

## “A Life Flourishing in Love” (Eph3:17-20)

### 1. Four Stages of Emotional Growth

We are taking the journey in the series of “Being Set Free.”

Last time we looked at two characters, Saul and David. Saul shows what a life of emotionally unhealthy spirituality is like, and David is a great model of a life of emotionally healthy spirituality. David knew himself in knowing God. That sets him free from the false ways of knowing himself: I am what I do, I am what I have, I am what others think, and I am what happens to me. Saul understood himself in those ways. And it brought him into a broken life, real disaster, and it became from worse to worse. On the other hand, as David knew himself in knowing God, he could overcome different kinds of emotional and spiritual attacks.

Do you think David was always emotionally mature? Was he always able to respond to happenings in life in the way he fought with Goliath? I don't think so. He also went through the stages of emotional baby, child, teenager. As a little boy, he looked at God and himself, and he understood God and himself who was a little boy. As a child he looked at God and himself, and he understood God and himself who was a child. When he grew into an emotional-spiritual adult, then he could fight with Goliath.

Peter Scazzero in his book, “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” introduces that there are four stages in emotional maturity, the process of growing in our faithfulness to our true selves, in our ability to distinguish who you are and who you are not.

- Emotional Infants look for others to take care of them. They are driven by need for instant gratification and use others as objects to meet their needs.
- Emotional Children are content and happy as long as they receive what they want. They interpret disagreements as personal offenses. They complain, withdraw, manipulate, take revenge, become sarcastic when they don't get their way. And they have great difficulty calmly discussing their needs and wants in a mature and loving way.
- Emotional Adolescents tend to be defensive. They keep score of what they give so they can ask for something later in return. They deal

with conflict poorly, often blaming, appeasing, going to a third party, pouting, or ignoring the issue entirely. And they become preoccupied with themselves and are critical and judgmental.

- Emotional Adults recognize, manage, and take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings. They respect others without having to change them and appreciate people for who they are. They give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect. And they are able to enter into the feelings, needs, and concerns of others without losing themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Considering this, Jesus was 100 % emotionally adult.

You cannot expect a baby to do like a teenager. It's un-realistic to expect a child to think and behave like an adult. I hope it is making sense to you. Okay? But many Christians cannot see this in their own Christian life. They are disappointed when they found themselves unable to do as David did with Goliath. Sometimes they even think it is a sin. And they accuse themselves and blame themselves and beat themselves up. That's what I used to do! But now I know that if you are still an emotional baby or child or teenager, you are not able to do what an adult can do. That's okay. That's totally normal.

We can only exercise our faith as we are. For example, emotional infants pray for their needs naturally. They can understand God takes care of them. But it's not easy for them to see themselves as servants. For example, emotional children go forward by faith as long as things go as they wished. They are happy to serve as long as others agree with them. But it's very difficult for them to cooperate with those who have different ideas. That's very natural. Okay?

When I look at myself, I can recognize I have all four kinds of stages of emotional maturity. Sometimes I'm pretty much like an adult. Other times I can be quite childish. And sometimes I'm like a baby, especially when I'm tired or hungry. I want my way. I don't care at all what is going on in others' lives.

We deal with things with our emotions, because we are emotional beings. You can hide it, but you shouldn't ignore it. Because it's a big part of who we are.

In order for us to grow into emotionally healthy adulthood, we have to take steps, it requires time and effort. It's not something we get right after we gave our lives to the Lord, nor something that naturally happens in an instant. That's

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Zondervan, 2006, pp.178-179

illusion. It's the same for our physical growth. It takes time. We grow step by step, day by day, year by year.

There are certain things we must learn in each stage particularly. We practice them, exercise them and experience them, then we can move on to the next stage. If we miss those practices and exercises, we will have problems later. If you miss the opportunity to grow in certain areas, that areas remain immature, you grow unhealthy.

For our healthy emotional growth, we need to understand our current maturity stage, and we must nurture our emotion. And also we need to find out and take out "emotional garbage," which I will talk about next time. And if there are broken parts in our emotion, we need healing, recovery.

