. (Harlow and Zimmerman's 1958 Study).

Psychological studies of nurseries and orphan homes where there was not a lot of stroking, hugging, holding prove the same need. The children suffered from contact deprivation). Some of the infants actually died though they were otherwise healthy. They died for lack of human warmth—no one touched them. They felt unloved.

The psychologist of Israel wrote, "Better is open rebuke than hidden." (Prov. 27:5). Hidden love lacks visibility—the very thing needed if it's to be communicated. In communicating the gospel to us God incarnated his love, making it visible in flesh and blood. Jesus came as God's love wrapped up in skin. No wonder Jesus was a toucher. He knew that tactile stimulation transmits warmth. To be touched conveys feelings of love and importance. Absalom didn't feel warmth from his dad because he was isolated from him. He was never hugged. The other prodigal was hugged. His dad ran, embraced, and kissed his son (Luke 15:20).

We all have this need for tactile stimulation. It's been said that a person needs twelve hugs every day to be emotionally healthy. Using that statistic, how are you doing? Many of us have shriveled up prune-like souls and suffer emotional blahness for this very reason. Be a hugger.

Our problem, of course, is that we live in a non-touching and non-hugging culture. Leo Bascaglia tells about a dog who happened into the University Commons where he was conducting one of his "Love Classes 1A." The dog stared with his big brown eyes at one of the girls and she caressed his mane. Then the dog cuddled up to the boy next to the girl, and he rubbed his head. So it went as the dog traveled from person to person receiving attention and touch. Finally a girl blurted out,

"This dog comes in here and gets love by everybody. I've been coming to this class for eight weeks trying to understand more about love but I still feel unloved and unwanted. Why does that dog get so much loving and we hold back from each other?"

Dr. Bascalgia said the class then explored that question. They discovered that the dog looked friendly, presented himself to them, loved them with his eyes, and unashamedly cuddled up to them—he also looked touchable. Consequently the dog received plenty of loving whereas many of us live lives of emotional deprivation.

The early Christians tapped the positive power of Christian emoting through touch, they greeted one another with a holy kiss, washed each other's feet, shared meals, and entered into each other's lives emotionally. They rejoice with those who rejoiced and wept with those who wept. Too often we are afraid of our emotions and afraid that we'll lose control. Yet the simple act of touch provides us a way of getting close.

Emotional Atmospheres

Atmospheres play a significant role in the stimulation of our emotions. A sterilized hospital room with its white walls and metal gadgets conveys one "feel," while a cedar cabin with a fireplace on a cool autumn evening conveys different feelings. In human existence, places, events, people, rooms, meetings, and colors give off feelings—impressions. Church buildings with ceilings that stretch fifty feet into lofty rafters convey a feel of majesty and formality. A building with a low ten-foot ceiling with aisles carpeted in plush gold give off feelings of informality and friendliness.

The evocative nature of different atmospheres enables us to create the atmospheres that bring out the best in ourselves and others. We can apply our renewed mind creatively so that the suggestive and evocative elements around us help to cultivate positive emotions.

Jesus tapped the evocative dimensions of a ritual (Passover) to conclude his ministry and leave a sacrament that would forever evoke positive feelings within us. For his immediate disciples the traditional meanings and symbolisms of the feast, the four cups of wine, the deliverance from Egypt, the coming of a new theocracy, and the beginning of the Exodus was an emotional situation. Today we use ceremony and ritual to set off special days and to evoke emotions: birthdays, graduation days, marriages, baptisms. Intuitively we sense the importance of ritual, music, symbol, clothing, and color in setting appropriate moods.

The attitude we exhibit physically in posture and gesture affects our mental attitude. We can even evoke thoughts and emotions by changing our posture. Bowing and prostrating in prayer tend to evoke feelings of humility and/or sadness. Raising the arms and looking up into heaven evokes feelings of joy, praise, and hope. Folding the hands and closing the eyes evokes feelings of quietness, peace, meditation. By posturing we can design an emotional atmosphere to reinforce emotions. To feel great, we need to stand erect, smile, move with energy, speak with enthusiasm, and behave as if cheerful. To feel depressed, slouch, grouch, grind your teeth, whine your

words, and adopt a basset hound look.

These emotional dynamics can help us evaluate our churches and meetings to see what emotions our structures tend to evoke. Every church has a "feel" yet some leaders seem to ignore that fact. Millard Reed says that no one would intentionally put up a "Keep Out" sign on the front lawn, but "in a variety of subtle ways the same message is communicated" by the atmosphere within the building (*Let Your Church Grow*). Some church communities are full of warmth and excitement, suspense is in the air. Other churches bore people to tears with dull sermons, stale songs, repetitive ritual, and cold formality.

If resurrection is the theme of the gospel then the emotional atmosphere of Christian worship should be one that evokes awe and reverence, joy and praise, wonder and excitement, love and faith. Its structures, activities, place, and people should be so arranged so as to evoke emotions appropriate to the gospel.

Music is a key element in emotionalizing our faith. Music stirs the very air we live in and sets up a rhythm that we not only hear with our ears but sense in our skin and bones. Music can excite; it can also calm nerves. It can set our feet a-dancing or it can mellow us in its calmness. Add to this mood-setting dimension of music there is the cognitive aspect of its words.

Positive Psycho-Linguistics

Psycholinguistics is the study of the psychological effect of words. Words are emotionally laden because they convey meaning and trigger thoughts, images, and beliefs. How we speak, describe things to ourselves, the phrases we employ in our communication, and richness (or poverty) of our vocabulary directly affect our emotions.

"With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone." (Prov. 25:15)

"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the bones." (18:8)

"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." (12:25)

"Pleasant words are like a honey-comb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." (16:24)

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly." (15:1-2)

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (18:21)

Hebrew wisdom appreciated the power of psycholinguistics. "A soft tongue will

break a bone" means by translation that words create deep emotional hurts. In spite of the jingle ("words will never hurt me") words do hurt. They can penetrate to our deepest emotions (the inner parts of the bones). For good or ill, words affects our emotional health. They can start relationship wars, spark anxiety in the heart, or enrich our appreciation of God's world.

Jesus tapped the positive power of emotional words when he referred to God as "Abba, Father." Never before had an individual addressed Yahweh with such an intimate title. The emotional connotation of Abba suggests the closeness and warmth of a little child with his daddy. Abba doesn't encourage cheap familiarity, but the intimacy of relationship.

Paul knew the power of psycholinguistics. It saved his life once when he was in a jam. He had been arrested when a mob assailed him. Later he was arranged. When he perceived that part were Sadducees and part Pharisees, he shouted "With respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial." (Acts 23:6). Saying that was like dropping a bomb.

"A dissension arose ... A great clamor ... And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force" (Acts 23:7-10)

Words can create a lot of emotional uproar. This especially true of relationships. Delilah whined to Samson:

"How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me wherein your great strength lies.' And when she pressed him hard [with her words] day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death." (Judges 15:16)

Samson couldn't endure Delilah's verbal beatings. "He told her all his mind!" What the Philistines armies could not do, a woman did with some soft emotion packed words.

Yet words are but vehicles of meaning. We need to keep reminding ourselves of that if we're to gain emotional control. Words are vessels of meaning containing no inherent meaning. They do not mean anything. *Meaning* comes from the speaker and must be discerned by the hearer. Sometimes their meanings coincide but often there's a meaning-gap. To de-mystify the magical effect of some words we must recognize that we are the ones who pack words with meaning. If someone calls us a "thester" that word will probably not evoke anger in us, nor joy. We will feel confused. What in the world is a thester? If someone calls us dumb (silly, ugly, moron, turkey) the emotion that arises with us arises because of our understanding of the word, the person, ourselves, and the situation.

Do I believe them? Do I even care what they think? Do I take it as a good natured joke? I do not become a moron simply by being labeled one. We always have the choice of accepting the words spoken to us, rejecting them, laughing them off, seriously reflecting upon them, or feeling confused as to why they used such a word. Sigmund Freud wrote:

"Words and magic were in the beginning one and the same thing, and even today words retain much of their magical power. By words one of us can give another the greatest happiness or bring about utter despair; by words the teacher imparts his knowledge to his student; by words the orator sweeps his audience with him and determines its judgments and decisions. Words call forth emotions and are universally the means by which we influence our fellow creature. Therefore let us not despise the use of words in psychotherapy." (*General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, pp. 21-22)

Psycholinguistics provides us the insight that *words are catalytic agents for emotions*. They call forth emotions, provide the opportunity for them. This underscores the importance of accurate self-talk. We can chop ourselves up, devastate our self-esteem, convince ourselves of gloom and doom, or healing and hope via our words. We can tell ourselves that "Everything is Awful!" "He is terrible!" and "Nobody loves me!" and thereby call forth negative emotions. We can label our children with lying words, "He's a brat that will never amount to anything!" "She's a jerk who can't do anything right!" Words of this sort can evoke traumatic emotions which may reap devastation in the personality for years to come.

Being "snared in the utterance" of our lips (Prov. 6:2) is a common experience because we engage in self-talk that misperceives reality. It's therapeutic to take a good look at our words and phrases and update them so that they reflect Christian thinking. We should evaluate them also to see if they are assuring, inspiring, and uplifting. Exchanging catastrophic phrases like "How could he do this to me?" for one with a more positive focus, "I certainly don't appreciate that. Now how can I use this situation creatively?" Speaking the truth to ourselves by positive words frees us from negativism. Learn to say, "Next time" and "Up until now." "Next time that happens, I'm going to assertively say, 'No thanks!'" "Up until now it's true that I've been using too many negative words with my children; from now on I'm not going to insult them like that."

To cultivate positive emotions that turn us on to life and invigorate us with emotional vitality we need to meditate and use inspiring words and phrases. "This is a terrific place to be!" "I'm glad to be alive in these exciting days!" "How can God and I turn this situation into a terrific experience?"

Letting our minds soak in the great and magnificent ideas of the Bible not only

refreshens our vocabulary and recycles our destructive words but programs us for inspiration. A practical way of soaking our mind in scriptures is to get a three-by-card, head with "Inspiring Words for Renewing the Mind" and use the card as a psychological "tool." When we find vigorous words that evoke new vistas of thought—write them down.

Marian Chapien describes "a word fast" in *Love and Beloved*. She tells about a fast where people try to go ten days without any put-down words. Most people fail miserably. Yet the fast makes them conscious of the prevalence of negative words in our lives and their power.

"In him is always yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God." (II Cor. 1:19-20)

Jesus *yesses* us. Via his salvation he pronounces an affirmative and definite yes on us. There's no ambivalence with him; "Yes, you are a loved and valued person; no, on second thought, I can't stand you." "All the promises of God find their Yes in him." And when you've been yessed by Jesus, you live *a Yes life*. The yes life is a life permeated with grace, power, and spiritual beauty. It talks in terms of praise and appreciation. It talks in terms of choice and freedom, thus eliminating coercive words like "I have to, I must..." It talks in terms of potentials instead of impossibilities. The Gospel encourages us to put all diseased words, downbeat words, and sterile words away from us so that we break out from stale thinking.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6)

The power of positive psycholinguistics is assumed and exemplified in this passage. The problem, however, is that the English translations do not clearly convey it. The Hebrew text more dynamically catches the spirit when it says, "Train up (instruct) a boy on the mouth (*'al piy*) his way..."

A boy's way must be put on his mouth. He must come to the place where he can articulate the "way" that is uniquely his way. If he doesn't learn how to express who he is (his identity), what temperament and gifts are his, and how he is to grow in maturity—he will not know "the way he should go." The staying power of personality results from the kind of personal learning that comes when one learns his way and can talk about it.

Parents should enable their children to speak about the way that befits their life. By doing so they equip them with a staying power that transcends merely teaching rules and regulations. Aristotle taught "That which is expressed is impressed." If a person can put what he has learned into his own words he has really been deeply impressed

with that truth. It is *his*. So it is in teaching our children about their identity, values, attitudes, and beliefs. When it comes from their lips it is also in their heart and it will with them throughout life.

Living in the Now

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15-16)

Living in this moment enables us to make the most of our positive emotions. A neurotic is often characterized by the inability to live in the present. Past memories and traumas may have him fixated in the past, or present pain drives him to project himself in the future via fantasy. The result is that we miss the now. Life passes us by.

In contrast scripture urges us to become aware of this day, this hour. Two Greek words are translated "time." *Chronos* refers to quantitative time; *kairos* refers to qualitative time—psychological time. The first is measured by the clock, it is external, constant, and inexorable.

The second refers to our subjective experience of time. The word is translated in a wide range of ways: "opportunity, timely moment, due time." *Kairos* refers to very special moments. A pregnant woman experiences both *chronos* and *kairos*. The *chronos* refers to the date of the birth, doctors and nurses note the *chronos* of the birth to the exact minute and record it on the birth certificate. But the expectant mother also experiences another kind of time. We talk about her "time" being upon her. Sometimes when false labor pains occur the *kairos* is experienced for days and even weeks. The timely moment for the birth might occur at any moment.

Kairos time is like that. It's always pregnant with possibilities and opportunities. "Look carefully" or "walk circumspectly" (KJV) literally means to look all around. The verse urges us to a state of awareness so that we are fully conscious of our moments, so that we live in the now. This means that instead of gobbing our food, we take the time to taste every bite and enjoy our eating. It means we give ourselves permission to slow down and smell the roses. To experience *kairos*-time we have to tune into life and to feel what's happening this moment. It means receiving the joy of the blue sky, the peace of the starry sky, the beauty of the flowers and the invigoration of the wind.

Scripture offers another insight about *Kairos*-time: "Make the most of the time because the days are evil." Does that "because" strike you as strange? Normally we assume that evil days prevent us from having timely moments. When things aren't going our way, when trouble comes, when bad things happen—we usually develop

tunnel vision and see only the evil. But we can make the most of our Kairos in the spite of our external circumstances.

Jesus' experience of Kairos at Golgotha demonstrates that even evil days can't negate God's opportune moments. Things were not going well for Jesus; he experienced despair, sorrow, and repulsion. Yet in that evil day "in due time (kairos), Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6). A great and momentous incident occurred in and through that Good Friday. Jesus found the emotional and mental resources to handle the stresses of that day because he "looked carefully" and saw the timely moment before him (Heb. 12:2-3).

Living in the now is a childlike quality; it's being fully present in what we're doing. Every morning we each awaken to a wondrous miracle—we have another twenty-four hours of un-manufactured time. We cannot store it, cannot skip it, cannot sell it. Yet it is ours, the essence of life. To attend to this moment is an emotionally exhilarating experience that serves as an antidote to depression and boredom. Living now puts us in direct contact with reality; it stimulates our capacity to appreciate our present and experience it wholeheartedly.

Learning to Enjoy Life

Intuitively we feel emotionally vital when we feel good and experience joy. Our problem, however, is that we tend to misbelieve about joy. We believe it is externally conditioned, that we can only experience happiness when our health, relationships, job, finances, and other circumstantial factors are going well. The theme song of the musical "Oklahoma" expresses our thinking:

"O what a beautiful morning! O what a beautiful Day! I have a wonderful feeling— everything is going my way."

This is happiness because it depends on life's happenings. Joy is different. It does not come from external happenings, but from within. Scripture identify joy as the fruit of the Spirit and evidence of the presence of God's kingdom. Like happiness, it gives us a feeling of pleasure, but unlike happiness it can be habituated as a mood. "Rejoice in the Lord always" reveals that joy can be programmed within us. We can cultivate it.

We've been designed with a pleasure-pain mechanism biologically so that we naturally avoid painful things and are motivated to repeat those things that give us pleasure. *Pleasure* turns us on to life. It's emotional payment for behavior. It's an incentive to keep us doing whatever we're doing. It's an emotional green light. Physical pleasure enriches our life for it relaxes, refreshes our spirit, and renews our energy. Pleasure works similarly in our spirit but with one difference. Unlike our dendrite nerve endings which are programmed to inform us what is pleasurable and therefore good

for us, or what is painful and therefore bad for our somatic life—psychic pleasure and pain come with almost no programming. We do not instinctively "know" what is good or bad. That knowledge is derived from our cognitions and arises as we discover values.

One prominent mis-belief that limits our joyfulness is our equation of circumstantial happenings with happiness. That belief predisposes us to unhappiness, irresponsibility, passivity, and needless misery. In contrast the early Christians were capable of "rejoicing with unutterable and exalted joy" even in the midst of painful trials (I Pet. 1:3-8). Their joy was one not conditioned on external things. Even Paul wrote about joy joyfully while a prisoner in a federal penitentiary (Phil.4:4). Joyfulness results from an awakened consciousness of God's wonders and love which are always around us.

