

Communicating Heart-to-Heart

Brown Community Group

October 25, 2020

Series Overview – Experiencing Great Commandment Love

This series of lessons, though clearly biblically-based, will be different than our standard exegetical passage studies. It is designed to be educational and practical. It is hoped that the material in these lessons will build on what you have already experienced about relating to God and others, particularly in terms of deepening your intimacy with the Lord and those He loves. Where possible, there will be some opportunities for reflection and even experiential exercises to put these biblical principles to work with your friends, your spouses, and even your encounters with Jesus.

Here are the four lessons in the series. The first two were covered last November and copies of those handouts were sent to you earlier today.

- **Created to Connect** – We are “wired” to relate to BOTH God AND others (Genesis 2:18)
- **Needy by (God’s) Design** – We are at our best when we relate to one another INTERDEPENDENTLY (I Cor. 12)
- **Communicating Heart-to-Heart** – We need people in our lives with whom we can be fully transparent (Rom. 12:15)
- **Becoming Living Epistles** – Living life as Great Commission witnesses powered by Great Commandment love (II Cor 3:2-3)

The Pain and Potential Chart

As we mentioned before, God created us with needs that can only be met through relationships. God is the ultimate source of our provision for these needs. However, he has commanded us to be meeting such needs for one another. Be kind to one another, encourage one another, take thought of one another, build up one another, comfort one another, for example. When such needs are met, we experience God’s love through others. But, when they go unmet, our hearts are not nurtured in the way He has ordained. This is especially significant when we are developing as children. Just as we would want to provide nutritious food and exercise to help our children grow to their full stature, relational care is important for them to develop wholeheartedly.

This chart shows the connections that naturally flow influenced significantly by the presence or absence of relational care as God intended. Imagine that Sally is a seven-year-old who loves to draw. One Sunday afternoon, she uses all of her colored markers to create a picture of a rainbow. She knows her dad is in the living room watching a Cowboys game, so she goes running in to him holding up her picture and saying, “Daddy, Daddy, look what I drew!” In this example, her dad mutes the TV, picks her up and sets her on his lap, and says things like, “Sally, you really like to draw, don’t you. That’s a fantastic picture of a rainbow. I really enjoy seeing what you create. Would you like me to help you find a magnet so we can put it on the refrigerator next to the other ones?”

Think with me for a second. How many of the Ten Relational Needs we identified earlier just got met in this brief interaction? Now follow the connection across the chart. As needs are met, they impact her thinking in positive ways. (Dad thinks I’m cool. I can make things. He chose to spend time with me rather than watch the game.) Her feelings follow the thoughts. (“I feel valued. I feel loved. I feel joy.) These feelings will likely influence her behavior. (Continuing to create. Trying other endeavors. Encouraging her younger brother to draw.) And, if these interactions with Dad and others occur frequently, her thinking, feeling, and behaving are likely to evolve as patterns and life outcomes.

However, what if her dad responded very differently when she ran in to show him the picture she drew? What if he said, “Don’t bother me now, can’t you see I’m busy?” Or, what if he frowned at her and said, “Don’t you know rainbows only have SEVEN colors, not 30 or 40?” Or, what if he just ignored her altogether or told her to go show her picture to someone else. She would be impacted just as much as in the previous example, but not in a positive way. In fact, if this was a common occurrence, Sally might think less of herself, feel discouraged or put down or inadequate, and stop trying to do creative things altogether. On the other hand, she might decide to use her markers to paint pictures where her dad HAS to notice, such as her bedroom wall. The outcomes of such conditioning can vary widely, but suffice it to say, they are not reflective of the abundant life God wants for us.

The PAINFUL PATH of CONDITIONING

- Sally’s need for attention/approval goes unmet (e.g., Dad ignores drawing)
 - Her thinking is affected (e.g., I’m not very important)
 - Her feelings are evoked (e.g., hurt, rejection, unimportant)
 - Her behavior is influenced (e.g., quits trying)
 - A pattern is reinforced (e.g., complacency)