This is the journey we continue to take. And what we've been doing now is to establish a new language so that we can begin to create a fresh culture of emotionally healthy adults. We're taking this journey, now we're growing, now we're moving forward, now we are becoming mature.

## 2. The greatest miracle

Our question is, what is our part so that we can nurture our emotion and become an emotional-spiritual adult? What is the key? How can we do that?

Be deeply rooted in his [Christ] love... Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. The fullness of God, the love of Christ may flood through our entire beings (Eph3:17-20 CEV, Voice).

Basically, we can and will grow when we remain in God' love. When we are deeply directly connected with God's love, we are nurturing our emotion. When our lives are deeply directly empowered by God's love, we are nurturing not only ourselves but also for others. It's about contemplative spirituality. That's the source of love. That's the most fundamental and essential thing, what we can offer to ourselves as we love God and love ourselves.

Let's think about it in other way around. What is the most important commandment? Jesus gave the answer, that is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

And 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mark 12:29-31). Surely we all know it. Right?

I like what Mother Teresa said. "We must know that we have been created for greater things, not just to be a number in the world, not just to go for diplomas and degrees, this work and that work. We have been created in order to love and to be loved."<sup>2</sup> I think it is so true, and perhaps it may be the most un-cared truth not only in the world but in church as well.

You love others in the way you love yourself. And you understand God' love in the way you love yourself. Then, have you ever learned how to love yourself? I'm pretty sure that you've learned about love. Here my question is, have you ever learned how to love yourself, and to love others as you love yourself? Maybe some of you have. But I don't remember that I was taught those things, especially to love myself. What I'd learned was to "deny yourself, die to yourself". And I was taught about behaving well, keeping the high moral standard. Do this for God and do that for church. Perhaps I went to a bad church. But I am not surprised if many of you are like me.

My parents are Christians, they are not just church-goes, they are good committed Christians. And they were strongly concerned about my future. So they invested a lot of money, time and effort for my education. They wanted me to get the skills to be professional to make it in the world. But they never ever taught me how to love, especially to love myself. Or I can say that what I learned from them is that the best way to love myself is to study well, to enter into this kind of school, and to get this degree and that certificate, and good job and make money. It is said, "Work without love is slavery. (Mother Teresa)" This absolutely makes sense to me. No wonder why people are suffering and are depressed in their business, in their offices, in their companies, even in their homes.

A Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky said, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."<sup>3</sup> We all like to think about love. For Christians, thinking about God's love, it's awesome. It's like I'd be a great Christian if it wasn't for people. I could have a great time with Jesus, and I'd be doing wonderful if I were alone. But there are people who drive you crazy, irritate you, hurt you. That's our real life on this earth. So, practicing love is a harsh and dreadful thing. It really is. Compared to just dreaming about love and talking about it.

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<sup>2</sup> All words of Mother Teresa "Mother Teresa > Quotes," [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/838305.Mother\\_Teresa](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/838305.Mother_Teresa)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/162429-love-in-action-is-a-harsh-and-dreadful-thing-compared>

In other words, it is not natural to put love into action for others and for ourselves. Perhaps it could be the very last thing you want to do. It's not just for us in 21 century. But it's the same for all humans on this earth at any time of human history. Because all we are sinners.

Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth. This church was a very unique church. They were gifted. They were on fire. They had zeal. All kinds of signs and wonders happened there.

The other distinctive thing about them was they were a messed up church. They were divided. They were jealous of each other. They were envious. They were full of pride, had no humility. They were immoral. They were fighting. There were conflicts. There were unresolved issues and they didn't know how to handle it. All kinds of stuff underneath the surface.

In this context, Paul says,

“If I speak in the tongues of humans or of angels, but do not have love I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:1-3).

Paul is saying, no matter what you do, if it didn't come from love, it means nothing. You may look good on the outside, you can be impressive, you can actually be helping people. But he emphasized that if it didn't come from your love, it's nothing. You think it's worthwhile, but it's nothing.

You see, Paul separates the two issues here. Gifts, talents, power, work, ministry, helping others, signs and wonders are one thing. To love is another thing. Whatever you do, whatever happens through you, if it didn't come from your love, it's nothing.

The sign of the Holy Spirit is not the externals, it's the love of Jesus flowing out of our heart.