Joy springs from our developed capacity of appreciation and praise. It's not the case that there are not enough blessings, but that we haven't learned how to value things properly. Our tendency is to discount and to de-value. "So what? It's just another sunset. Once you've seen one sunset, you've seen them all." By de-valuing we dull ourselves to the magic of life. We see the miracle of a newborn baby and causally dismiss it as "just another baby." Actually, there are all kinds of joys created for our enjoyment and ours for the taking: the joy of adventure and discovery, the joy of relationships, the joy of being a part of something, the joy of beauty, the joy of accomplishment, the joy of creativity, the joy of experiencing something new, the joy of expanding one's mind. Joyfulness is a natural result of the renewed mind.

Humor as one particular expression of joy is also one of God's good gifts that enables us—to adopt a delightful spirit—even when bad things happen. Psychologically humor is a distancing phenomenon. It enables us to stand apart from something and laugh at its incongruity. Humor is seeing the incongruous in ourselves, others, and the world without letting it wipe us out. It's God's priceless gift that helps us remain sane when the world seems nutty.

Humor deepens our appreciation and thus our joy. It enables us to be emotionally alive and vibrant. There were times in Christ's life when the pretension, legalism, and self-righteousness of the Pharisees angered him and he spoke out against it sharply. But there were other times when he responded to them with humor. He drew wild and ridiculous pictures in stories and proverbs of their judgmentalism. He described one man trying to remove a speck from another's eye while a beam was protruding from his own (Matt. 7:1-3)!

Jesus jested with the Pharisees about straining out gnats while swallowing camels; a proverbial way of charging them with messed-up priorities (Matt. 23:23-24). He

painted funny little scenarios of self-righteousness as the one about the Pharisee whose prayer was a monologue that got him nowhere with God (Luke 18:9-14). Humor kept Jesus from being deadly serious all the time. It kept his spirit sweet in the midst of his serious mission.

By letting humor happen whenever it can we learn positive emoting. Let humor leap out of your skin, dance in your eyes, and give your belly a massage; it's health to your emotions (Prov. 17:22).

Developing a Sense of Awe

Positive emotions are also cultivated by awe. Approaching life with awe (reverence, admiration, appreciation, praise, and affirmation) gives us a worshipful perspective. Jesus approached life with the wide eyes of a child. Once when a soldier expressed faith in him, he responded with astonishment. He was excited and delightfully surprised. He didn't take it for granted.

"When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, 'Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.'" (Matt. 8:10)

Child-like exhilaration results from a child-like perspective—open-eyed to the wondrous things of life. A child can say "Wow!" or "Whoopee!" because he is uninhibited and not dulled in seeing. A child sees freshly. Also children are unpretentious and full of natural enthusiasm—emotional vitality. They haven't learned to squelch feelings or make certain negative emotions their life scripts. Children trust and experience life with a heightened sense of aliveness. No wonder Jesus wants us to become as little children to enter his reign (Mark 10:15).

Kant, the philosopher, noted, "Two things incline the heart to wonder, the moral law within and the starry sky above." Actually everywhere we look there are astonishing realities, realities that we have not begun to fathom. But to see them we must resist the tendency toward cynicism. We must not "get used to glory" as did the Israelites.

The spirit of worship keep this child-like spirit alive within us. Edgar N. Jackson says the worshipful perspective can bring "a healing perspective, a new appreciation" for life. It stimulates faith; it lifts the spirit." *Psychology for Preaching*). This gives us an inner fire of enthusiasm. Elton Trueblood says, "The church is at best ... an incendiary fellowship," because it is a community that worships (*The Incendiary Fellowship*). In worship we experience healing dynamics that renew life: the renewal of the mind, the release of negative emotions, forgiveness, love, confession, meaning, praise, community, and God's spirit who transforms. In worship we learn to dream again, love again, believe again, and hope again. Worship is therapeutic.

Worship reminds us of Jesus' grace and enablement—two of the most dynamic and

exhilarating forces in the world. In worship we experience a grace that affirms, values, and invigorates. This unconditional and overflowing of love grants us forgiveness which deals with conscious and unconscious guilt that may be inhibiting us from living life to the hilt.

Feeling Human Warmth

"If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:17-18)

God's agape-love becomes a reality ("truth") in our lives as we open ourselves to it emotionally ("heart" is literally "bowels"). It becomes a deep compassion in the center of our being. To see and not feel indicates that we have closed our hearts—turned off human warmth. To do so makes us cold and calculating people; people calloused and impervious to human suffering. John's plea is that we become holistic in our loving—loving people in word and deed.

Our willingness to be inwardly pained by another's plight) enables us to care. The word "compassion" is revealing for it means to suffer (*passion*) with (*come*) another person. Feelings of human warmth arise as we share by empathy another's pains and feel moved to do something about them. Psychologists tell us that the unwillingness to suffer is the primary basis for all mental illness. If we flee from this positive use of a negative emotion) we sicken ourselves and damage our optimum functioning. Carl Jung wrote, "Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering." (*Collected Works of G.G. Jung*)

Legitimate suffering—entering into the experience of another by way of imagination and feeling with them enriches) our lives and gives us the capacity for genuine warmth. This happened between E.T. and Elliot in the movie, x{"E.T. -- THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL."} A deep friendship developed in the movie between the eight-year old boy and the strange looking creature from outer space. Their friendship touched audiences because it was meaningful and deep. What explains this depth? One of Elliot's friends figured it out, "Elliot feels E.T.'s feelings."

When E.T.'s ship returned for him at the end, there was a touching goodbye scene that vividly illustrates compassion. E.T. walked up the plank and turned to wave. He pointed to his glowing red heart that lit up from within, pointed to it with his extra-long finger and exclaimed in his grunty voice, "Owwch!"

The love adventure that turns on warmth begins when we intentionally and consciously turn our central self to express good will and acceptance of others because of our new perspective of their sacredness. We deliberately do them good.

We choose behaviors that are affirming and gracious. Then slowly and quietly a miracle occurs. As we live with renewed cognitions, behave Christianly, our heart warms up with *phileo-love*. God's love is felt in the center of our being.

Karl Menninger writes, "Love is the medicine for the sickness of the world." Karen Horney explains psychoanalysis in terms of love: "Analytic therapy is essentially an attempt to help the patient gain or regain his capacity for love." Otto Rank objected to Freudian Psychology for this very emphasis.

"Psychoanalysis is at bottom a love therapy, that is, that it works on the basis of the transference relationship, which is a revival of the parental relationship. As this is founded on love and fear, so analysis would be nothing but an improved edition of child rearing, a re-education as Freud himself called it, but it works with more love and less fear." (*Will Therapy and Truth and Reality*, p. 20)

Paul Tournier underscores the importance of helping another person feel loved.

"I am convinced that nine out of ten people seeing a psychiatrist do not need one. They need someone who will love them with God's love and take time with them and believe for them, and they will get well." (*The Relational Revolution*, Bruce Larson, p. 62)

True human warmth is therapeutic because it springs from unconditional love. It consists of a love that will face even ridicule and rejection. Elton Trueblood says, "Passion takes us beyond the superficiality of life to a deep and wonderful glow in which we learn to care." (*The Yoke of Christ*, p. 78). This is the kind of love we have been created for. The most pagan unbeliever has a drive for self-sacrificing love for his own. Agape-love isn't foreign to the human personality. But what happens in secular life is that we learn to "shut up our bowels of compassion" because it makes us vulnerable, weak, and too much at another's disposal.

We need to learn to identify with those warm feelings of compassion when they arise and use them for motivation. The gospel provides us a model for agape-love that feels and acts for others. Christ's human warmth quickens our warmth and gives us permission to feel those deep aches for others without shame or embarrassment.

We turn on human warmth by letting our aching feelings arise and identifying with them. This is not a mystery. All of us are quite adept at identifying with feelings. We all know how to identify with feelings of depression, negativism, and fear. We have the power to cultivate these feelings, nurse them, and feed them as we can compassion.

"Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (I Cor. 13:13)

Three great forces of the Christian experience create an indomitable vitality. Faith, hope and love supremely help us in cultivating warmth. Faith enthuses and enlivens us with confidence and courage (Heb. 13:5-6, II Cor. 4:13). It's a great motivator. Faith in relationships enriches our love capacity for it "believes all things and hopes all things" (I Cor. 13:7).

Energizing Ourselves with Meaning

"Man's most desperate need is to find some meaning in life," writes Viktor Frankl who founded Logotherapy—the therapy of meaning. John Powell says "Meaning is our daily bread." Conversely, without meaning we become neurotic and aimless. Without meaning "the personality collapses" (*The Church and Psychotherapy*, Karl R. Stolz, p. 95).

Meaning taps our positive emotions and organizes our personality forces thus creating a state of excitement and intensity. We are never more alive or emotionally vibrant than when we are moving toward a desired goal. It gives us a sense of power and significance. Indecision, meaninglessness, and passiveness, on the other hand, devitalize life and makes us feel impotent and empty.

Positive emotions are cultivated as we set exciting goals for ourselves, as we dream bold dreams, and value life-affirming ideas. This moral dimension of life enriches personality and energizes emotions. No wonder immorality and a vague sense of values weaken convictions and undermine emotions. Meaningful goals make us feel good about ourselves and our direction in life. It turns our conscience on and taps our creativity.

We cultivate positive emotions in aligning our wills with God's for then we become "en-thused" (filled with God). A vital relationship with God makes us more creative in our life's purposes. To create means to organize, synthesize, make new things, bring together fragmented and broken things into a new unity. In personality this is therapeutic. We're energized by meaning so that our subconscious mind becomes more creative moving us toward self-actualization.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

Positive emotions are to live in. They come as God's gifts for motivation and revitalization. Positive emotions provide us life's exclamation marks. We tap into this rich reservoir by—thinking Christianly, acting on our cognitions, rejecting passivity, touching and hugging, being as friendly and warm as a puppy, emotionalizing our environments, improving our vocabulary of grace, living in the Now, radiating charm and joy, developing a sense of humor, learning to worship so that awe and wonder can enrich our personality with meaning.

In these ways life becomes a sacrament. Every facet of life becomes extra-ordinary. Every bush is aflame with God's presence. Every step is a step onto holy ground. This perspective sanctifies all of life and excites us in a godly way to the holiest of emotions. Then unending springs of living water begin flowing out from our deepest chambers of our heart refreshing and revitalizing every relationship, task, and word.

Chapter 12

EXPERIENCING

THE DYNAMIC OF GRACE

E*motions primarily arise from cognitions.* And one special form of cognition is that which arises from our experiences. In chapter three we called this dimension of consciousness, "Experiential Consciousness." This is our consciousness via our experiences in life—experiences which stimulate us to "reckon in our soul." Experiences provide us facts and events that confront us and challenge our thoughts. After the experience we do the cognitive work of understanding, assimilating, and fitting it into our perceptual system.

My daughter Jessica provided me an unobstructed demonstration of the role of experiences on the emotional life when I wrote the first draft of this chapter. She was only seven months and completely pre-verbal. Even a strong command like "No!" signified nothing to her. She had not begun her abstract mental development and therefore knew almost nothing intellectually. Yet on another level of consciousness she knew a great many things and had a great many feelings.

Experience had conditioned her to enjoy peekaboo and chase. She was conditioned to "know" that graham crackers were good and the red medicine bottle was bad. She "knew" that the yucky nose dropper always left her with a bad taste in her mouth and so she took evasive action whenever she saw it coming. All of her life knowledge was experiential knowledge. Though she was but seven months she was already "reckoning in her soul"—making infant decisions about life and programming feelings into her subconscious. The experience of swinging in the air provided her bodily sensations of stimulation which she willingly received and longed for. The experience was "understood" to be exhilarating and good.

Experiential thinking triggered by experiences comprise our first "knowing" about life

and thus the deepest parts of our subconscious programming. Our first experiential thinking subsequently influences our basic emotional patterns. Psychoanalysis has made Twentieth Century man aware of the pervasive influence that our first years have on our cognitions and character. Freud noted that "the ego is the history of its object relations" which means that we are what we have experienced. This basic psychological truism stands at the heart of all of our conditioning. Our character arises from our experiencing because our experiences leave impressions on us about "the way life is."

The word "experience" is defined as "the totality of the cognitions given by perception; all that is perceived, understood, and remembered; the knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in the events of life." The problem, however, with our early experiences is that they occurred during our infantile, pre-verbal, and pre-adult understanding of life and are therefore loaded with inaccuracies and irrationalities. This explains why our subconscious programming tends to be full of cognitive distortions and why some children seem to start life off on the wrong foot.

The dimension of experience greatly affects our emotional lives because we were born as "selves" through relationships. Understanding this psychodynamic of human personality deepens our appreciation for "where we are coming from," our early experiences, as well as today's relational experiences. It also enables us to tap the power of grace so that we can have new experiences which influences today's cognitions and emotions.

The Genesis of Emotional Patterns

Many of our adult feelings arise due to the influences of our early experiences. Early experiences are foundational in our psychological development because they established emotional patterns or "scripts." Our early home life taught us what to fear and what to love; there we learned either to avoid honest confrontation, repress feelings of sexuality, or to use our helpless feelings of dependency in manipulative ways.

Nearly all behavior is in some sense conditioned by previous experience. This doesn't mean that our personality patterns are irresistible for today's experiences are also formative and transformative. Edward V. Stein warns against interpreting the cruciality of early conditioning as forever determining behavior. He says some people find the idea a convenient rationalization.

"Psychological determinism is one of those ideas that can easily get caught in the northern latitudes of logic and freeze a person into immobility or ineffectiveness, just as many a woolly mammoth was mired in permanent ice in Siberia." (*The Stranger Inside You*, p. 47)

If bad feelings predominate today it's highly likely that you were conditioned for them early in life. Perhaps you suffered rejection, mockery, or fear and then made your negative thoughts and poor self-image your emotional script. Today those feelings live in your subconscious as an organizing influence predisposing you to low self-esteem, insecurity, and/or fearfulness. Those exposed to high levels of anger in early life often become anger-filled and anger-prone individuals who are not only predisposed to various forms of hostility as adults, but who also feel uncomfortable when there's no conflict going on! They need anger. They need conflict because anger has become part and parcel of their "deep heart" script that informs them how life is.

Leon J. Saul explains the dynamic. "Children who remain too long in too intense an emotional situation form fixed patterns." (*Emotional Maturity*). We adopt such fixed patterns during our vulnerable years when we have a tremendous need to identify with the emotionally significant people in our lives. Add to this the fact that we also had little rationality or judgment with which to temper our interpretations, we can easily understand how we came to adopt many hurtful, neurotic, and irrational scripts.

Children experience their parents and others adults as "gods." They take nearly everything said as literally true. They believed it all. They are not capable of realizing that "daddy is exaggerating" or teasing, or that he has his own emotional hangups. So as children, when we were disapproved or teased our self-image immediately collapsed. Through these innumerable experiences we gradually developed vague impressions and fuzzy ideas about life.

"If a person has five bad experiences with dogs, one after another," explains Norman Wright, "naturally a fear response is gradually reinforced." (*The Christian Use of Emotional Power*, p. 16)

The basic emotional lesson we all learn in our first years is what life feels like. From parents and others we absorb a sense that "these are the feelings of life." Eric Erickson talks about basic trust, a sense of personal autonomy, and a good self-image as the first emotional lessons of life. If our parents were non-demonstrative in their affection then we learned that open affection and tenderness are not acceptable. We will feel uncomfortable in the presence of intimacy, hugging, kissing, and physical demonstrations of affection. If we had no mature emotional model during those formative years we will discover that we lack some psychic imprinting concerning how an emotionally whole person should feel. Thus we carry around in our souls a lot of unfinished business. This is especially true of self-worth feelings. We may find ourselves incapable of getting on with life in the present because we are fixated upon past emotional needs. In one sense we do not live in the present at all, but in the past, or rather, the past continues living dynamically within us.

Individual Psychology, following Adler's insight about the importance of early memories and one's position in the family constellation, emphasizes how experiences affect emotion. The first child experiences life differently than the last child or an only child. He grows up in a different psychological world though he may be in the same house, same bedroom, do the same things, and have the same parents. Each position in the family constellation has its own peculiarities and impresses the soul in its unique way so that there are psychological styles characteristic of each position.

Further, the experiences of spoiling and neglect, said Adler, give powerful impressions to the child. In spoiling he senses that he is not really trusted to cope on his own. In neglect he gets the impression that he is not worth his parent's bother. As different as spoiling and neglect are, both impact the child with a sense of inferiority. Adler also pointed out that we are conditioned by our experiences for or against a social feeling—to move toward or away from other people.