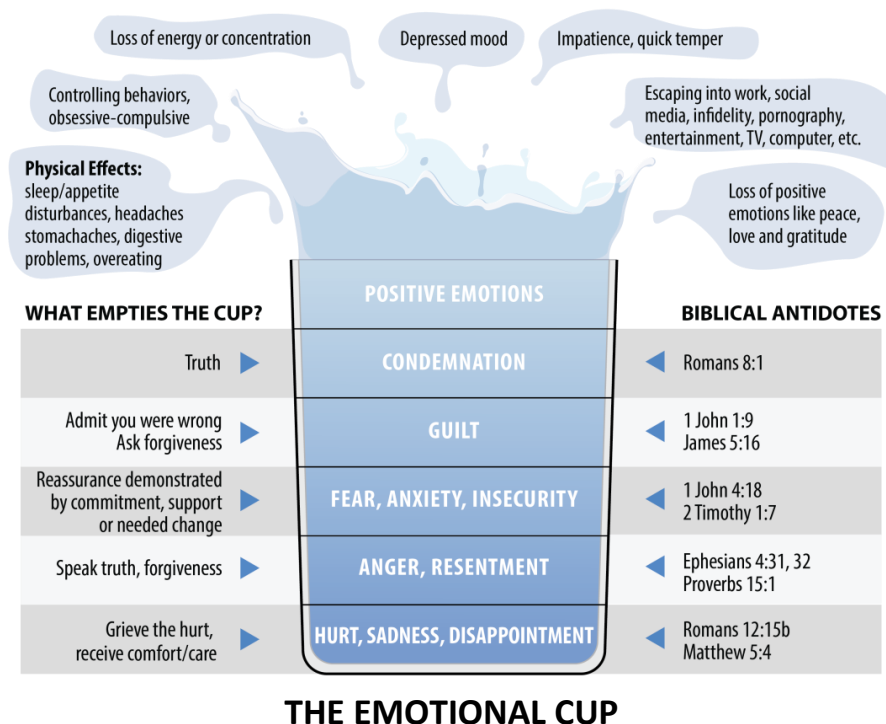
Emotionality

God created us in His image and part of that includes emotionality. We serve a relational God who is also an emotional God. Jesus, being fully divine and fully human when He came to dwell among us, experienced many emotions. In addition to all other kinds of instruction, He also placed in His Word guidance for what to do with our painful emotions so they don’t continue to hinder us from experiencing abundant life with Him.

- What has some of your cultural conditioning regarding being emotional looked or sounded like?
- What’s it like for you when you experience hurt, sorrow, or a rush of emotion while in the presence of others?
- How did your family address sadness, crying, or times when you were fearful growing up?

Emptying the Emotional Cup

The following diagram is intended to be a figurative representation of the way we can accumulate emotional residue from our life experiences, good or bad. I will concentrate however, on the painful emotions and what the Bible tells us will be helpful in addressing them. When we were first introduced to this diagram, we were asked, “What do you do with your hurt?” And, “What does the Bible say to do with it?” I remember thinking that I had no confidence in any answer I might give, even after spending three years in a seminary studying the Bible, psychology, and counseling. The knowledge I gained there, or when I was told about this paradigm for understanding and processing emotions might do little good if I simply just took it on board intellectually. But when we started applying the principles associated with this diagram, pain that had accumulated over the decades was healed and there was greater freedom to experience joy and peace, giving God the glory for that.



So, as negative or painful life events impact us, emotions appropriate to our experiences are generated within us. They are associated with the newly-formed memories, but we feel them in our bodies/hearts. Jesus warned us that this life would have trials and tribulations, and even His first disciples experienced some very tragic experiences. But the Lord also left us with provisions and “antidotes” to treat this pain and to empty it from our “cups.” Here’s a quick summary of these processes.

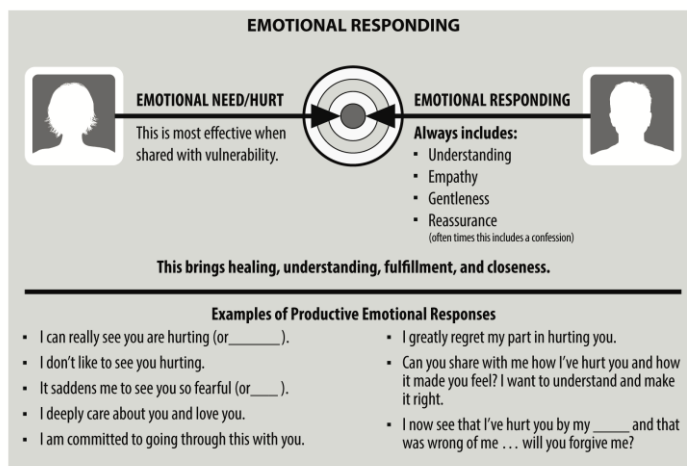
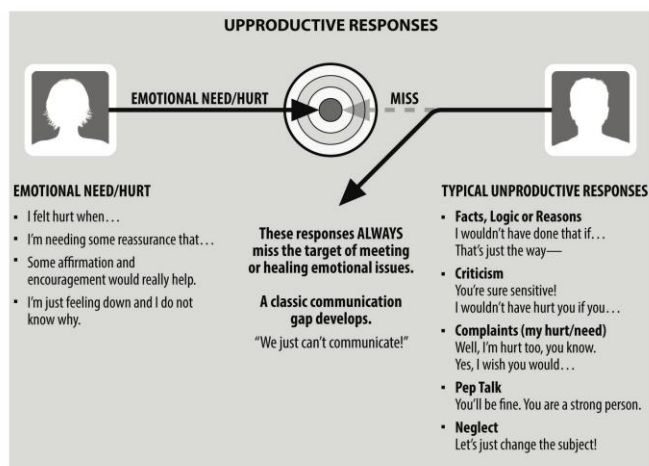
HURT, SADNESS, DISAPPOINTMENT – is HEALED as some of God’s COMFORT is extended to us and we take it on board (Rom. 12:15; I Cor. 12:26; Matt. 5:4)

