



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Dealing with Disappointments” 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Proverbs 4:23 Healing Ministry

(Prayer for Illumination)

I was reading through Proverbs with some friends last month, and again I came upon a verse that seems to mean more to me every year.

“Above all,” the writer says, “guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”
(Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

For the Hebrews, of course, the “heart” was more than just “the emotions”; it was the “center of the person”—thought, will, emotions all together. But for our culture, “matters of the heart” are primarily emotions. We commonly locate our thinking in our brains, and our will is supposed to be driven by rational thought.

Supposed to be. Ah, there’s the rub. Isn’t it usually our passions—sometimes clear to us, and sometimes hidden under rationality—that get us into trouble?

If you want to see this in Scripture, I invite you to read the accounts of Samson; or King Saul, to name just two. About himself, the Apostle Paul wrote to his friends at Rome,

²¹ “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” (Romans 7:22-24, NIV)

In current culture, we know there is a struggle between head and heart. For the *Star Trek* series, Gene Roddenberry invented a character named Spock who was from the planet Vulcan. The Vulcans were fully focused on their intellect, compared to the Klingons, who were very, very passionate in a scary way. Somewhere in the middle were the Earthlings, sometimes pulled one way, sometimes another. Our Western European culture starting with the Greeks and then The Renaissance and The Enlightenment, has urged us to follow Spock, and often claims that is who we really are. But there is a lot more Klingon in us than most will admit.

Daniel Goleman, Professor at Harvard University, has been studying something he calls, “Emotional Intelligence”. What got him curious was the very different success rates among doctors graduating from Harvard Medical School. Some became world-renowned physicians and researchers. Others failed in their careers and in most other parts of their lives. All were intelligent; you don’t get into Harvard Med without great GPA’s and highest test scores. So

Goleman studied these physicians, and found it was not a problem with IQ, with intelligence. The men and women who had the difficulties were emotionally and socially inept. They had poor relationship skills, terrible bedside manners, or were ruled by their passions. From these results, Goleman wrote his book, “Emotional Intelligence—Why It Can Matter More than IQ”. There is a follow-up volume on “Social Intelligence”, which I imagine applies emotional intelligence to social situations—and after all, by the end of our lives, isn’t it by our relationships that we judge that life has gone well, or gone poorly? I know very few terminally ill patients who say, “I wish I’d spent more time at the office.” Instead, we look at our relationships. So Goleman advocates teaching “emotional intelligence” and “social intelligence” to our families and children, in order to make for more successful living and relationships. Makes sense to me!

What I want to do this morning is to raise our emotional intelligence so we can deal more effectively with disappointments in our relationships, including our relationship with God. Let’s begin with God, shall we, and what God says about these things?

In Genesis, God creates humankind “male and female”—which tells us, right at the beginning, that we were created for relationship with each other and with God. God used to walk with the humans in the cool of the day, just “to hang out together”. But in Genesis 3, the people decide they want to make their own decisions, to be “independent adults”. Each wanted to be The Decider of their own life, without God. Unfortunately, we were not designed for that; we can’t know enough to make good decisions, and our perceptions of our self-interest sometimes turn out to be really harmful. (Think, “addictions”.) With our First Parents leading the way, all people—all of us—are addicted to sin, we all have an “I problem”. You are an addict. I am, too. When our First Parents acted on this addiction, it broke the trust relationship God had with them, and they with Him. And in breaking that easy intimacy, all other relationships for humans became broken, too—a broken connection with creation, broken trust between the partners, between the person and his or her physical body--all of it.

But that did not end God’s desire for a love relationship with us. If we get nothing else out of the Bible, we ought to notice that God keeps trying, and keeps trying to establish such a relationship with us, to the extent we can stand it. He has paid enormous costs—costs to His power (as God limited what He would or would not do), costs to His honor (continually forgiving and calling the prodigal people back), and costs to Himself, by giving up divinity to live our human life, and die a terrible death on a cross to show us the serious cost of our sin, and to pay that cost that would kill us forever. THAT’S how much God wants this intimate connection with us—and still does, after all these centuries of recorded human history! Here are some of the Scriptures that spell out what I’ve just been saying: Genesis 2:18, 3:8-9; Deut 30:19-20; John 3:16; John 14:21; Romans 8:35, 37, 39; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10, 19. (This may sound quite familiar to those of us who have studied the book, *Experiencing God*.)

There’s a second aspect to what God wants: God wants us to have great relationships with each other, too. In fact, the relationship with God and our relationships with each other are intertwined. Boy, if I was going to list all the Bible examples of that, we’d be here all day! Let me just read one of the texts where Jesus makes this really clear. This is Matthew 5:21-26, from the Revised Standard Version:

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his

Whoa! Jesus is serious! And he speaks for God. You could say, it's in our self-interest to forgive. (Next time when we explore "forgiveness", we can look at the many ways it helps US as we forgive OTHERS.)

God knows we hurt each other, as broken people in this broken world. That's why Jesus talked a lot about forgiveness—taking responsibility for our part of the relationship, and doing all we can to reconcile. So here is one of the major texts for today, from Paul's Second letter to his friends at Corinth, from chapter 5. Listen again for God's Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud.

¹⁴ [. . . Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (NIV)

Or, here's how Eugene Peterson puts it in paraphrase:

"Christ's love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

¹⁶⁻²⁰Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. ²¹How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God."

^a Or *be a sin offering*

God is all about reconciling us with Himself, and us with each other. And God wants us to join Him in that ministry, until everyone on the planet is brought into God's Forever Family. This is your lifetime assignment, in some form or other, just as it is mine.