Because we think relationally, our relational consciousness conditions us and strikes deep impressions on our malleable souls. Even before we develop verbal thinking, we are "reckoning in our soul" and have an impression of whether we are Ok or Not-Ok, that our parents are Ok or Not-okay, that the world is Ok or Not-ok, that God is Ok or Not-ok. These are the initial lessons learned in the School of Infancy.

Our parent's relational skills (the way they listen, care, affirm, give of themselves, expect appropriate responses, etc.) are crucial factors in our emotional styles today. This insight shouts volumes at parents and teachers, warning them to tread softly. Their words, attitudes, emotions, and behavior can become the subconscious programming of the children to whom they relate. Parents can slay kids with their words and pierce them through with a glance. Neglect, demanding too much, the lack of forgiveness, teasing, rejection, abuse, and modeling unhealthy emotional reactions can create an emotional Achilles' heel that leaves them vulnerable for years.

Psychologists tell us that early emotional deficiency creates emotionally starved adults. They become fixated with their need for belonging and affection. Others are left with a legacy of resentment, timidity, or indecision. Cold personalities can usually be traced back to cold emotional experiences with one's parents. In this way the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations (Ex. 20:5). Those abused in childhood with severe beatings grow up swearing that they will never hit their kids only to find themselves regressing to their emotional script in times of stress (anger, frustration, depression) and abusing their children.

Failure to receive our basic emotional needs as children frequently causes us to fixate on those needs. This is especially true of love. Authentic love validates us, gives us the security, confidence, and drive to grow. Without it our love-hunger drives us

desperately to find acceptance. Without a deep sense of unconditional love we may even lack a feeling that we are permitted to be.

Love affirms us as one of God's unrepeatable miracles, as one of his beautiful children, and provides the basis for mature growth. In a child's life this kind of love says, "I will always be there for you. I am fully committed to your growth and development. You don't have to prove anything; you are innately valuable and lovable because of Who you are. God created you to be a work of beauty and I love you for what you are and what you can become. I believe in you. You can trust me and depend on me."

Spoiling "love" is condescending love. "I am here to take care of you, to protect you from reality, to shield you from the cruel world" with the unstated implication that the child cannot cope with life on his own and is not to be trusted. Conditional "love" undermines a person's self-esteem. "I will love you and treat you with respect if you measure up to my expectations and wants. You had better not disappoint me." Obviously, anything less than unconditional love isn't the real thing and fails to satisfy the love-hunger with which we are all born.

Since I've been urging self-awareness as an essential step in our journey to emotional wholeness it might be insightful for you to explore the nature and content of some of your early experiences. Was there a lot of hostility or a lot of love? Were you warmly hugged and affirmed or were you held off at arms distance? Did your parents motivate you by threats and scoldings or by hopes and dreams? Were you made to feel respected and important or did you get the impression that there was something wrong with you? Were you loved for who you were or for what you did?

List ten of your earliest memories and see if there is any pattern in them. Who were the emotionally significant people in your first ten years? Describe each person according to his emotional maturity and style. What was the most traumatic experience you had during that time? Write down the five most wonderful experiences. What did you want to be when you grow up at five years of age?

By getting in touch with our early conditioning and renewing our minds about it we bring the demons out into the open and exorcise them. They can no longer blindly drive us. But equally important as understanding the experiences which have conditioned us are our present day experiences that ministers grace, meaning, and love (or their opposites) to our lives.

Experiencing Grace Via Relationships

Carroll Wise writes, "We are hurt by persons and we are cured through persons." (*Psychiatry and the Bible*). This occurs because God made us relational beings. He further established the psychological law that persons are healed when they deeply

meet others with love, warmth, respect, and affirmation. Wise says, "Only personality can reach the depth of other persons. In the incarnation God communicated his love in Christ on a level far deeper than words could ever penetrate."

As relationships create emotional patterns in early life they also re-create or perpetuate emotional patterns. This is the dynamic of relational experiences. Creative relationships "re-parent" us. By updating our Child Ego state and our Parent Ego state with new Adult information and experience we give our deficient Child the strokes it needs, the permission to feel, to grow, to change, to Be, and/or to make contracts with itself.

Theologically, *koinonia* provides us one of the most dynamic gospel resources for new experiences of grace. *Koinonia* is Greek for "fellowship," although "fellowship" poorly translates the idea of a deep, meaningful and intimate shared life. *Koinonia* means a deep knowing and being known as believers truly "encounter" one another in Christ.

"They devoted themselves to the . . . *koinonia* ... And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people." (Acts 2:42-46)

Koinonia effects personality change because of identification. We identify with those with whom we associate. Robert C. Leslie says that a child "absorbs the standards of the significant people" in his environment (*Jesus and Logotherapy*, p. 65).

Absorbing the standards and spirit of other persons is learning by experience—experiential learning. It is what makes discipleship dynamic. "Identification means the child takes as models persons who are close," and they begin imitating them (*Emotional Maturity*, Leon J. Saul). Our inner understandings and outward behaviors come to be fashioned after the ones with whom we have identified. We have become as it were their disciples and reproduce their lives. Thus if we see our parents behaving with restraint, dignity, order, and love, we come to feel these things in the deepest fibers of our being. We sense, "This is the way life should be." If we see shallowness in their faith, deception in the way they relate to people, repression of some emotions, or greed in their orientation to life—we tend to adopt such qualities into our very souls and follow their ways.

Identification offers us a powerful psychological "tool" that can be consciously utilized for re-conditioning. For as we become aware of our emotional pattern we can positively focus on others who manifest the kind of emotional wholeness that's

inherently attractive. By letting our consciousness be filled with images of how that person lives, either by direct involvement with him or vicariously as in reading or watching a movie, we attend his qualities, note how he handles his emotions, and begin modeling his behavior, trying on his attitudes, and imitating his ways. We can do this with living heroes or dead ones, with secular people or with the Lord Jesus.

George A. Coe says "Anyone who can enter sympathetically into the life of another has the capacity for developing in himself the qualities of this other." (*The Motives of Men*, p. 101). Sympathy, openness, and positive attitudes plug into this power of identification. Since I've been writing about Christianizing our emotions, no model for imitation provides a better identification than the appealing character of Jesus. Christian discipleship is a tremendous psychological "tool" which the gospel provides us for personality transformation (Eph. 4:20-24, I Peter 2:21).

"That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." (Phil. 3:10)

"My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4:20)

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher." (Luke 6:40)

Ideally, the Christian community exists as an emotional atmosphere of wholeness where we can constantly experience grace. By definition it is to be a place for intense discipleship to Christ and his school of Grace. Those long there, in fact, become models for the newer ones of what human Christlikeness is. Christian believers are also charged to make it their business to be agents of grace. The fellowship is not a place for people who have attained perfection, but where everybody is still growing and becoming. This makes it easy for people to be real and honest about emotions, needs, and even failures. Failing isn't shameful, dishonesty is.

In the Christian community the contagion of holy and positive emotions can be turned loose in a creative way. Emotions after all are contagious. By getting around those with overflowing love, joyfulness, and hope we have a good chance of catching them. These godly emotions are created and encouraged also as the group is engaged in one-anothering: bearing one another's burdens, loving one another, encouraging one another, supporting one another, exhorting one another, singing to one another, and confessing to one another. Then the *koinonia* factor gives us a new experience of grace that sanctifies our relationships and heals our emotions.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering ... and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together ... encouraging one another." (Heb. 10:23-25)

The grace of God as experienced in the lives of others re-conditions us: it gives us a

new experience of being loved and accepted. For some this will be their first experience of unconditional, non-possessive, and non-manipulative human warmth. The kindness and affirmation will be like nothing they have ever known. They will be suspicious at first. "What do these people want from me?" But eventually they will learn the feeling of love and will come to enjoy "the bowels and mercies" in the *koinonia* of people of like precious faith. Then they too will be able to give good positive feelings of good will. "We love, because he first loved us." (I John 4:19).

Because human life has an inner relatedness to it, we become genuinely human and emotionally alive only when we are able to love and to be loved in a healthy and holy way. Human community is essential for full development. We need each other for Christ loves us unconditionally by incorporating us in his family so that we learn how to accept one another.

"Let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother ... If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. ... Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." (Rom. 14:13-19)

Grace via the Group Experience

Psychologists predict that a person "out of community" for an extensive time will end up mentally and emotionally disturbed. Our deepest personality needs depend upon satisfying and positive relationships. Our emotional vitality is contingent upon experiencing depth *koinonia* in a support group. Our nature hungers for belonging, for love and acceptance, for giving love, for being motivated by others, and for healthy inter-dependence.

Modern psychology's rediscovery of the dynamic of *group* for the healing of personality reaffirms the Christianity's emphasis on *koinonia*. Group provides us experiences of deep relationships and enables us to learn the social skills—genuine listening, positive affirmation, non-accusatory disclosure of feelings, empathy and being present with another person.

Without a group we experience psychological deprivation. We become an anonymous person— unknown and "lacking marked individuality and personality." Eric Fromm warns that anonymity destroys people in this alienated age. Why? Because *anonymity makes us no-bodies* in the midst of the masses and this destroys personality. Anonymity makes for antisocial behavior for we feel detached from others and therefore irresponsible to them. This demoralizes. Conscience weakens inasmuch as anonymity removes the social impact of other's censure and/or approval. The result: morals break down.

Floyd Ruck explains,

"Emotions or impulses that would otherwise be held in check by conformity to social norms may be released under the mask of anonymity." (*Psychology and Life*, p. 541)

Without a meaningful and rich social world, we run wild. To combat anonymity and to positively tap the power of community, Jesus called people to "be with him" (Mark 3:14). He facilitated them into a *group experience*. Group was his *modus operandi*—the fabric out of which his program for changing the world developed. William T. Ham writes, "There are many things which a person can do alone, but being a Christian is not one of them." Jesus molded his original disciples together, in spite of their incompatibility in beliefs, backgrounds, and temperaments, via a Group experience. He knew the power of relationships to form and to re-form.

Yet group *per se* is not therapeutic. As negative relationships warp personality so the dynamics involved in a negative group—one that's uncaring, critical, and hostile—creates deviant personalities. Abraham Maslow writes,

"Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or hurt unnecessarily or dominate or reject another human they become forces for the creation of psychopathology. Let them recognize also that every man who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm is psychotherapeutic force even though a small one." (*Motivation and Personality*, p. 254)

A group of Christians dedicated to the sacredness of human personality and permeated by the unconditional love of God becomes a large psychotherapeutic force in the world. In Christ there are many emotional resources for warmth and compassion which hold a tremendous potential for healing, for Jesus himself is God's communication of grace and love. He graces us so that we can grace one another.

Keith Miller writes frequently about the value of small groups in renewing the vitality of a church. He describes their function as that of *unbinding a community we unbind each other*. Mr. Miller illustrates with the Story of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus called for Lazarus to come out, and "The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" (John 11:43-44).

God's miracle restored Lazarus to life. Lazarus re-entered the world of the living. But as he stood before the crowd he was all bound up. From head to foot the grave wrappings held his arms tight across his chest. He could only take little waddling steps. Nor could he speak clearly. Only muffled sounds came out of his lips since there were grave wrappings around his face! The only sounds he could make were

"muffled hallelujahs!" says Miller. That's why Jesus told those near him to unbind him and let him go. He needed other people to help him shake himself free from the shackles of his grave clothes and enter more fully into the liberating life miraculously bestowed upon him. And that's what *a grace group* does.

In group we learn to forge emotional bonds and to develop genuine friendships. A *grace group* enables us to be ourselves, to honestly discover ourselves as we find ourselves reflected in the eyes of caring people. Groups also inspire. Therein we're challenged to take risks, to discover our gifts, and to strive for excellence. Groups give us a sense of accountability and visibility. Group results when we open ourselves to form relationships with others on an emotional level. Then and there we begin experiencing the miracle of intimacy and the grace of being accepted. Group is an antidote to the shallowness of life for it is an encounter in our depths.

The Grace Experienced in Counseling

Paul Tournier describes grace in a counseling relationship:

"The virtue of psychotherapy is the virtue of non-judgment. We are overwhelmed by it and overjoyed, every time that we experience it afresh. We see in it a sign of God's grace." (*Feelings, Where They Come From and How to Handle Them*, Joan Jacobs, p. 107)

Through another person who tries to understand us, who listens intensely to us, who offers insights, who reflects sympathy and warmth, and who respects us as persons, believes in us, and hopes for our best—we experience *the grace of friendship*. Psychotherapy's power to heal wounded souls lies primarily in its ability to give an individual a new experience that calls into question the traumatic and/or confusing experiences of life and which stimulates the individual to adjust his beliefs and hopes. "Love received and love given comprise the best form of therapy" (*Becoming*, Gordon W. Allport, p. 33).

The counseling experience is a form of friendship, "paid friendship." What ultimately qualifies a person to counsel another are the qualities that also make him an authentic human being capable of being a real friend. The counselor must be non-manipulative, non-judgmental, caring, willing to take the time to hear someone out, and to offer insights. Paul identifies such a person "spiritual" (Gal. 5:22-23,24-25, 6:1-2).

Counseling facilitates growth because it allows the receiver to *be real* with at least one human being. The one in counseling is given permission to ventilate his repressed thoughts and feelings in a safe atmosphere where his secrets won't be used against him. The therapist is not going to break confidence or trust. This experience of freedom to face oneself enables a deeper level of awareness to surface, a new

experience of relating to develop—and thus wholeness to happen.

The heart of counseling (and friendship) is *dialogue*. Dialogue means "emotional clearance." In dialogue we first report and ventilate our built up emotions which prepares the way for real discussion.

Dialogue and discussion are not equivalent; *dialogue* is sharing emotions in an atmosphere of grace. It allows us to feel what we feel even if the emotion is inappropriate, horrible, dangerous, artificial, and stupid.

"There is no place in dialogue for arguing since dialogue is essentially an exchange of feelings and there cannot be any argument over the way a person feels." (*The Secret of Staying in Love*, John Powell, p. 124)

Such dialogue is uncommon in daily life. We all tend to judge. When someone reports that he feels anger, fear, or lust, our usual response is to shake our index finger and tell him how he ought to feel. "You shouldn't feel that way! It's not right!" We may think we're helping, but our advice is usually perceived as a discounting of the person's emotions and a devaluing of them. Our moralizing only makes it unsafe for the person to come out from hiding and truly look at himself. Without the strength of another's gracious presence we are not able to explore our inner resources. When relationships are loaded with judgment they are un-therapeutic.

Dialogue comes as a gift of grace. By giving another person the opportunity to speak his emotions and by hearing him out without condemnation—we befriend and grace. By dialogue we emotionally enter into his world and see life as he sees it. We come to feel his pain and experience his confusion. This is accurate empathy—a high level relational skill that is as rare as it is demanding. This kind of acceptance doesn't mean that we approve every thought or emotion the person reveals; it means that we accept him and are willing to come to understand him so that we can help. The counseling experience re-conditions a person because it gives an experiential taste of grace—challenging and replacing the traumatic experiences.

The Grace that Flows from an Encounter with Jesus

To convey his message of grace Jesus selected the media of personality. In and through relationships and groups Jesus flesh-out his spirit of love and compassion. He didn't write a book. Instead he inscribed his ideals and spirit on the fleshly pages of human hearts. And by molding men and women as his apprentices to a new kind of life, love, and grace, he enabled them to identify with him, learn his ways, catch his spirit, and serve as his ambassadors for the new humanity. He knew that his method would permeate their spirits with his kind of life more completely than if he left them a textbook on procedures or rules.

Jesus' method of discipling centered in giving people new experiences. He loved them, graced them, valued them, and encountered them as no one else ever had. The majority were utterly surprised when he first walked into their lives and treated them with such grace. He usually used dialogue to obtain emotional clearance so that he could then encounter them with his good-news. At other times he simply invited people into relationship: "Come and See!" (John 1:29). Andrew asked him where he was staying but instead of telling him, he showed him. He gave him an experience.

Jesus encountered the woman of Samaria intentionally avoiding the discussion method. He opted to grace her in a surprising way that was primarily non-verbal. He violated social protocol, demonstrating how far he would go and the price he would pay to reach her. By offering her some unexpected human warmth and respect) he shocked the daylights out of her. "Give me a drink," he requested simply. Yet in so asking he put himself at her disposal. He made himself dependent, vulnerable, and open to rejection. He made her feel needed. Instead of coming across as other rabbis did (superior, self-sufficient, distant, better than Samaritans, too busy for a second-rate woman), Jesus used the factor of transparency and vulnerability to give her a taste of grace.