ANGER, BITTERNESS, RESENTMENT – is RELEASED as we trust God’s command and freely give FORGIVENESS to our offenders (Eph. 4:31-32)

FEAR, ANXIETY, and WORRY – is DISPLACED as we experience God’s perfect love through Him or someone He ordains to care (I John 4:18; Isa. 41:10)

GUILT for wrongful behavior – is FORGIVEN by the Lord when we CONFESS and His love and godly sorrow transforms us (I John 1:9; Jas. 5:16)

CONDEMNATION or SHAME – is REMOVED as God’s TRUTH about your identity in Christ is made real and embraced by you (Rom. 8:1; John 8:32)



Emotional Responding

God’s word is very clear about how we should respond to UNHEALED HURT in our Emotional Cup as well as that of others. Instead of trying to help people STOP crying, we are to HELP them cry or grieve. In doing so, we are trusting God at the point of His Word that instructs us most clearly – weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn. The amazing thing is that the outcome of grieving with someone is that they start to feel better since they’re not alone in their sorrow.

- **Matthew 5:4** is a good verse for understanding how to do this well and how we might miss the mark if we don’t.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

The word “blessed” can be translated “happier.” So, first, people who are hurting or have suffered a loss, need to do the “work” of grieving or mourning, which means they allow the sadness to be present without distraction. But, in addition, one or more people who are present, need to be experiencing EMPATHY, which means they are ATTUNING to that person’s sadness and EXPRESSING COMPASSION. When that combination occurs, the person who was hurting will often report feeling a sense of relief within moments.

- **The story of Ken, a former Marine who served in Viet Nam**

▪ **Responses to AVOID**

- **Facts, logic, or advice** – “That’s just the way life is, you know.” “Get your resume together and send it out.”
- **Pep talks** – “Look at the bright side.” “I’m sure God will make lemonade out of these lemons.”
- **Criticism** – “You’re just being TOO sensitive.” “You’re making a mountain out of a molehill.”
- **Complaints of our own** – “You think THAT’s bad. You should hear what happened to ME.”
- **Neglect** – “Let’s talk about something positive.” Lack of eye contact or no response at all.

▪ **Effective Emotional Responding**

- **Heart-to-heart - Emotion needs emotion**
 - “I can see that you are hurting and I want you to know I care.”
 - “I’m hurting for you. You’ve been through so much already.”
 - “That is so sad and I feel compassion for you. Tell me more.”

▪ **Spider Man**

- **Try It Out** – Experience Rom. 12:15 and/or Matt. 5:4 with someone this week by sharing sad times from childhood.

Rom. 12:15 – Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

I Cor. 12:26 – If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Eph. 4:31-32 – Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