Love that's the love of Jesus flowing out of you. Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, it doesn't boast, it is not proud, it does not dishonor others, it's not self-seeking, it's not easily angered, doesn't keep a record of wrongs that people have done to you. It does not delight in evil but rejoices in the

truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

In other words, you're safe when people get near you. It's like getting near Jesus. You're so safe that no matter what they do, they know you love them. You're approachable, you're soft. They know you're not going to smash them even when they cross the line.

It's a supernatural thing. It's the greatest miracle. You cannot do it. I cannot do it. But the Holy Spirit in you and me can make it through you and me. And people can feel it as you're involved with them, whether at work, at home, in marriage relationship, or in any other relationship.

### 3. Communicating the love of Jesus

What do you think is the most terrible poverty? According to Mother Teresa, the most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved. So communicating the love of Jesus is the biggest and fundamental need in the world, in that sense it's the most important thing.

So how can we communicate the love of Jesus?

The first thing is that we abide in his love, remain in his love, deeply rooted in his love (John 15:9). It's contemplative spirituality. We slow down to be with God. We intentionally pause whatever we are doing to be with God, in order to allow the love of Jesus to come into us, crafting a lifestyle of dwelling in Jesus' love and loving him. And please take time and do the reflections in the bulletin. That is, we make a space for God in our schedule, like having a date with God so that our life flourishes in his love. Sounds great, right?

We need to allow the grace and the love of Jesus to soak through our own souls. We've got to be melted by this beauty of Jesus. We need time and space for that to happen. Because unless that happens, I cannot give what I don't possess. I can't give Jesus to you that I don't have inside of me.

The second thing is to practice little things out of love.

"There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind

of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God. (Mother Teresa)"

Love is, you live in such a way that the other person is flourishing. It's their flourishing, their blossoming. It's the greatest gift from God to the world. We bring hearts that are soft and broken and approachable. People know we are safe because the love of Jesus is flowing out of us. Unless we show love, the world will never know Jesus.

You don't have to do great things, but let's just do little things, like "Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing." "Smile at each other. Smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other -- it doesn't matter who it is -- and that will help us to grow up in greater love for each other. (Mother Teresa)"

Here I want to talk about a very practical thing, something we can do, a little thing we can do to communicate love in our everyday lives. It's appreciation. This is so foundational to even beginning to love other people well.

Appreciations are about focusing on the positive aspects of life. What someone has done very specifically in this case. Most of us don't appreciate people unless they go over and above the call of duty. Then we say something. Appreciation is very underrated.

How many of you grew up in families where your parents or caregivers expressed appreciation for you? I'm not talking about encouragement. How many of you had parents who affirmed you and appreciated you growing up on a regular basis? For girls, did your parents appreciate you when you did the dishes? Many parents motivated us by criticism, that was their way of loving us, that we might do better for our kids and others.

This is how appreciation comes out. I'm recognizing God in a person. I'm recognizing God coming through a person as a gift for me. And so in a sense it does keep me God-focused.

We were actually made to receive appreciation. And we were actually made to give it.

Later we will practice this giving appreciation here.

I want to encourage you to tell your appreciation during this week as you go to work, school, in your family, neighborhood, friendships. This kind of small things out of love can transform you, flourish your family, nurture your relationship, blossom your company, change our city, this nation, and the world. We're meant

as a Jesus family to go into places and create new culture. We must be different from everybody else in the office, around the store, on the street. It's one of the great gifts we give to the world. Let us build lives flourishing in love. Amen!

This message was inspired by "The Greatest Miracle of All: Learning to Love" preached by Peter Scazzero

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection:

- 1) Read 1 Cor 13:4-7. What do you think is hindering you from loving yourself?
- 2) How did people close to you (parents, siblings, friends, etc) show love to you? How did those experiences shape you to love you and love others?
- 3) What do you think might be one of your "birthright" gifts from God that you have ignored in your life? Why did it happen?\*
- 4) "The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved. (Mother Teresa)" What do you think about this? How would you respond?

\* Taken from "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day" by Peter Scazzero, Zondervan, 2014, p.44.