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9)

The woman was utterly surprised by his behavior. It teased her into inquisitiveness. It lured her out of her emotional hiding place and enabled her to experience an authentic encounter with Jesus.

Jesus encounter the IRS racketeer boss of the first century, Zachaeus, and old Zach nearly fell out of his sycamore tree. He had climbed the tree to get an eye-full of the Prophet that everybody was talking about. But he never dreamed that the Rabbi would treat him with respect or be willing to receive his hospitality. After all, he was a renegade to the Jewish race. Yet Jesus' first words to Zacchaeus when he stopped his entourage beneath the tree were:

"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."
(Luke 19:5)

What a privilege for the town's chief mobster! What an unconventional expression of grace. Zacchaeus was overjoyed. But the crowd murmured; "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

For Zacchaeus it was a turning point. Jesus' style proved therapeutic, it transformed old Zach and left him a changed man. Grace does that. Paul Tournier explains the psychological dynamic in grace:

"The experience of Jesus Christ is the most powerful force that human

personality can ever know, and the greatest transforming energy that has ever existed." (*The Person Reborn*, chapter 11)

The gospels are full of stories narrating encounters between Jesus and hurting people. Jesus was always giving himself to people in ways that gave new experiences of grace. He loved, accepted, respected, and challenged because he was a man for others and he demonstrated that he was willing to take his time and trouble with them. Children felt his warmth, prostitutes and tax collectors his care and belief in their possibility of change, fisherman were enthralled with his big dreams.

Out of the encounters people felt his revitalizing reality which enabled them to become new people. Christ's encounters were always catalysts for growth. People not only felt trusted and believed in, forgiven and healed, but given the security for honesty and risk taking. They knew too that his love wasn't mere sentimentalism, but tough love. He showed favoritism to no one but graciously dealt with the rich and powerful as well as the poor. His grace manifested itself toward the self-righteous as he took the time and trouble to shake them out of their legalism and lethargy.

The man possessed with a thousand demons approached Jesus in a way that scared most men. But Jesus met him with serenity and confidence. Others had chained him, driven him out of town, and abandoned him in terror. But Jesus re-conditioned him by giving him a new experience. To the man's rage and ugliness Jesus did not draw back in repulsion or timidity. Jesus refused to play the games that everybody else played. Consequently the man was released from the dark powers that possessed his soul (Mark 5:1-20).

In relating to busy Martha, Jesus challenged his life priorities. "Mary has chosen the good portion which shall not be taken from her." He spoke quietly when Martha yelled at him insisting that he command Mary to help her. That was the last thing fretting Martha expected to hear. She assumed that Jesus would be on her side, that he would tell meditative Mary to get off her chair and into the kitchen "where she belonged." And though the parable of the "Good Samaritan" helping the poor man in the ditch immediately preceded this encounter with Martha, Jesus knew her deeper than she knew herself. There is a place for practical service but service must be subordinate to sitting at Jesus' feet in fellowship, communing with him (Luke 10:38-42).

Jesus no longer literally rubs shoulders with us. How then can we experience his encounter? According to Jesus' story of Judgment Day, he is invisibly present every day of our lives in our everyday encounters with people. "As you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40). Our most mundane life situations are God's burning bushes. *All of life is sacramental* —he is not far from any one of

us.

"The God who made the world and everything in it ... does not live in shrines made by man. ... He himself gives to all men life and breath and everything ... that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him) and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:22-27)

This experience of feeling after God and finding him even in the marketplaces of life indicates the possibility of transcendent encounters at all times. Paul describes this experiential encounter using an emotional word—feel. In Greek this word (*pselaphao*) means "to handle, touch, or feel." These are experiential words indicating an immediate experience—to the intuitive experience we sometimes get in prayer when we feel that we are immediately in God's presence. The process of "feeling after" (note the optative force) has a clear objective, "so that one finds him."

Experiencing Jesus and the reality of his grace is experientially real. Note the experiential language of the Psalmist: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psa. 34:8 // I Pet. 2:3). Hebraically, tasting refers to relishing something on the palate, or metaphorically, experiencing it).

Jesus "tasted death" for all of us (Heb. 2:9). He had a direct, in-depth, and immediate experience of death. He did not merely look at a picture of death, he endured the pangs of death by crucifixion. *Tasting* is one of our senses—a bodily feeling. The word thus draws a picture of a stimulating external reality that's brought into us. Christians according have "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). Mere verbal communication of this reality fails to do justice to the experience. Try to explain what "tasting the powers of the coming age" is like explaining what strawberry shortcake tastes like. It can't be done. It is a knowing that transcends words about it. Reading about strawberry shortcakes in a cook book cannot give one the experiential knowledge. It must be tasted.

"By this we may be sure that we *know* him, if we keep his commandments..." (I John 2:3). Actively responding to Jesus in faith (keeping his commandments) gives us a deep and experiential knowing. A knowing that is beyond merely knowing *about* him, it is a knowing of *him*.

"If these things are yours and about, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Pet. 1:5-8, e.g. Phil. 3:8-10)

Experiencing Jesus is the ultimate experience of grace. It is a rejuvenating experience wherein we come to know his loving heart and exciting purpose. We become part of his body; his spirit lives within us.

"The Christian life is not a decisive and radical experience undergone once for

all. It is an uninterrupted series of experiences in which by God's grace even defeat and backsliding generate new victories." (*The Strong and the Weak*, Paul Tournier, p. 248)

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (II Cor. 3:17-18)

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

The kind of relationships and encounters we experience in life radically affect our emotions. Our early experiences initiate our present emotional patterns and today's experiences continue the conditioning. As early relationships traumatize or stabilize so new experiences of grace can bring inner healing and vitality. We tap into this psychological dynamic by identifying with persons of grace who manifest a high degree of emotional maturity, by getting into a *koinonia* community where we can both be loved unconditionally and love unconditionally, by giving ourselves to a group of grace people where we can validate others, hear them out, and give ourselves permission to enter into deep relations where dialogue can occur. We also tap the power of grace by encountering the Lord Jesus for in him are the powers for changing our natures.

Chapter 13

WHEN I WAS A CHILD

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." (I Cor. 13:11)

Our journey into emotional wholeness and vitality ultimately brings us into a state of "full development" (maturity). We become self-actualizers. Maturation doesn't mean we become perfect. Maturity refers to the emergence of those qualities that equip us for rich relationships and vital emotional experiences. To be mature means getting over our infantile feelings of insecurity, narcissism, passivity, dependence, and inferiority. By growing out of such crippling emotions we are able to attain positive growth.

"My husband is a child!" a woman once told me in a counseling session. "He can't tolerate being questioned and he becomes irrational whenever I question anything. I don't know how to handle him anymore. Sometimes he throws anger fits and becomes extremely demanding. He's like an eight-year old boy in a man's body; what am I to do?" Sue's husband was infantile. He simply had not grown up. She went on to tell me that his mother called him at least twice a day and that she virtually ran their lives. Everything had to be cleared with mother.

"Can he see this?" I inquired. Sue thought he did because there were times when he would blow up about his mother and vow to cut the apron-strings. And he would . . . for awhile. But he would then fall back into his old habits of depending on her.

When I finally met Jim I explored with him *the dynamics of how his mother kept infantilizing him* and how some of his emotional needs kept him plugged in her mothering. He felt torn. His drive toward maturity motivated him to self-determination and responsibility, yet his fear of responsibility de-motivated him. Eventually he came to see how his cognitions were involved in his emoting— how he had been thinking like a child, reasoning like a child, behaving like a child, and

subsequently feeling like a child.

Seeing these inner dynamics enabled him to make some cognitive and behavioral changes. He took positive steps which nullified his mother's infantilizing influences. He began dealing openly with his feelings of inferiority and insecurity. It wasn't an easy process. Jim had his ups and downs. He had to cope with his old beliefs about "hurting mother" because she was the kind of person who "needed her little boy." But eventually the personality characteristics emerged in Jim that enabled him to grow up. And with his growing came a greater and healthier emotional vitality for him and his family.

Emotional vitality flows when we mature from our infantile thinking and emoting. To Christianize our emotions fully we must abolish our childish ways of thinking, believing, willing, and behaving. A problem common to most of us is childishness. It lingers in our subconscious and provides us ongoing motivation. It is childishness we revert to in times of pressure. We call this *regression*. Our childishness lies dormant with our deep heart until anxiety, fear, or some other intense emotion arises in adult life and we're suddenly thrown back upon our automatic programming. Pressure tests—and in particular it tests our maturity level, challenging us to put away our childish ways and complete our maturation.

Christian Infantilism

One church in the scriptures where ungodly emotions ran rampant was the church at Corinth. Though they were Christ's people, God's holy ones, and participants in the new life—their emotional-spiritual development had fixated at a childish level. They were not experiencing the positive power of Christian emoting.

"I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready. (I Cor. 3:1-2)

Paul's language indicates the close correlation between emotional and spiritual development. Perpetually being a "baby" is equated with being "fleshly" and unspiritual. The flesh inspires, instructs, and motivates us for we receive the content of our thinking from secular sources instead of from God's Spirit (I Cor. 2:10-16). Paul's description also reveals the centrality of mature cognizing. His discipling of the Corinthian was still at a nursing stage, they couldn't handle meat. They were fixated in their growth and unable to chew on the more substantial nourishment.

"You are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?" (I Cor. 3:3-4)

Selfishness and argumentativeness characterizes childishness. The immature believers had failed to absorb the gospel emotionally and still felt an excessive need for

approval. They became an unhappy and peevish group. A spirit of rebellion broke out and they were at each other's throats, ready to sue each other, each claiming superiority, and playing the game, "My Apostle is Better than Yours."

Their infantilism showed up also in their inability to tolerate frustration—everything had to go their way. They pounced on Paul's words about Christian liberty—childishly wanting "total freedom." Consequently misused their liberty (I Cor. 5:1-2, chs. 8-10). They had no ears to hear his words about the cross. Their lack of emotional and psychological development manifested itself in their inconsideration at the Agape Feast and eucharistic celebration which frequently ended in drunkenness and divisions (I Cor. 10:23-24, 11:20-24). The mess at Corinth resulted because the believers had failed to grow up.

Paul's letters (I and II Corinthians) grapple with Christian infantilism. He identifies their lack of maturity, describes it in no uncertain terms, encourages them to abolish their childish ways and calls on them to grow up.

"Do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature." (I Cor. 14:20)

"Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong." (I Cor. 16:13)

*"Be courageous" is literally "play the man" ("Quit you like men" KJV). To understand how this translates into practical strategies for growing up we need only to examine the content of Paul's letters. There we discover some spiritual and psychological insights for emotional development. Paul first stresses *cognitive restructuring*—Christian maturation comes with the renewal of the mind.*

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived ... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? ... Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? ... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (I Cor. 6:9-20)

"I want you to know ... Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. ... Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel." (I Cor. 10:1, 12:1, 15:1)

Infantilism springs from infantile thinking and a mind full of illusions, fairy-tales, and deceptions. Throughout the Corinthian correspondence Paul challenged their thinking and provided them new data for consideration. Repeatedly he asked, "Do you not know?" The Mind of Christ enables us to Christianize our emotions. This mind is revealed by God's Spirit as expressed in spiritual truths (I Cor. 2:12-16). Paul sought to impart to them the secret of God's hidden wisdom in revealing the Good-news of the cross.

"Among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age ... but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification." (I Cor. 2:6-7)

Thinking Christianly contrasts with thinking secularly, "the wisdom of this age." By emphasizing the priority of the Cross and its paradoxical "foolishness" Paul sought to help them renew their minds so that they wouldn't be so infatuated with worldly Greek wisdom which only served to predispose them against the mind of Christ.

"Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise..." (I Cor. 3:18-23)

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand ... and we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit." (I Cor. 2:12-13)

The Christians at Corinth were mis-believing. The wisdom of Greek thinking had set them up to despise the body, believing it was inherently evil. That worked to create the erroneous zone that "what one *does* has nothing to do with what one *is*." They thought they could still engage in immorality without suffering the consequences because it was not them doing it but just their bodies (I Cor. 6). That same Greek philosophy also caused some of them to "say that there is no resurrection from the dead" (I Cor. 15:12). Plato conceptualized salvation as dis-embodiment not a bodily resurrection.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.' Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man! ..." (I Cor. 15:33-35)

Their infantilism sprang from their ungodly thinking. Their consciousness had not been infiltrated with the gospel nor by the Spirit of Christ. Like rebellious adolescents, resentful of being told anything, many of them wanted to be "free thinkers" apart from the apostolic authority that conveys truth.

"If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord." (I Cor. 14:37)

Primarily then Paul's corrective consisted of helping them "take every thought captive to obey Christ." He knew that the ultimate battle is a battle for the consciousness. "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God" (II Cor. 10:5). Before they could become truly spiritual or emotionally whole they would have to renew their minds Christianly. Secondly, Paul provided them a new focus.

"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God

and the wisdom of God. ... When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 1:23-24, 2:1-2)

A Christ-centric focus releases us from narcissism, it puts us in touch with Reality, and it enables us to wake up to the meaning of human existence. Paul focuses their attention on Christ declaring him to be the only foundation (I Cor. 3:11), that all things are ours in him (I Cor. 3:22-23), that the day of Christ is the climax of our days in this world (I Cor. 1:7-8, 5:5), that they themselves are the body of Christ (I Cor. 12), that God gives us the ultimate victory through Jesus (I Cor. 15:51-58), and that our work in the Lord is not in vain. Their misuse of communion manifested their failure to "discern" and "remember" the Lord Jesus. Nor could they focus on the reality of Christ's community. They were totally self-occupied.

"What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not." (I Cor. 11:22)

Paul's confrontation called them to turn their central selves to a new focus. For that focus he gave them new thoughts. He even gave them a bit of shock therapy as he jolted their minds into a new level of awareness of what they were doing.

Third, Paul underscored the therapeutic value of genuine love in the process of growing up.

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (I Cor. 13:4-7)

This description of love highlights the characteristics of maturity and puts those traits in terms of how it relates. Love shows respect and thinks about the other's interests. A genuine orientation in love nullifies impatience, defensiveness, rudeness, temper tantrums, fear of responsibility, and selfishness. By "making love our aim" (14:1) we let Christ's unconditional love transform us. It helps us transcend the conditionality of human love that keeps us immature and greedy.

Conditional love is really emotional blackmail. If we say, "I will love you if you will fulfill these conditions," we are really saying, "I don't care for you for yourself but for what you can do for me." That's exploitation, not love. "Meet my expectations and fulfill my wants and then I will love you," is a manipulative way for controlling another. True love, on the other hand, is psychologically curative because it enables us to transcend ourselves.

"I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel ... What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (I Cor. 4:14-15, 21)

Paul cared enough to confront. His love was tough enough to intervene instead of letting them destroy themselves with the "old leaven ... of malice and evil" (I Cor. 5:6-8). Paul challenged them to grow up in their love knowing that agape-love provides us a powerful spiritual and psychological tool for maturing.

More Shock Therapy

"To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." (Matt. 11:16-19)

Jesus' story of fickle children fussing and finding fault with each other's idea over what game to play was told in response to the infantilism. He was trying to jolt his hearers into an awareness of their juvenile ways. Everything peeved them, nothing satisfied them, they could find fault with everything. But they could not have it both ways: John's asceticism and Jesus' sociality. Jesus and John were both viewed in exaggerated ways and criticized. Jesus called for rationality, "Wisdom is justified by her deeds." He wanted them to look at what they were doing.

The story portrays children being childish. Each child sits on the street curb with folded arms and yells, "You aren't being fair! I want to play funeral. Why can't we play funeral? If you don't play my game I don't want to play at all." Jesus' intention with the shocking story was to jar those who heard his words out of their infantilism as it pictured the ridiculousness of their arbitrary stubbornness.

Nathan did the same thing with King David when he used his "Once there was a little ewe lamb" Story. He jolted David's consciousness with that Story. He drove home his point that the perspective, "I'm special and deserve special privilege" is a selfish and infantile belief. David saw clearly how infantile and cruel the rich man was in taking the poor man's ewe lamb but he had not transferred his intellectual learning to himself until Nathan pointed his prophetic finger and said, "You are the man." That shocked David to look at his immaturity and immorality.

I Can Stand Anything — but Frustration!