I John 4:18 – There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

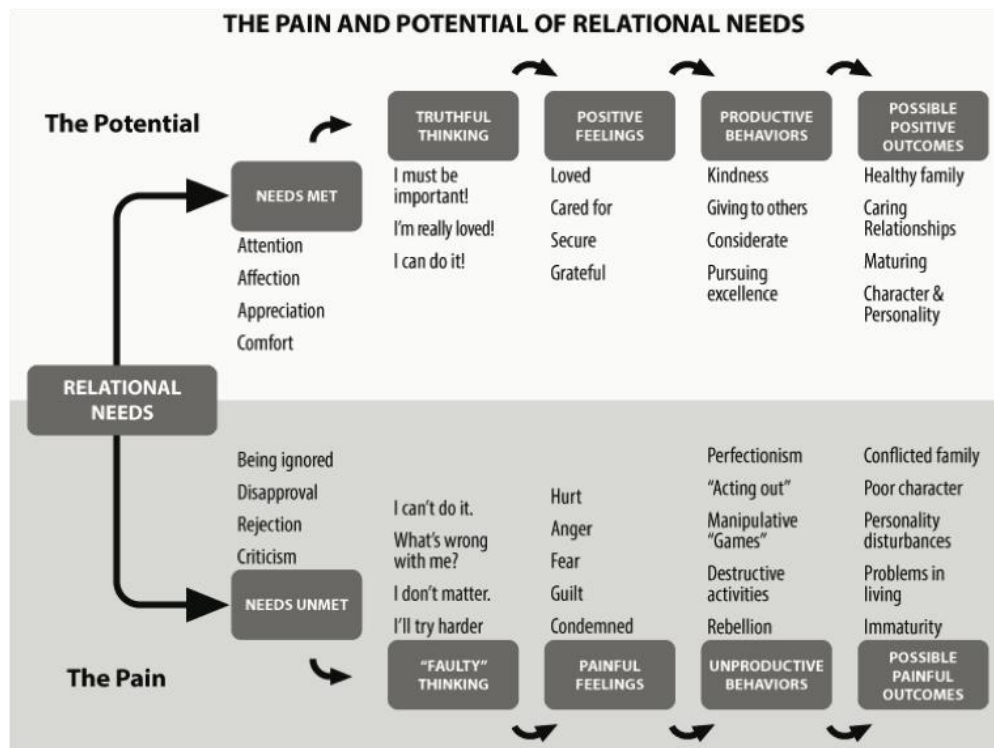
Isa. 41:10 – Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

I John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jas. 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Rom. 8:1 – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

John 8:32 – ...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.



Becoming Living Letters

Brown Community Group

November 1, 2020

What Truth Needs to Be Experienced?

Are we really doing enough with the Bible? Could it be that discipleship is defined not by how much we know, but by how much we are formed by the light of God's Son, His Word, and His people? Jesus spent much time being WITH the disciples and they abided with Him.

- **Light in the Lord** – "In your light, we see light." (Psalm 36:9) We don't have light unless it comes from Him.
- **Light in His Word** – "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105)
- **Light in His People** – "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14)

As we go about our lives, we must ensure that we haven't settled for knowing the Word, but have the security of knowing we have been experiencing it. This was what some early discipling looked like in my (Bruce's) journey – memorizing the Word, walking with the Lord and seeing it made real, and fellowship with other believers who showed me the way.

Experiencing Hope through the Encouragement of Scripture

Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (NASB) Many people have been persevering and enduring, but have missed out on the encouragement because even though they might know some Scripture, they may not have experienced it. Joyce and I were married almost two decades before we actually experienced some of the relational verses that I have been describing in this series of lessons on Great Commandment Love. Matthew 5:4 and Romans 12:15b would be examples. Let's see if we can recall a time of experiencing Romans 15:4, and in so doing, experience another verse that says, "Bless the LORD, my soul, and do not forget any of His benefits;" (Psalm 103:2 NASB)

Think about a time in your life when you were hurt, sad, confused, or disappointed. It might have been a time of crisis, a time of health problems, a time of indecision, a time of temptation, a time of loss, a time of questioning, or a time of discerning God's will. Think about such a time when God encouraged you with a verse or a principle out of His Book, the Bible. Share that with someone now, if possible, or if not, later today.

The Challenge to Become a Living Letter

When we are equipped with God's truth, His light, we are potentially members of a Good Samaritan "SWAT team." Our influence is magnified when the truth we have to share with others has been forged in us through the crucible of life. Then, we become living epistles or letters as Paul refers to in II Corinthians 3:2.

We truly are letters being read by all men. Therefore, the challenge to become persons of care, grace, and compassion deserves high priority. We see how the Jews watched Jesus weeping with Mary and said, "Behold, how He loved him." (John 11:36 NASB) They were "reading" Jesus. Christ told the motley crew He had assembled that all men would "read" their love for one another to determine that they were truly His disciples. (John 13:35) It is that love for one another that reflects His Word experienced in their lives that would be attractive to unbelievers. The challenge is to be the kind of living letters read by all men that reflect the heart of God. There may never have been a time when people are reading us and looking not so much for how moral we are or the things we stand against, but watching for whether or not we love and care for one another. In today's world of divisiveness, character assassination, demeaning statements, innuendos, gossip and rumor mongering, what if they read Ephesians 4:29 in us – as we encounter opposition, on our FaceBook posts, etc. Let's encourage one another to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)