Now I want to equip you to more effectively reconcile your relationships.

In your worship bulletin today is a funny diagram I'd like you to take out, so you can write on it—and perhaps add notes on the back, if you want. This is called the “Role Renegotiation Model”, and I believe it comes from a business school setting. I have not seen the copyright, so I'm not sure. I want to walk through this with you, and then apply it to our relationships with some “how-to's”. This model applies to every important commitment we have—marriage, employment, friendship, church membership—all of it.

When we first meet with the other person or representative of the institution we're considering for a commitment, we start by checking each other out. We often put on our best behavior. We're “dating”, in the world of marriage. We're investigating the job description, or interviewing the previous employee in a work setting. We read church literature and visit various church activities if we're “shopping” for a church.

Let's say that goes well. We're ready for a commitment. We get a marriage license and book a church; we sign the contract with XYZ Company; we meet with the Elders and make membership promises. That's the Commitment Stage.

For a while, things go swimmingly. You're happy, the other party is happy, there's productivity and excitement.

But in every relationship, there comes a time when we get a “pinch”. A pinch is a surprise, usually an unhappy one. Something happens you did not expect. It's not a body blow to the relationship; it's an irritation.

You have several options when you get a “pinch”. You can bail out. Some people can't deal with the least disruption of their lives, perhaps because at the time they are under so much stress that even this “little pinch” is something they can't tolerate.

Most people slough it off. They say, “Oh, it wasn't important. Nothing to get too upset about.” And they go back to being a mostly-happy camper.

But there's another option. You re-negotiate. You go back to those with whom you made the commitment, and you have a frank conversation about those expectations. You say, “When I signed up for this position with the company, no one told me I would have to work seven days a week.” Or, “Honey, when we married, I did not expect your mother to move in with us and want us to play cards with her every night.” Or, “When I became a member of this church, I expected that when I was in the hospital, the pastor would call on me.” If the renegotiation does not succeed, then you can move on. But if you are making an expected or exceptional contribution to this person or institution, the others involved will try to find a way to meet those expectations, perhaps with some compromises on each side. Both side can monitor this agreed-upon change, and have another conversation as needed. Dealing with pinches—minor disappointments--this way is very healthy; it respects both sides.

But sometimes pinches start stacking up. The box on your paper that says, “Violation of Expectations”—draw “a stack of pinches” there. A person at this point has gotten a lot of pinches,

and now it's pretty significant irritation. Maybe there's even been a gross violation of one's expectations. We call this a "crunch". It's intolerable, and would be to anyone.

Again, in this "crunch" position, you have several options. You can bail out. That's easier if you don't depend on this commitment for your major life support. Another choice is "sucking it up", and going back to your position, and continuing to work away. But that probably won't last long. Now you're hurting, and that makes you even more sensitive to any additional pinch; you'll probably be back in "crunch time" very quickly. There's a sad third option when you've been crushed. It's indicated by that word off to the right, a French word: ennui. Ennui is a sense of being stuck. You're still there, but you aren't happy about it. Maybe you feel you have no choice; you must stick with this because the cost of change is too high. So you become "the invisible man"; you "defect in place". Your production is poor. The only people who hang out with you are other complainers; "misery loves company," as they say.

There is one more choice—re-negotiating. But if you go back to the commitment-makers now, you've got your six-guns on--you're negotiating under pressure! You're determined to get a clear indication of whether your disappointments are going to be dealt with, and you won't settle for wishy-washy talk any more. This can lead to a positive outcome, but because you've got all this steam built up, it's going to be harder for you to keep your cool, and to be smart during this conversation. Your emotions may be too high. You may need to get some advice, talk it over, walk around the block. Then you may be more ready to have the difficult conversation.

Now, I've given you a cognitive map of relationships, how our expectations get stepped on. What's the "take-away" from this? When you get a pinch, re-negotiate. Don't wait until "crunch time". Go to the relationship partner, and hash it out. Look at Bible relationships sometime, and you'll see a lot of negotiating between people, and even between people and God. Abraham negotiates with God over God's plan to wipe out the city of Sodom, for example. Moses negotiates with God. We could even look at Jesus talking with God in the Garden of Gethsemane as a negotiation of the "terms of his call", as he faces the torture of crucifixion. In the end, Jesus re-ups; he grasps this calling with both hands, and sees it through, all the way--for US! We praise you and thank you, Jesus!

Relationships require repair and maintenance! I hope this will help you deal with disappointment in your relationships much better. Paul wrote, in Romans 12,

¹⁷ "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [Prov. 25:21, 22] [And, I would add, it will confuse him, incredibly!!]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Our relationship expectations can be reasonable or unreasonable. They can come from childish wishes, or from unhealed hurts that make us defensive and distant. But our expectations

drive our relationships; and our happiness and disappointment propel us to choose among of these options. Choose life, as Moses tells us in Deuteronomy, chapter 30. Choose well. Deal with your disappointments early, and honor God by how you honor others.

To God be the glory!

Transition to Healing Ministry; Intro; Team members will stay as long as there is need. After God's Words of Blessing, we will move directly to our Healing Ministry. (Call Healing Ministry Staff to their Stations); "As we sing our last song, I will take light from the Christ Candle to the Healing Stations."

SONG—KW takes flame to Healing Stations

GOD'S WORDS OF BLESSING—"After these words of God's blessing, please make your way out quietly, or move to the center section if you are staying to pray or to come for healing. This will help us continue this service with as little interruption as possible."

BENEDICTION

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on November 11, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]