Freud noted, "In our innermost soul we are children and remain so throughout most of our lives." T.A. speaks about being "in our Child" when our thinking, feeling, and behaving resembles what we were like as children. T.A. categorizes the child into two states, the Natural Child and the Adapted Child

The Natural Child Ego State refers to our natural child-like qualities that make us endearing and taps our positive traits of curiosity, eagerness, humility, unpretentiousness, and warmth.

The Adapted Child comprises our less wholesome qualities that enabled us to cope when we were kids. This Adapted Child needs to be defused by Adult updating of its cognitions.

The classic infantile personality in the Bible was Esau. He sold his birthright in a moment of passionate hunger. He felt the pressure of a growling stomach and regressed. "So what if I have a birthright! A lot of good that will do me if I starve to death!" Esau was in his Child. He had not learned to postpone gratification of immediate needs and tended to exaggerate. He wasn't going to starve to death.

"Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. And Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me eat some of that red pottage for I am famished!' ... Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' Esau said, 'I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?'" (Gen. 25:29-34)

Esau engaged in crooked thinking when he said he was about to die. Starving men don't walk into the homes of their fathers, smell beans cooking, and really believe their going to die of starvation. Jacob may have been a scoundrel but he wouldn't have let his brother starve to death. Esau was catastrophizing. He wasn't going to starve to death within the next thirty minutes. He was just acting on impulse rather than principle. Undoubtedly his hunger drive was strong.

He had a legitimate need. But he was suffering from a cognitive distortion when he lied to himself about the worthlessness of the birthright. Esau was submitting his will and personality to his passions and becoming their slave. Though he was a big husky guy, a brave and courageous hunger, Esau was a baby in moral values. He refused to accept the pain of waiting. His infantilism consisted in his refusal to tolerate frustration.

"Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." (Gen. 25:34)

Esau walked away from Jacob's table full and satisfied. The beans and cornbread filled his stomach and made him feel good. But the good feelings were momentarily. For as it is with the nature of beans, he suffered that night(!). But a worse suffering began because he suffered a loss of self-respect and that turned him sour and cynical

about birthrights.

Fritz Perls, gestalt therapist, says "All growth stops with the avoidance of pain." When we refuse to tolerate the realistic frustrations involved in life, we begin a pattern of running, escaping, and avoiding. The truth is that as our muscles need to be frustrated and tested by exercise if they are going to grow and function optimally, so our spirits need frustration.

Dr. Quentin Hyder in *The Christian's Handbook of Psychiatry* writes:

"All anxiety or psychic tension is not bad however. A little of it in normal amounts can enhance performance. Athletes would be unable to perform successfully without it. ... It definitely strengthens concentration and spurs imagination, thereby producing more creative ideas. It stimulates interest and develops ambition. It protects from danger."

Earl Lee says,

"Without tension we could not exist any more than a violin string can be played without being stretched across a bridge. This creative tension is not the same thing as destructive worry." (*The Cycle of Victorious Living*)

Accordingly as we renew our minds about frustration, put away from ourselves those infantile thoughts that set us up for low tolerance of frustration, we raise our frustration tolerance level. Dr. Hans Selye says that by "adopting the right attitude we can convert a negative stress into a positive stress."

Abraham Maslow writes:

"We also know that the complete absence of frustration, pain or danger is dangerous. To be strong, a person must acquire frustration-tolerance, the ability to perceive physical reality as essentially indifferent to human wishes, the ability to love others and enjoy their need-gratification as well as one's own." (*Toward a Psychology of Being*)

We frustrate ourselves with mis-beliefs like, "Life is unfair!" We create inward tension by failing to release negative and self-centered thoughts. But by scheduling the pains and pleasures of life intelligently we can prevent destructive frustration. For instance, if I have an unpleasant task to do like cleaning the restroom, I can tackle it the first thing in the day and get it over with. If I procrastinate and make it the last thing to do, then my whole day is spent anticipating something disagreeable. That makes life miserable.

Dr. Hans Selye suggests that if we expose ourselves to controllable doses of stress we thereby transform distress into *eu-stress*—good stress that gives us creative energy

for living (*Stress Without Distress*). Let's de-confuse ourselves about frustrations. We mature when we learn to welcome frustrations as useful and challenging. By de-sensitizing ourselves to the irritability and peevishness that frustration brings we learn also to put away whining and complaining.

The Tantrums

Because of the causal loop between our mind, body, and emotions, infantile reactions generally have an intensifying effect so that the more we pour and whine, the more we shout and brag, the more we judge and throw tantrums—the more infantile we become. We think and feel dependent, inferior, and needy. It's important that we understand these infantilizing dynamics so that we can break with those elements that keep us passive and childish, and prevent maturity. Anything that perpetuates dependency, inferiority, or inadequacy, illusions and magical thinking, low frustration-tolerance and tantrums works to infantilize us.

Then there are our "emotional vulnerability spots," those childhood patterns and reactions that persist within us and which are triggered by pressures. Leon J. Saul quotes a psychological truism in his book *Emotional Maturity* when he writes, "Scratch an adult and you will find a child." (Page 33). There's a little boy or girl in each one of us and in times of stress when strong feelings of dependency, impotence, or inadequacy come our way we tend to regress. We become that little boy or girl again.

"The rabble that was among them had a strong craving; and the people of Israel also wept again, and said, 'O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.'" (Num. 11:4-6)

The stressful situation of living in a barren desert triggered Israel's infantilism. They began griping, fussing, bellyaching, and throwing tantrums. They reacted with arrogance, egotism, and impatience, but inwardly felt inferior and insecure. Though there were miracles all around them, they turned inward, and in their narcissistic reaction failed to see the glory. They complained about their menu, they badmouthed about their leader, they bellyached about the journey, and they grumped about God's time table.

They longed for the secure days of Egyptian slavery. They felt that the anxiety involved in their freedom just wasn't worth it. They wanted to escape their freedom. They lacked the emotional maturity for the wilderness trek. When they compared their present frustrations and deprivations to the security of slavery, they opted for the latter.

"Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man at the

door of his tent." (Num. 11:10)

They childishly reacted by carrying on a camp wide gripe session, every family huddled at their tent door and wailing, "It's unfair! It's unfair! Moses is a slave driver! Why can't we go back to Egypt? It's terrible that God wants us to go through this desert!"

"The anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the Lord, 'Why hast thou dealt ill with thy servant? And why have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou dost lay the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the suckling child, to the land which thou didst swear to their fathers?' For the weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me at once, if I find favor in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.'" (Num. 11:10-15)

The two anger responses here, God's blazing anger and Moses' intense displeasure, arose from different sources. God knew it was long overdue that the people grew up. Their infantile reactions were no longer appropriate, but artificially created selfishness. Moses' anger was a stress-reaction from being a camp dean to a million cry-babies.

Moses who was usually in control crumbled under the pressure. He regressed. Today we identify his syndrome as *burn out*. He was emotionally drained. Fatigue had set in and when the anger of the Lord blazed hot again—his emotional threshold was crossed. Childishly Moses lashed out at God blaming him for burdening him with a million Israeli babies who had pumped him dry of milk.

Then he begged God to kill him! Moses' emotions were overwhelming him, blinding his rationality. "Kill me at once and have it over with!" he pleaded. "I can't stand anymore." But Moses' suicidal depression was actually an expression of infantilism. His manipulative prayer, his ultimatum with God, and his despair were but regressions. His ineffectiveness in dealing with the people had hooked his sense of inadequacy. Temporarily his sense of personal esteem caved-in. Outwardly he shook his finger at God and made big demands, but inwardly his tantrum resulted from his sense of impotence.

Such feelings are common in childish tantrums. We feel threatened and impotent. We feel as if life's meaning and purpose has caved in on us and there's no reason to go on. Intense emotions have been hooked and with them irrational cognitive distortions. Roy Menninger writes:

"Mental illness is characterized by an inordinate desire to be safe, to be out of

danger, and to avoid risk. Wholeness is delaying gratification and tolerating pain." (*The Meaning and Mystery of Being Human*, Bruce Larson, p. 85)

The struggle to grow up means a willingness to tolerate a degree of anxiety and insecurity so that we are not hooked by intense emotions which trigger infantile reactions. A solid sense of ourselves and a sense of mastery strengthens us. So does a renewed mind that appropriately values anxiety and which doesn't over-value safety.

Coming to Terms with Reality

"When the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall, and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. Then the angel of the Lord went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the ass with his staff. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the ass ... 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' And Balaam said to the ass, 'Because you have made sport of me I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you.' And the ass said to Balaam, 'Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your lifelong to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?' And he said, 'No.'" (Num. 22:25-30)

Balaam blew up at his donkey. How funny! Here is a grown man, a Prophet of God, screaming at a jackass! Three times his donkey frustrated him and now he would take no more. Balaam felt insulted, maltreated, and "made sport of." His anger glowed. A murderous rage filled him. "I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you."

The scenario humorously pictures the jackass perceiving reality clearly and taking appropriate action while the man of God foolishly rushes in where angels dare not tread. Balaam was on a journey he had been forbidden to take, one he knew he was not right, but somehow he put that awareness out of his mind, rationalized his actions, and went on blindly. Guilt unconsciously ate at him. Feelings undermining his self-worth bothered him. Then when his vehicle of transportation began malfunctioning his anger kindled and Balaam regressed.

In contrast another man of God felt frustration without regressing. His disciples failed him time after time. Finally he revealed his ultimate plan and his chief disciple took him to task and even rebuked him. Later Jesus revealed his glory to Peter, James, and John, but again they didn't understand. Afterwards they returned to the others at the base of the mountain and found the other nine apostles wallowing in failure. Jesus inquired about their problem and strife with the scribes. But none felt like confessing. Finally the father of a demonized son explained the situation.

"Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able. And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.'" (Mark 9:14-19)

Jesus was frustrated. His words indicate the depth of his feeling. Undoubtedly he was wondering if he had picked the right men. Were they going to catch his spirit and carry on his work? "O faithless generation!" He felt alone and different. Did any of them understand? "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" Jesus felt upset but he did not regress in some childish reaction. Fully cognizant of his emotions, Jesus used his energy to deal constructively with the problems at hand. He emphatically made it clear to the father that "all things are possible to him who believes." He exorcised the demon and challenged his disciples to a greater depth of discipline. "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:23-29).

Jesus models the fact that *we do not have to act on every feeling*. Nor do we have to repress our emotions. We can be real without being a cave man. Assagioli argues that authenticity does not consist in giving in to every feeling one has but in being true to one's values. He describes that kind of response as "the authenticity of the cave man" (*The Act of Will*, p. 143).

The mature personality comes to terms with reality, accepting it for what it is without "kicking against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). Otto Rank describes this characteristic as that which separates a normal person from a neurotic. "The neurotic has a bad relation to reality not because reality is bad, but because he wants to create it instead of using it." (*Will Therapy and Truth and Reality*, p. 195). But this avoiding of reality is disintegrative to our nature. It lures us into a fantasy world of wishful thinking and grandiose illusions. Theologically this reality principle refers to God's will.

Narcissism

The central characteristic of infantilism is narcissism. The Greek myth underlying this word told the Story of a beautiful youth name Narcissus, who pined away for love of his own image in a pond and was metamorphosed into the narcissus flower. A narcissistic personality refers to a person who is egocentrically focused upon himself. All that matters is his concerns, his needs, his wants, and his perceptions. A narcissistic personality is introverted. In morality, this means that (good) becomes anything that I want, and bad) is whatever I don't like. Carroll Wise explains that for an infant there is no other criterion with which to judge good and evil.

"In so far as an adult remains infantile (childish) in emotional development, he

will live by the same criterion" (*Psychiatry and the Bible*, p. 75)

Adler identifies this narcissistic orientation as one lacking "social interest." The person has little capacity for thinking of others, caring about them, fitting into a group, and knows little about relating socially. Adler argues that one of the central tasks before every human being is developing his social interest. If we don't we're crippled in life. Paul defined "life in the Spirit" in characteristics that give content to this social interest: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-27, 6:1).

Living in the Spirit and walking by his inspiration cures our narcissism. The Spirit throws us into the midst of relationships so that we develop longsuffering and gentleness. For Paul these psychological characteristics makes us spiritual. The contrast is the peevish, irritable, self-righteous person who is envious and self-seeking.

Thinking Like a Child

Children enter the world without words and without an emotional vocabulary. At first there's little differentiation in their emotions. They only know that there is pleasure and pain. But as their cognitive powers and experiences unfold, they begin developing a wider range of emotional reactions. But our Western culture with its over-emphasis on technology, provides little stimulation or interest in giving children an accurate emotional vocabulary.

How does Jimmy feel? He doesn't know. He only has vague and generic feelings—feelings with little differentiation. Several factors contribute to this state of emotional illiteracy. Scientism, home environments which make it unsafe for people to share their intimate feelings, peer pressures, and hedonism.

First of all we need to make it safe for emotions to be expressed in our homes and relationships. Then we need to help our children learn how to express their feelings. The furious little boy doesn't need to be slapped or spanked but understood. "Don't feel upset!" only discounts him and increases his fury. Affirmation is what he needs and understanding: "You feel really angry, don't you?" "I bet your upset because won't let you go to Tommy's house and place? Billy, do you feel like throwing something or screaming?"

Give the child the chance to let off his steam by talking about his emotions. Nor should we expect a six year old to be able to provide us with clear, sharp understanding of his feelings. It's all new to him. He probably doesn't know how he feels. This is especially true when there's ambivalence involved. He may be both excited and afraid, thankful and resentful, loving and hating. Feelings involving anger and aggression, lust and sex, fear and inferiority, pride and arrogance, jealousy and

envy, are usually forbidden and repressed emotions. They consequently grow up afraid, confused, or ignorant when they experience such feelings.

Carl Breechen and Paul Faulkner suggest *the use of metaphors* as a means of furthering our emotional education. Instead of labeling the emotion; describe what it is like. Carl Breechen tells of one who felt "put out." What does that feel like? He responded, "It feels like a dog put outside of a warm house in the middle of the winter who wants back in."

Another person said he felt guilty. It was "like a sincere Christian who just murdered someone in his anger." That's guilty! Metaphors give our emotional labels depth and reality. In one counseling situation a man said to was feeling "slightly uneasy." He was then asked to explain what that felt like. "Like someone about to be executed." Yes, I'd say he was feeling uneasy!

Another man who had been unemployed but who had recently accepted a new job described his excitement and anxiety as feeling "relieved and apprehensive." What is that like? He said, "I feel like a little boy who just wet the bed."

Metaphors enrich our emotional vocabulary, help us communicate our true feelings, and enable us to mature emotionally. For those who were not given permission to feel nor helped to describe their emotions in a way that was helpful or accurate—it is not too late to begin now. Authentic Christian community, deep friendships, and counseling provide the dynamics needed for this kind of emotional growth.

This brings us back to Paul's writings to the Corinthians, for one of the resources he mentioned in the journey toward maturity was "the Body of Christ." Paul explained that each one had been incorporated into the body by the Spirit and gifted for the good of the whole Body. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (I Cor. 12:7). This Body has an inherent inter-dependency which prevents anyone from discounting another saying, "I have no need of you."

"God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (I Cor. 12:24-26)

Emotional harmony is God's design for the Christian community. This social dimension works to enable each believer to outgrow his infantilism and experience the rich interdependency and emotional identification with the whole body. As we grow in Christ we give up our childish ways to become more and more Christlike.

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

In our emotional development it was appropriate that we emoted as children when we were children. But in our journey toward emotional maturity and wholeness, we must learn the art of putting away childish thinking and reacting.

Practically this maturing is accomplished by developing a greater frustration tolerance level, a lifestyle that doesn't keep infantilizing us, putting on the mind of Christ, pursuing the most excellent way of love, cultivating a solid sense of our self-image in Christ so that we don't regress under pressure, learning to feel our emotions without having to act on them, and improving our emotional vocabulary so that we understand our emotions with an adult mind.

Developmentally we've been designed for maturity; we have an innate drive that moves us toward higher development. Fixation goes against the grain of our nature for regressing to childish coping skills goes against developing emotional vitality. God accordingly spurs us on to authentic emotional wholeness by giving us the model and resources for maturity via the good-news of his Son.

Chapter 14

THE PSYCHOLOGY AND LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONS IN THE BIBLE

Modern Western man thinks with his *head* and feels in his *heart*. Books and speakers urge us to round out our head knowledge with heart knowledge. On Valentines Day we send all kinds of heart-shaped gifts and expressions of our love to our sweet-hearts. Boxes of candy, cakes, flowers—all in heart arrangements, as well as cards in assorted colors and designs portraying the human heart—often with an arrow through it. Such is our language of emotion.

But in biblical times man thought with his *heart* and felt in his *bowels*. Conceptually he viewed the heart as the thought-center—where man's mind was located. "Out of the heart proceeds ... thoughts" (Mark 7:21). It was in the heart that man thought, reasoned, believed, reflected, valued, imagined, and intended.

Where he felt was deeper and more central for he felt in the "middle" of his being. Stomach words are used throughout the scriptures to indicate man's emotions: belly, bowels, liver, kidneys, loins, and reins. Not very romantic is it? Yet for this very reason a good bit of mental adjustment is needed if we are to enter into the conceptual world of the Bible and understand their psychological language of emotions.

To understand what the Bible says about our emotions and other psychological capacities we must be willing to suspend our Western meanings and think Eastern. Today we understand the word "heart" to refer to man's affective dimension. Kidney and reins mean little to nothing to us. To read that we are to have "bowels and mercies" toward one another leaves us not a little mystified. Many English translators have taken the liberty to paraphrase the original Greek and Hebrew which says "my

bowels move for you" to "my heart feels for you." But they are transculturalizing.

The bowel words leave an unpleasant image in our minds. Who sends his sweetheart a Valentine's card with the shape of the big intestines on it? Who inscribes, "Will you be my viscera?" and expect to be friends or appreciated afterwards? Yet though it may lack romance, it is very biblical.

A Gut Feeling about Emotions

"A leper came to (Jesus) beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.' *Moved with pity*, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.'" (Mark 1:40-41)

Jesus felt a deep emotional stirring within himself at the sight of the leper's plight. He was "moved with pity." This phrase is one word in Greek (*planchna*) which is a verb form of bowels. Jesus felt deeply stirred. The closest expression we have in English that would translate the phrase is, "I had a gut feeling."

Jesus was emotionally moved by the desperate condition of the man and wanted to help. He reached out and touched him, feeling not repulsed at his loathsome diseased, but hurt that he suffered as he did and that he had doubts about Jesus' willingness to help. The context, in fact, indicates that Jesus also felt anger. Some variant manuscripts have another word in the place of "moved with compassion," they have "he was warmly indignant" (*orgistheis*).

"Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And (Jesus) sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people.'" (Mark 1:42-44)

Jesus didn't encounter the leper in a mood of cool detachment, but emotionally. He became emotionally involved. That's why he "sternly charged" him to tell no one. The Greek word here (*embrimaomai*) means to be deeply agitated, to express violent displeasure, and to groan. Vincent in his commentary on [Mark] says, "It is a word of strong emotional tone." He translates the statement as, "Crying, he roared at him!" Jesus became emotional because he deeply cared.

"The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the *mind* and try the *heart*...' (Jer. 17:9-10)

This passage illustrates the problem translators have in conveying *the meaning* of the text. The word heart occurs twice but each time is a different Hebrew word, and the first "heart" comes from the same word for the word "mind."

The Hebrew text reads, "The heart (*leb*) is deceitful ... I the Lord search the mind

(*leb*). This word that primarily refers to the mental, intellectual, cognitive sector of consciousness is first translated heart and then translated mind.

The second "heart" in our English translation comes from a Hebrew word that refers to the viscera (*belayoth*) and literally means "the kidneys." "Heart and kidneys" God searches and tries refers to our minds and emotions.

The feeling area par excellence in Hebraic thinking resided in the hidden recesses at the center of the body—that area which seemed to them inaccessible. English is not without some emotional language referring to this area. We talk about our stomachs churning when we're upset, about butterflies fluttering in them when we're in love or jittery with stage-fright. We even talk about courage as intestinal fortitude. We do have a few visceral words and phrases for those deep gut feelings.

More Gutsy Statements

"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies. Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one mind..." (Phil. 2:1-2 KJV)

"Bowels and mercies" in the old quaint King James Version becomes "affection and sympathy" in the RSV which updates the translation conveying the meaning of Paul's statement. The first is literal, the second an interpretation. The second explains what the first means, bowels refers to warm and tender feelings.

Contextually Paul is pleading for unity, cooperation, and deep *koinonia*. He reasons from the fact of their *koinonia* in the spirit and from their bowels in Christ. Unity is urged as a logical and spiritual consequence of objective sharing of life with Christ and subjective feelings for each other that Christ inspires. The two things go together. Paul's concept of motivation is holistic, the outward and the inward.

Nor does Paul flinch when he mentions feelings of love (bowels and mercies) as one impetus that should propel us toward unity. Deep belly feelings of sympathy should move us closer together. Paul strikes a wondrous balance between emotionalism and stoicism. He opts for a rich interplay of objective reality and subjective reality.

"It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart ... For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:7-8)

Paul had struck a deep emotional bond with his friends at Philippi. Now he thinks about them (they are on his heart) and the experiences they shared together ("you are all partakers with me of grace"). He prays for them, yearning for them. "I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (KJV).

This striking phrase suggests that there is not only a mind of Christ which we are to adopt, but also bowels (affections) of Christ with which we are to feel. As thinking Christ's thoughts opens up our intelligence to new vistas of truth, so feeling his emotions opens us up to new dimensions of affections. In other words, we are no more left to our own resources emotionally than we are mentally. As Jesus provides us a mind that models for us Christlike thinking, perceiving, reflecting, reckoning, and imagining, so he provides us emotions to guide our emoting. When our thinking goes awry the gospels provide resources for renewing the mind; when our emotions flounder Christ provides us bowels.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another." (Col. 3:13 KJV)

New life people are here told to put on bowels of mercies. Warm affectionate feelings are to be supplemented to our repertoire of emotions. But this putting on does not suggest "faking it." It refers rather to adding to our relational skills the tender feelings that are ours in Christ. Paul's underlying assumption in this mandate is that we have the capacity for choosing our emotions. We don't have to wait around for the mood to hit us. We are not at the mercy of our feelings. We can intentionally cultivate the big hearted emotions we want and turn our central self to them.

By attending the ideas and beliefs that underpin such emotions as sympathy, kindness, warmth, respect, joy, and love, we can "put on" whatever emotion we choose. Paul uses the metaphor of adorning ourselves with a garment and discarding another garment or "habit" in providing us an image of this transformation.

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one to another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Pet. 3:8 KJV). "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." (Jas. 5:11 KJV)

Pitiful used to equate with emotional warmth. Then the word was mugged, raped, molested and left in a semantic ditch to rot. Today the word has lost most of its positive meaning. We describe someone as being "pitiful" who needs our pity or even someone who arouses our contempt. But the Greek word is the same word as these other belly words (*splanchna*). "Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind." (RSV).

"Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return—I speak as to children—widen your hearts also." (II Cor. 6:11-13)

When relationships break down and bad feelings arise we often say, "I feel nothing in my heart for him." The biblical writers expressed that same idea by saying that their "bowels were shut up." Bad vibes and feelings of ill will arise due to a restriction of

sympathy. This was the problem between Paul and the Corinthians. Some "super apostles" had spread the word that Paul was inferior to the apostles which caused the church to dry up in their affection for him. They felt only contempt.

As the conflict increased, one visit turned out to be a "painful visit" (II Cor. 2:4), with the result that Paul then wrote a "painful letter with many tears" which he later regretted because it was so severe. Then his regret turned into joy. Godly grief and repentance in the Corinthians set things straight. In this passage Paul asks for emotional reconciliation. "Our mouth is open to you"—he's ready to talk things out and get things settled. "Our heart is wide"—he's open-minded. "You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections"—their feelings of pressure and coldness are due to their own "bowels" having been shut down. "You are straitened in your own bowels" (KJV)— their feelings of narrowness and crampedness prevented them from feeling warm love toward Paul.

They suffered from a lack of feeling for Paul because they had put the squeeze on their own affections. They became emotionally closed to Paul by their ill thoughts of him. To reverse matters, Paul asks them to expand their conscious understanding, "Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together." (II Cor. 7:2-3). By renewing their minds about Paul they would become emotionally purged.

"But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (I John 3:17 KJV)

"Shutting up our bowels"—holding back our emotions—limits God's love within us. What determines whether we shut up our feelings or turn them on is our willingness to suffer. Feeling for someone in need means experiencing emotional pain. We shut down our feelings because we don't want to hurt or don't want to get involved.

The ancient Stoics understood this relationship and made passionlessness their goal. Modern Stoics, consciously or unconsciously, live by the same logic. They choose to turn off their gut feelings when they see a need and thereby dull their entire emotional nature.

The essentiality of will is observed in this passage. We choose to see the hurting person and attend his needs or we learn not to see (Luke 10:27-37). John's searching question, "How does God's love abide in us" links the good-will of agape-love with the feeling-love of compassion that eventually results. Agape-love, practiced often enough, becomes energized by our emotions so we begin to feel it in our bowels.

"(Titus') heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, and the fear and trembling with which you received him." (II Cor.

7:15)

Titus' "inward affection (bowel) is more abundant" because of his cognitions. Emotional warmth developed and blossomed as he recalled their good qualities (their obedience and respectful reception of him). *Feelings followed cognitions*. Titus' deep feelings came to him as a natural consequence of turning his thoughts to their positive features.

"The hearts (bowels) of the saints have been refreshed through you ...I am sending (Onesimus) back to you, sending my very heart (bowels) ...Refresh my heart (bowels) in Christ" (Philemon 7, 12, 20)

Philemon was a slave-owner turned Christian who knew how to emotionally refresh people. Paul refers to this history of refreshing hearts and upon it makes a request. He wants Philemon to make him feel good by doing something for him. He wants him to receive a run-away slave back as a brother in the Lord. Philemon can't say he doesn't know how. It's strictly a matter of will. Paul puts the emotional squeeze on him by casually mentioning that Philemon owes his very self to Paul.

"Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear ... 'Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart." (Psa. 40:6-8)

By translation "an open ear" means an open mind. The Messiah would "delight to do" God's will because he has ears to hear it in a responsive way. There is first of all intellectual understanding of the Torah. But there is also emotional motivation. "Thy law is within my heart" literally means "Thy Torah is within my bowels (*ma'im*)." He not only had the Word in his mind but it had become a felt reality in the center of his being. He felt it. Intellect and feelings were integrated. Consequently there was no divorce within his personality making truth mere cold abstractions. The Word was a dynamic feeling reality that energized his own being.

Loins, Reins, Kidneys

"My loins are filled with burning ... I am utterly spent and crushed. I groan because of the tumult of my heart." (Psalm 38:7-8)

"Then the king's color changed and his thoughts alarmed him, his limbs gave way and his knees knocked together ... he cried aloud." (Dan. 5:6)

"For thou, O God, hast tested us; Thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Thou didst bring us into the net; Thou didst lay affliction on our loins..." (Psalm 65:10-11)

"Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see; and make their loins tremble continually..." (Psalm 69:23)

Trembling loins and burning loins is emotional turmoil. King Belshazzar's response

to the writing of a man's hand on the wall with great emotional agitation: his color changed, his cognitions became confused, "the joints of his loins" shook. The imprecatory prayer curses the Psalmist's enemies asking that they be afflicted in their guts with ulcers.

"Thus says the Lord, we have heard a cry of panic, of terror and no peace. Ask now and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! That day is so great; there is none like it. It is a time of distress for Jacob yet he shall be saved out of it." (Jer. 30:6-7)

Men with their hands on their loins "like a woman in labor" is not a description of pot-bellies. Jeremiah pre-technological culture wasn't sedentary enough nor was fatty junk foods prevalent enough for pot-bellies to be common. Jeremiah's words describe judgment. Men grasping their loins like women in travail is a picture of deep pain.

Contextually the people were lightly dismissing God's words, but when his judgment came they would have a visceral experience that they wouldn't forget. Yet in afflicting them with the pangs of birth, the metaphor held out hope for a new life—a new birth.

"A stern vision is told to me, the plunger plunges and the destroyer destroys ... Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in travail; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I cannot see. My mind reels, horror has appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling." (Isa. 21:2-4)

Isaiah's vision of judgment wiped him out and caused him great emotional pain. Hope failed him, so he broke down. The inter-relationship between strength (energy) and the health of the loins indicates the relationship for us between healthy emotions and motivational energy. The most common expression in the Bible relating to the loins therefore is "girding up the loins."

"Gird up your loins and say to them everything I command you. Do not be dismayed..." (Jer. 1:17). "Stand therefore having your loins girded with truth" (Eph. 6:14). "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind; be sober and hope to the end..." (I Pet. 1:17)

Girding provides a feeling of strength and readiness. In supporting the midsection with a cloth or leather belt one felt braced up and energized. Metaphorically, our deepest emotions can be disciplined and strengthened so that they provide us motivational energy, then we are not dismayed when problems come or our message is rejected.

God "seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces, he set me up as his target, his archers surround me, he slashes open my kidneys, and does not

spare, he pours out my gall on the ground" (Job 16:13-14)

Job felt torn to pieces. His sickness, loss, and privation mixed with his confusion worked emotional havoc within. To describe these horrible feelings Job says his kidneys (reins) and gall were smashed.

"Thou who triest the minds and reins (hearts RSV), Thou righteous God."
(Psalm 7:9)

"I bless the Lord who gives me counsel in the night also my heart (reins) instructs me." (Psalm 16:7)

Literally it is not the heart that instructed the Psalmist in the night, but his reins—his emotions. Via our dreams our emotions provide us messages (See Appendix on Dreams).

"Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart (reins) and my mind." (Psalm 26:2)

"When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart (reins) I was stupid and ignorant, I was like a beast toward Thee; Thou does hold my right hand." (Psalm 73:21)

An experience of bitterness is here described. Bad things happened to the Psalmist and his pain angered him. Nor would he release his anger. His galling experience couldn't be put into a meaningful perspective—"I was stupid and ignorant, I was like a beast toward Thee." His inner life and energy (soul) became embittered when he was "pricked in his reins"—galled.

"But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end."
(Psalm 73:16-17)

"Thou didst form my inward parts (reins), Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13)

"My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will be glad. My soul (reins) will rejoice when your lips speak what is right." (Prov. 23:15-16)

"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I complain to thee; yet I would plead my case before thee. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Thou plantest them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; thou art near in their mouth and far from their heart (reins)." (Jer. 12:1-2)

Jeremiah described some wicked persons who used their religion in a superficial way. They talked a lot about God assuming their prosperity proved they had a good standing with him. But inwardly, in the deepest recesses of their beings, God was far from them. Or rather, they were far from God. "Thou art near in their mouth and far from their reins." Their religion was surface having never touched their motivations.

"I am full of words, the spirit within me constrains me. Behold my heart (belly) is like wine that has no vent! Like new wineskins, it is ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief. I must open my lips and answer." (Job 32:19)

Elihu compares his emotional energy to fermenting wine that keeps expanding and stretching the inside of a wineskin. It is dynamic. He feels as if he's going to burst out of his skin. Elihu needed an emotional release, "I must open my lips and answer."

"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the belly." (Prov. 18:8)

Gossip goes down into our most fundamental emotions. For many of us, our enjoyment of whispered secrets and our hankering to hear the latest scandal arises from our emotional need to feel good about ourselves by hearing something bad about others. The suffering of misfortune by others morbidly makes us feel better about ourselves. Our low self-esteem motivates us to be envious of the good fortune of others and to excitedly want to hear the latest gossip.

"They conceive mischief and bring forth evil and their heart (belly) prepares deceit" (Job 15:35)

"The belly prepares deceit" for those who are not willing to face the morality of their thoughts and deeds like the "company of the godless" that Job mentioned. Our emotional dynamics cause us to hide truth from ourselves and others. These are our defense mechanisms that arise because we develop emotional reasons for covering up.

"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief, my soul and my body (belly) also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away." (Psalm 31:9-10)

"My soul and my belly" describes what we call our energy (or motivation) and emotions. The Psalmist's grief and heartache left him feeling wasted. Devastated. He had no energy or emotion left. His bones were wasting away; he was falling apart at the seams. That's why he called upon the gracious love of God to renew him in hope and life.

"Such persons do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites (bellies)" (Rom. 16:18)

"Their god is their belly ... with minds set on earthly things." (Phil. 3:18)

Some people make their earthly appetites (emotions) their god and devote themselves to them as their ultimate concern. They are hedonists par excellence. Hedonists whose only morality is determined whether it makes them feel good.

"He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart (belly) shall

flow rivers of living waters.' Now this he said about the Spirit..." (John 7:38-39)

Rivers of living water springing forth perpetually like a gushing and refreshing spring describes Christianized emotions. It identifies one of the psychic areas the Spirit affects when he lives within, for from God's Spirit flows emotional health and vitality. Peter used a similar metaphor when he spoke about the "times of refreshing" that comes from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). God renews our parched soul and dried up emotions.

"Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught." (Prov. 3:25-26)

The word "confidence" actually comes from "loins" (*kesel*) which refers to our inward parts and viscera. It is related to the idea of fatness and then to strength, metaphorically suggesting confidence and hope. Accordingly, God promises us his presence in our emotions—to be in our loins—thus giving us a feel of security and confidence when faced with the challenges of life. That's why we have no need to be afraid at sudden panic.

"Blows that wound clean away evil, strokes make clean the innermost parts (belly)." (Prov. 20:30)

"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart (bowels) yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." (Jer. 31:20)

Boning Up on the Language of Emotion

"Now my soul is poured out within me, days of affliction have taken hold of me. The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest." (Job 20:16)

Bones being racked describes emotional pain for Job. Things were not going well for him. "Days of affliction" were making him feel downright awful. His soul was being poured out, he could not sleep at night, he was restless and his bones ached.

I learned about bones aching and being racked when I broke my left hand. The bone snapped in a spiral fashion when the tractor I was driving hit a hole in the front lawn which sent the steering wheel spinning with a sharp jerk. I immediately nursed my hand in my lap and Steve Rogers came over to see what had happened. He gently guided his index finger along the second bone to see if there was a separation. But before he found out, I found out that bones have feelings. Burning sensations reverberated throughout my body and I suddenly felt very dizzy. My knees wanted to buckle, my stomach felt nauseous -- it felt like every part was out of whack. I laid

down to get over the dizziness, but that evening, I began to understand this verse, "the night racks my bone."

"A cheerful heart is good medicine; but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." (Prov. 17:22)

The Hebrew mind perceived the bones as a feeling zone. Even today we colloquially talk about our bones aching, being stiff in our bones, feeling bone dry. We describe a deep feeling by saying that we "feel it in our bones." But for the most part, the bones do not represent a feeling center for us. Who sends pictures of bones on Valentines day? We would not dare call our sweetheart a bonehead or ask him or her to be our sweet-bone. Yet when the Proverbist wrote that "a downcast spirit drying up the bones" was contrasting an optimistic spirit and a sense of humor with the depressive feelings that leave us bone dry.

"With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone." (Prov. 25:15)

Children sing that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." But they do. Even soft words can break bones—hurt feelings.

"Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, the hair of my flesh stood up." (Job 4:13-15)

Eliphaz's vision of a spirit caused his bones to shake. We know what he means for we talk about our knees knocking in fright and about getting goose bumps.

"One dies in full prosperity, being wholly at ease and secure, his body full of fat and the marrow of his bones moist. Another dies in bitterness of soul, having never tasted of good." (Job 21:24-25)

Job contrasted the fortunes of the good and the wicked and complained that the wicked experience emotional vitality while the righteous never "taste of good." Ease and security grace the wicked, so does fatness of body and moistness of bones. "Fat" scares us moderns off, but for the Hebrew mind, fat was good news. They lived in a culture where people worked their fingers to the bones, fatness was a luxury only for the prosperous who didn't have to work so hard. It thus became a sign of success and wealth. It indicated the good life and was what people dreamed about, longed for, and prayed to receive. To make it to the top in that cultured was evidenced by a "body full of fat and the marrow of the bones moist."

"My skin turns black and falls from me and my bones burn with heat. My lyre is turned to mourning and my pipe to the voice of those who weep. ... Man is also chastened with pain upon his bed, and with continual strife in his bones; so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite dainty food. His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen; and his bones which are not seen stick

out..." (Job 30:33-34, 33:19-21)

Because Job's bones burned with heat there was no music in his soul. All his music had turned to mourning. In Hebraic thought, bones shook, bones burned, bones had strife in them, bones dried up and bones were troubled. Emotional turmoil however wasn't the only thing that was expressed via the bones. Bones could also be refreshed, made moist, and even sang!

"All my bones shall say, 'O Lord who is like thee, Thou who deliverest the weak, from him who is too strong for him.'" (Psa. 35:10)

"Fill me with joy and gladness, let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice." (Psa. 51:8)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight, in all your ways acknowledge him ... Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones." (Prov. 3:5-8)

Note the cognitive mandates: trust God with all of one's consciousness, quit relying on your own insights, acknowledge God in every way you go, reject the prideful belief that you know better than God, and direct your volition to a holy reverence for God. Then comes a behavioral mandate: turn from evil. The result: "It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones." Emotional refreshment!

"A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones." (Prov. 12:4)

"A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion (envy) makes the bones rot." (Prov. 14:30)

When bones rot the structure of our emotional framework collapses. Relationships provide fertile soil for emotional ecstasy or emotional devastation. "A good wife" can make her husband feel like a king whereas one who violates his values and acts in a shameful way causes emotional devastation. Likewise a serene mind is emotionally healthy ("gives life to the flesh"), whereas emotional upset and envy bring on psychosomatic problems ("makes the bones rot").

"Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body (bones)." (Prov. 16:24)

Because words are loaded with emotional connotations, pleasant and positive words provide us a sweet experience. They are wonderful; we love them. They build us up and makes us feel great about ourselves. They make for good emotional health and energy ("health to the bones").

"I will not mention (God), nor speak any more in his name. There is in my heart as it were a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." (Jer. 20:9)

Jeremiah was in a real dilemma. He had been thrown into a pit of filth and mire and was feeling depressed. His spirits fell and despair rolled in. Jeremiah wanted to quit. But he couldn't. Something within would not let him quit. He made up his mind never to mention God again yet there was a burning fire in his bones. Emotional fire! So while his external circumstances kept slapping him down, giving him more reasons for discouragement, and providing him little reward, God's holy thoughts and ideas were burning within. In his mind and emotions ("bones") there was a spiritual blaze. Jeremiah had a motivation that would not quit—even when he was in the pits.

"There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me." (Psa. 38:3)

Sin directly affects our emotions. It creates emotional havoc within and violates the nature of reality. We live in a consequential world so that every time we violate our conscience we wound our very being. "The wages of sin is death." David felt the inner working of death. "There is no health in my bones." Guilt made him feel condemned. Guilt rang all his psychic bells alerting him to the fact that something was wrong. (For additional passages on "bones" see Isa. 58:11, 66:14, Jer. 23:9, Lam. 1:12-13, Ezek. 37:11, Hab. 3:16.)

Fleshing Out the Subject of Emotions

"Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me and trembling which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up." (Job 4:13-15)

"He feels only the pain of his body (flesh), he mourns only for himself" (Job 14:22)

"Look at me and be appalled, and lay your hand upon your mouth. When I think of it I am dismayed and shuddering seizes my flesh. Why do the wicked live and reach old age and grow mighty in power?" (Job 21:5-6)

When Job mused about the injustices of the world, and particularly about his own intense suffering compared with the ease and prosperity of the wicked, his "flesh shuddered." Eliphaz confessed that "the hairs of the flesh stood up" when he had a vivid dream of a spirit. Both used the word "flesh" but referred to their emotions.

"I keep the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body (flesh) also dwells secure." (Psalm 16:8-9)

David's emotional experience of security resulted from a renewed perspective of God's securing presence in which he took mental delight ("my heart is glad").

"O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger nor chasten me in thy wrath! ... There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation: there is no health in my

bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. ... My loins are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart." (Psalm 38:3,7-8)

"O God ... I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh faints for thee as in a dry and weary land where no water is." (Psalm 63:1)

"My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the Living God." (Psalm 84:2)

"Heart and flesh" stand for what we call "Mind and emotions." The Hebrew mind didn't perceive "flesh" as evil as did the Greeks, but as part of God's good creation. Flesh was God's gift to man. So when the flesh sang for joy to the Living God the person was feeling the emotional dimension of worship and praise.

Developing a Nose for Emotional Language

"As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter; as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit." (Job 27:2-3)

In Hebraic thinking, nose and nostril (*'af*) indicated breath or nose, accordingly it could refer to one's whole face. It is also translated "anger" because anger is full of *breath* and shows itself in the face and nostrils.

"Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel ..." (Gen. 30:2)

"Let not your anger burn against your servant ..." (Gen. 44:18)

"Moses' anger waxed hot." (Ex. 32:19)

"Let not the anger of my lord burn hot, you know the people, that they are set on evil..." (Ex. 32:22)

These statements literally read "their noses (*'af*) glowed" or became hot. Hot nostrils indicates a state of intense emotion. Today we understand the connection between respiration, breathing, and emotions. We know that when we are uptight, tense, and irritable we can find relieve in breathing deeply. We know that a person cannot be full of anxiety and tension or anger and relaxed at the same time. We also know that the face is the window of the personality and of the emotion. Faster breathing, the flushing of the skin, and the enlargement of the nostrils indicate intense emotions. In spite of our more sophisticated psychology we still talk about "blowing off steam," becoming "steaming mad," or "hot and bothered" about something.

"I was afraid of your anger and hot displeasure which the Lord bore against you." (Deut. 9:19)

"What means the heat of thy great anger?" (Deut. 29:24)

"Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger..." (I Sam. 20:34)

"Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies (compassion)?" (Psalm 77:9)

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

"Good sense (discretion) makes a man slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook an offense." (Prov. 19:11)

"Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth ... the blast of thy nostrils..." (Psalm 18:8,15)

The emotions of hot displeasure, emotional upset, and anger are all expressed in these verses as glowing faces and hot noses. A man's face (*'af*) and the depth or swallowiness of his breathing serve as billboards for his emotions.

The Soul and Emotions

I have parts of the anatomy which came to be synonymous with the idea of emotions for the Hebrews. They noted the correlation between their senses and emotions and developed a language that reflected the insight that emotions are influenced and expressed by bodily changes. Emotion itself involves bodily change. When we emote our blood pressure changes and our heart, lungs, pupils, glands, body temperature, chemistry, endocrine level, muscle tension, and energy level are all affected.

Yet there's more to emoting than mere biological changes. Behaviorists are right to include the body in the complex phenomenon of emotion. But they limit their understanding by identifying psychic functions exclusively with the body. Our emotions transcend the body just as our mind does.

Accordingly, the Hebrews employed intangible referents (soul, spirit) as well as tangible bodily referents in describing emotions. Soul (*hephesh*) means animal energy, animation, inner being, and/or personality. When we explore the use of this word in the psychology of emotional language in the Bible we note that concrete parts of the body are no longer used, giving way to that which is invisible, intangible, and non-material.

"In truth, we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress (anguish) of his *soul* when he besought us and we would not listen. Therefore is this distress come upon us." (Gen. 42:21)

"Now is our *soul* (strength) dried up and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at!" (Num. 11:6)

"We (*our souls*) loathe this worthless food" (Num. 21:4-5 KJV)

God's "*soul* grieved" over Israel's misery (Judges 10:16)

Samson's "*soul* was vexed to death" by Delilah. She "pressed him hard day by day with her word" (Judges 16:16)

Hannah was "in bitterness of *soul*" and wept bitterly. (I Sam. 1:10)

"My *soul* shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance..." (Psalm 35:9-10)

"As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my *soul* for thee, O God, my *soul* thirsts for God, for the living God ... Why are you cast down, O my *soul*?" (Psalm 42:1, 5)

"When the cares of my heart are many, thy consolations cheer my *soul*." (Psalm 94:19)

"My *soul* melts away for sorrow; Lord strengthen me according to thy word." (Psalm 119:28) (Compare also Matt. 11:28-29, Matt. 26:38, John 12:27, II Pet. 2:8).

Heart refers primarily to our *cognitive processes*—we think with the heart. Yet because mind and emotion are intricately connected, there can not only be no rigid line between the two, *heart* is therefore sometimes used in reference to emoting.

"I was dumb and silent; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse, my *heart* become hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned, then I spoke with my tongue." (Psalm 39:2-3)

"My *heart* is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me." (Psalm 55:4)

"At this also my *heart* trembles and leaps out of its place..." (Job 37:1)

"Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful *heart*, 'Be strong, fear not..." (Isa. 35:4)

"You will have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your *hearts* will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (John 16:22)

"What are you doing, weeping and breaking my *heart*?" (Acts 21:13)

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my *heart*." (Rom. 9:2)

"The peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your *hearts* and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7)

(Compare also Eph. 5:19, Matt. 22:37-39, I Sam. 28:5)

Floyd Ruch says that "An emotion is not determined by physiological responses alone, but requires a cognitive appraisal and evaluation of the stimulus" (*Psychology and Life*, p. 389). Then using contemporary American parlance he writes that to obtain an emotion one must "add one part gut and one part cognition." This is very much in accord with the Semitic mind and explains why it's frequently difficult to determine if "heart" refers primarily to mind or emotion in the scriptures.

The Spirit and Emotions

The words for spirit in Hebrew and Greek (*ruah, pneuma*) can be translated wind, breath, air, or spirit.

"In the morning (Pharaoh's) *spirit* was troubled; and he sent and called for the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men, and Pharaoh told them his dream"

(Gen. 41:8)

"Joseph is still alive and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt and (Jacob's) *heart* fainted, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons ... the *spirit* of their father Jacob revived" (Gen. 45:26)

Jacob came alive emotionally (his spirit revived). The evidence of good-news made him breathe easier so that he became animated again.

"When all the kings ... heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan ... their heart melted and there was no longer any *spirit* in them!" (Joshua 5:1 // I Kings 10:5)

The Canaanite kings were not zombies, not literally, only figuratively. They had spirits but emotionally, volitionally, and motivationally, there "was no longer any spirit in them." The news of Israel wiped them out. It distressed them to such an extent that they became fearful and helpless, hopeless and de-motivated.

"Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth said to him ... and he lay down on his bed, turned away his face and would eat no food. Jezebel said, 'Why is your *spirit* so vexed that you eat no food?'" (I Kings 21:5)

"I speak out of anguish of my *spirit*, I complain in the bitterness of my soul." (Job 7:11)

"A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the *spirit* is broken." (Prov. 15:13)

"The Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in *spirit* ..." (Isa. 54:6)

The Hebrew word for spirit (*ruah*) is sometimes used as a synonym for *anger*. But not only does *ruah* sometimes means anger, at times it also does duty for sadness, trouble, bitterness, and longing. All of these emotions were conceptualized by the Hebrew mind as being located in the *ruah*. Pascal writes, "The more spirit one has, the greater the passions." That was the Hebrew idea also. The Greek word for spirit (*pneuma*) likewise moves or inspires a person. This idea is closely associated with the observation that a man of spirit (breath, air) is in a state of emotion.

Jesus "was deeply moved in *spirit* and troubled and he said, 'Where have you laid Lazarus? ... Jesus wept. And the Jews said, 'See, how he loved him.'" (John 11:32-34)

Paul's "*spirit* was provoked within him as he saw the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16-17)

Apollos "had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in *spirit*, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus..." (Acts 19:25 // Rom. 12:11)

"God has not given us the *spirit* of fear, but of power and love and self-control." (II Tim. 1:7)

We emote in our spirits and souls. Our feelings and emotions however are *not* "soulish" or "soulical" in contrast to being "spiritual." That contrast is artificial and unbiblical although very popular in some circles. Being "in the soul" or "in the flesh" in the Pauline literature refers to living life apart from God's information (revelation). It does *not* mean living in one's feelings in contrast to one's intellect. "The mind of the flesh" contrasts in Romans Eight with "the mind of the Spirit"—each having different sources and intellectual content.

Man is holistic so that what affects one sector of his nature affects every part. Someone "in the soul" or "in the flesh" is one whose thinking, valuing, emoting, imagining, and believing is inspired by secular thinking rather than biblical thinking. Separating soulish from spiritual arises in part from our cultural tendency to dichotomize. We have a strong tendency to separate things into neat little compartments so that there's no overlapping. Such conceptualization, of course, violates man's unity.

Just as we cannot compartmentalize our nature neither can we call a moratorium on our emotions. We are emotional beings because we have bodies, senses, meanings, and values. Emotions are part and parcel of being an image-bearer of God.

Now I See it!

"Now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant, and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may *bright our eyes* and grant us a little reviving in our bondage." (Ezra 9:8)

By graciously bringing Israel back to her land of promise after the captivity and giving her opportunity to rebuild the Temple, God put *a light in his people's eyes*. That encouraged them. It gave them a ray of hope and lifted their spirits. Ezra felt it too and thanked God. Although his immediate situation and emotions felt grief due to Israel's continued unfaithfulness (Ezra 9:2-7). God had put *a light in their eyes*. This is an expression for a state of emotion. Today we describe someone enthusiasm and hopeful as one with a sparkle in his eyes. He has a bright perspective. He sees things optimistically and with confidence.

"You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways." (Job 22:28)

Eliphaz counseled Job to turn to God. "Lift up your *face* to God," say your prayers and decisively choose God's ways. Then emotional stability will replace your insecurity, and reviving light will replace your darkness of spirit. Again, emotion is described in terms of the eye being filled with light or darkness. Jesus used similar

terminology in describing our man's psychological nature.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23)

Our eye functions as *our perspective* that brings light into our personality ("body"). A single, wholesome, "sound" eye fills the personality with light—with vision and optimism. This light gives us a clear and focused perspective which turns on our whole personality with positive emotions and motivation. We become bright so that we begin beam. The warning, "be careful lest the light in you be darkness" is a warning against a dark eye. An evil perspective is one that sees what is unreal, false, or immoral. Our eye functions psychologically to determine our mindset and the content of our thinking—it therefore affects our whole personality.

"If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." (Luke 11:33-36)

Psychologically the eye serves a cognitive function which in turn creates emotions. Proud eyes sees life's events in haughty ways, adulterous eyes look for opportunities for sin (II Pet. 2:14). Eying someone indicates envy (I Sam. 18:9). "An eye that does not pity" describes one who turns away from seeing human need and who thereby loses the capacity for compassion (Deut. 19:11, Ezek. 5:11). Good or bountiful eyes bring in the light of kindness and cultivates the emotional quality of warmth and tenderness (Prov.22:9). But "turning away the eyes" means the shriveling up of the heart (Prov. 28:27).

Facing Our Emotions

Since the face serves as a billboard for our emotions, it's frequently used in the scriptures for emotions. A face turned toward someone indicates warmth, concern, respect, grace. That's why Israel prayed that God would "shine his face" upon them (Psalm 31:16, 67:1). Nothing terrified them more than to think that God would turn away his face. Turning away the face implies strong feelings of disfavor, insult, and rejection.

"I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me." (I Kings 2:16)

In the original the phrase "do not refuse me" is "do not turn back your face." Adonijah beseeched Bathsheba for a request and didn't want her to say No. He wanted her to face him positively and openly. Turning away the face conveyed the same emotions as turning the back (II Chron. 29:6, Jer.. 2:17, 18:17, 32:323). When the face was set toward something, a person felt expectation, feelings of desire and anticipation.

"You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel *fully expected* me

to reign; however the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord." (I Kings 2:14)

"Expected" is literally "set their faces toward" but has been transculturalized. Conversely, a face covered indicates feelings of shame (Psalm 69:7), although it may indicate feelings of humility or fear (Isa. 6:2, I Kings 19:13). Ahab hid his face, turned to the wall and pouted; resentment, sullenness, and anger were his emotions (I Kings 21:4-5). A covered face might also indicate sadness as when one mourned (II Sam. 19:4, Ezek. 12:6,12). And when someone else covered your face—watch out! That means doom for you, it triggers emotions of hopelessness and despair (Esther 7:8).

JOURNEYING TOWARD EMOTIONAL VITALITY

The scriptures provide us a rich resource for the Christianizing of our emotions by providing us a new and strange world. The Hebrews didn't talk about their emotions as we talk about our emotions. Yet by acquainting ourselves with their conceptual world we find that our consciousness expands.

The Hebrews didn't feel embarrassed about their emotions. They felt deeply and pictured the center of their body as the feeling center par excellence. They understood human nature holistically. They didn't have neat categories for things but felt quite free to use the imprecise language of poetry to describe their feelings. They were masters of the metaphor. Their psychology was a Rational Emotive one: they thought and believed in their heart and that determined their character.

The scriptures offer us many insights and strategies for taping our emotional energy. There is a holy use of emotions that enables us to be highly motivated persons. The secret centers in knowing God, fearing him with a holy reverence, and sharing life with him in a loving covenant relationship. That is the essence of emotional vitality.

Appendix I

DREAMS –

THE ROYAL ROAD

TO THE UNCONSCIOUS

Sigmund Freud described the value of dreams, "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to the knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind." (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 647). He postulated that during sleep the Ego is "off duty," which allows us to get around the guards that usually guard the content of the subconscious.

Calvin Hall, psychologist, described dreams as personal letters. "A dream is a personal document, a letter to oneself." (*The Meaning of Dreams*, p. 12). The Psalmist held a similar belief: "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me." (Psalm 16:7).

Dreams should be studied for the purpose of understanding our subjective reality. Dreams cut through the pretensions and deceits of waking life, through the defenses that keeps us from genuinely knowing ourselves, and they lay bare our true feelings. In the nightly picture show that illuminates our mind while asleep, we can get in touch with feelings we have repressed.

The Jewish Talmud speaks about dreams. "A dream which is not understood is like a letter which is not opened." Han Holzer quotes that statement and comments,

"I consider the dream state a state of heightened receptiveness, necessary to convey to man certain information which he would normally not accept because of the nature of his psyche." (*The Psychic Side of Dreams*, p. 15)

Dreams thus present us an opportunity for self-discovery. They allow us to look within our deep mind. Dr. Ann Faraday, dream therapist, writes, "Dreams are like a

microscope through which we look at the hidden occurrences of our souls." (*The Dream Game*). Pfaff writes,

"In dreams is truth, in dreams we learn to know ourselves as we are in spite of all the disguises we wear in the world. Tell me some of your dreams and I will tell you about your inner self."

How do we learn to effectively, appropriately, intelligently, and accurately use our dreams? How do they teach us wisdom in the night? What should we know about dreams that can aid us in the process of self-discovery?

1) Adopt an Open Attitude Toward Your Dreams.

Our dreams are not irrelevant or meaningless abreactions in the night, but exist as the way our minds operate when we sleep. In dreaming, our deep mind "instructs" us. It works out solutions in symbolic forms for the unfinished business of the day. In dreaming, our pictorial thinking utilizes material that is often forgotten, repressed, or only subliminally received. So while our conscious mind sleeps at night, our deeper mind is busy. "I slept, but my [heart] was awake." (Song of Solomon 5:2).

Different kinds of brain waves occur during sleep, waves that can be detected and graphed. Dream research indicates that everybody experiences four or five periods of Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep every evening. These periods begin about an hour after fallen asleep and occur regularly at intervals of ninety minutes. Twenty percent of our sleep is REM sleep and this is when we dream. In REM sleep our eyes move as if we were really seeing something. Mentally we are seeing. Brain waves change during REM sleep. When we miss REM sleep, we are thrown out of such balance psychologically that within 48 hours of sleep deprivation we begin hallucinating and extreme reactions emotionally.

2) Thank God for the Healing that Dreaming can Facilitate.

Freud called dreams our "internal therapists." They serve as safety-valves of the mind and thus play a role in the healing of tensions. Robert (1886) wrote:

"A man deprived of the capacity for dreaming would in course of time become mentally deranged, because a great mass of uncompleted, unworked out thoughts and superficial impressions would accumulate in his brain and would be bound by their bulk to smother the thoughts which should be assimilated into his memory as completed wholes." (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 111)

God frequently used dreams to encounter people. Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus' father Joseph experienced proscriptive dreams—dreams that prophesied the future. That is one aspect of dreaming, but not the only one. God frequently "visited" people in the night via dreams as when Solomon prayed to God. God answered his prayer with a

dream. "Solomon awoke, and behold, it was only a dream." (I Kings 3:15).

3) You and only You know what the Dream Means—to You!

Dreams are private. Each of us have dreams that are peculiar to us and which uniquely arise from our experiences, thinking, values, and emotions. They are our own creations. Whatever is in the dream therefore is there because you put it there. You can't blame anyone else. Your dreams arise in your consciousness due to the immediate and long term consciousness of your ego.

In each dream you are the playwright, producer, screen director, scenery director, designer, stage manager, principle actor, and even the audience. All of the pictorial symbols are yours too. Every image and line of the hieroglyphics arise from your minds. Dream "dictionaries" will do you no good except as you write your own dictionary. This is one of the values of keeping a dream journal. For by consistently recording your dreams you will discover various themes and patterns arising. To interpret the meaning of the symbols you have to ask yourself what they mean to you.

4) Look for the Emotions evoked.

Dreams serve as internal therapists by helping us work out our feelings in pictorial fashion. In dreams we express our feelings about our conflicts, challenges, puzzles, and hopes. To understand them we must therefore look for the "dream affect." Ask, "How do I feel in this dream? What emotion/s does it trigger?"

Your dreams are pictures of your feelings. They are like the maps and pictures that a weather reporter uses in communicating. By learning what symbols and scenarios portray stormy weather and which refer to blue skies and sunshine you will come to understand yourself better. Dreams reveals how you feel about the people in your life as well as the direction your life is taking.

Primarily dreams tell us more about the past and present than about the future. In sleep when our ego sleeps and lets down its guard, repressed feelings slip out. Freud said our dreams are the binoculars through which the dreamer brings closer the distant specters that haunt his unconscious (*The Story of Psychoanalysis*, Lucy Freeman and Marvin Small, p. 100). Look for *the emotional point* of the dream. The dramatizing and symbolizing of life as we experience it presents to us a mirror of our emotions.

5) Interpret the dream pictorially.

Dreams take the form of pictures. Perhaps that's because our first impressions of life were recorded pictorially. The infant has no words or concept with which to record and file away his impressions. This de-mystifies dreams. Seldom are they supernatural things. Their wild pictures and crazy patterns are simply the way the subconscious mind thinks. The predominance of the visual images in dreams share

in the nature of hallucinations, according to Freud. For that reason they seem to be of a different type of mental activity.

With the weakening of the ego in sleep there's an increase in passivity. Typically we talk about dreams as alien products. "I had a dream." "A dream came to me." Our talk suggests that we experience them as if they are extraneous to our minds. Yet they are not. They result from our own thinking. They only seem external to ourselves and alien because we're unfamiliar with our own pictorial images.

To interpret the pictures of our dreams we must begin by recording our dreams over a ten to twenty day period. This entails waking up repeatedly and writing down our dreams. Then when we awake in the morning we can do our "dream work" with our notes. Write down your latent thoughts about the pictures and dreams. Write down anything and everything that comes to mind. Out of this research we will discover symbols that keep reoccurring. Eventually we begin making manifest the values and feelings that give rise to our dreams.

6) Watch for the Humor in your Dreams.

Beware of the danger of being over-serious as you work with your dream. Humor glories in the incongruous—in mixing ridiculous elements and creatively coming up with new mixtures and so does your subconscious. Creativity, after all, preeminently arises from your subconscious. Don't be surprised therefore when you find "jokes" and "puns" in your symbols.

Dreams often come to us with outrageous scenes. Scenes that make us laugh for the purpose of lifting our heavy spirits and giving us some psychological distance from our problems and conflicts. Dreams frequently are loaded with fun, cleverness, and wittiness.

Our subconscious mind's ability for humor springs from its drive for creativity. Artists, inventors, and scientists have long known the value of sleeping on problems and puzzles only to come up with wild and crazy ideas that were later put to good use. Einstein and Edison reportedly used their dreams in tapping their creativity. In biology, our current model for the DNA molecule was first seen in a dream.

7) Identify Emotional and Ideational Themes.

Dr. Faraday identifies eight of the most common dream themes: falling, flying, nudity, taking exams, losing teeth, losing valuables, finding valuables, and sex. Generally speaking, these themes symbolize fear, ecstasy, responsibility, the thrill of finding something, the grief of losing, and sexual anxieties. By identifying our own themes, the reoccurring conflicts, our role in the dream, how active or passive we are, and other facets of our thinking and emoting, we will discover much about ourselves.

8) Share Your Dreams.

Rosalind Dumont Cartwright believes we can train ourselves to take control of our dreams and guide them to happy endings. She tells about the use of dreams by the Senoi people in Malaysia. Believing in the importance of their dreams, the Senoi tribe treat their dreams as a valid part of reality. When a child faces a bear in a dream he's encouraged to tell about running from it and his fear of it. After several campfire chats about his fears, the need for him to be courageous, and the encouragement to face the bear, the child begins experiencing a different kind of a dream. Now he dreams that he turns and faces the bear . . . and survives. The tribe then celebrates with him.

This motivates people to pay attention to their dreams and to want to take charge of their dreaming. Dr. Cartwright says,

"In times of stress, dreams have more work to do in resolving our problems and are thus more salient and memorable. When things are going well by day, we may have less need to dream about such weighty matters." (*Psychology Today*, Happy Endings For Our Dreams, Dec. 1978, p. 72)

"If dreams do help us work through tensions and problems from the previous day, then we should wake up feeling better than when we went to sleep. This mood-regulation function of dreaming has been confirmed by Milton Dramer and Thomas Roth..." (Ibid., p. 72)

9) The Content of Dreams Arises from the Private World within.

Repressed material and memories inaccessible to our conscious mind manifest themselves in our dreams. Also material that we may have been only subliminally aware of during the day may be dealt with in the dream. Dr. Faraday believes that we can ask our deep mind where we lost something or what we feel about a relationship before retiring and program our dreaming mind to go to work on a particular problem. We do pick up millions of sensations, impressions, suggestions, feelings, and moods throughout the day and sometimes our dreams can give us feedback on our subliminal knowledge.

10) Grand God Permission to Use your Dreams.

"God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men, and terrifies them with warnings..." (Job 33:12-18)

"There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dreams and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these ..." (Dan. 2:28)

Dreams can be committed to God's care. During consciousness, trances and

hallucinations are two phenomena that have the same kind of distorted image-making function. The Bible repeatedly refers to dreams as "visions in the head." Once this was a prophetic function; the prophet was then referred to as "Seer"—a man of visions (I Sam. 9:9). Yet even then, the seer's dreams were to be held accountable to the Word and not to be treated as the ultimate criterion (Deut. 13:1-5).

"It seems to me that strong emotional events do cast a sort of shadow ahead of themselves, in some as yet not fully understood manner" (*The Psychic side of Dreams*, Han Holzer, p. 76)

There may just be a natural, God-endowed quality within our deep heart that has a proscriptive tendency. By granting God permission to touch us, to heal and encounter us in these "visions in our heads" in the night, we are granting him lordship over our subconscious thoughts. Augustine struggled with the temptations he experienced while sleeping.

"In my memory ... there still live images of such things as my former habits implanted there. When I am awake, they assail me but lacking in strength; in sleep they assail me not only so as to arouse pleasure, but even consent and something very like the deed itself. So great a power have these deep images over my soul and my flesh that these false visions persuade me when asleep to do what true sights cannot persuade me to when awake. At such times am I not myself, O Lord my God? yet so great a difference is there between myself and that same self of mine within the moment when I pass from waking to sleep or return hither from sleep! At such times there is reason, by which a man awake resists those suggestions, and remains unshaken even if the very deeds themselves are urged upon him? ..."

"Is not your hand, O God all-powerful, powerful to heal all diseases of my soul, and, by your more abundant grace, to quench even the lustful movements of my sleep. Lord, more and more will you increase in me your gifts, so that my soul, freed from the clinging mire of concupiscence, may follow me to you, so that it may not rebel against itself, so that even in sleep it will not commit those base corrupting deeds..." (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, pp. 256-257)

Augustine's psychological acumen knew well about the dynamic subconscious. He described the disconcerting fact that his reason (ego) was off duty while he slept and that left him nearly defenseless in resisting the images that had been programmed within during his pre-Christian life. Augustine longed for a thorough reprogramming of his consciousness so that "even in sleep" his dream life would accord more with God's images and would foster godliness not pagan lust. His prayer is therefore fitting for those who want to be deeply cleansed and renewed by Christ's good-news and the Spirit's holiness—a power that "heals all diseases of the soul."

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Emotions: Sometimes I Have Them / Sometimes They Have me! (1985) was his first book and resulted as much from the emotional roller-coaster that he experienced as a young man in the ministry and trying to cope as from his theological training and focus. In that, this is as much autobiographical as anything.

Michael earned a master's degree in biblical language and literature in a very conservative denomination and served as a minister with several churches for a number of years. Forced out of his original denomination, he began a search that led him to pastoral counseling, then to T.A., and Rational Emotive Therapy. In 1982 he began a private therapy practice. 1984 he moved to Colorado and found the NLP model in 1986. The follow up book to *Emotions* was *Motivation* (1987).

With training and certification in NLP, he began a Training Center in 1989. 1994 saw the discovery of the Meta-States Model, 1996 the collaboration with Dr. Bob Bodenhamer and the creation of the International Institute of Neuro-Semantics. Bob and Michael wrote and published *Patterns for Renewing the Mind* in 1997 as a Christian Interpretation of NLP.

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As a Modeler of Excellence

Using Neuro-Semantics and Self-Actualization Psychology

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