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## The Role of Human Emotion in Christian Discipleship

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE ROLE OF HUMAN EMOTION IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ALEX BRYAN

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**Audrey** : pure joy

**Nicole** : pure beauty

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation asks and attempts to answer the following question: *What role does human emotion play in the problem of contemporary Christian discipleship and how might emotion play a provisional and productive role in its success?* The argument of this project, in response to the above question, is that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*. Just as the rational (left brain) component of human beings is complicit both in the spiritual pathology and redemptive potential of mankind, so to is the emotive (right brain) mind a responsible party in both the degeneration and regeneration of the moral self. We cannot fully appreciate or experience the goals of Christian discipleship without attention to our feelings.

Chapter 1 examines the contemporary Christian scene, exposing some particular discipleship challenges. The influence of emotion is shown in areas of concern. We also identify a working definition of *emotion*.

Chapter 2 surveys biblical writings. Here we *recognize* emotions in God and human beings. We also *recognize* the role of emotions in fallen humanity and the proper (biblical) role of emotions in the pursuit of holiness.

Chapter 3 explores contemporary Christian thought in regard to emotion. We observe *recognition* of affective influences in an array of discipleship concerns: marriage, evangelism, financial stewardship, church unity, and relationship to God.

Chapter 4 begins a two-chapter project on the *recreation* of emotions by analysis of emotional intelligence. This contemporary field of psychological and sociological

study provides a potentially useful way of understanding and implementing Christian discipleship goals as articulated in the teachings of Jesus.

Chapter 5 continues this *recreational* mode by discovering a preferred venue for discipleship (and emotional) growth: *the dinner table*. Jesus' pervasive use of mealtime environments is shown, as well as the potential for similar experiences today.

Chapter 6 summarizes both *recognition* and *recreation* of emotions and offers some specific recommendations for the introduction of emotion in discipleship programs.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Then he said, “Cut the living baby in two—give half to one and half to the other.”

The real mother of the living baby was *overcome with emotion* for her son and said, “Oh no, master! Give her the whole baby alive; don't kill him!”

But the other one said, “If I can't have him, you can't have him—cut away!”

The king gave his decision: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Nobody is going to kill this baby. She is the real mother.”

1 Kings 3:25-27, MSG (my emphasis)<sup>1</sup>

Emotional moments and emotional understanding often lead us to the greatest clarity in our thinking and understanding. These are the lightbulb moments. They capture the truth in a snapshot, as no amount of rational thinking can.

Matthew Elliott<sup>2</sup>

### Introducing the Problem

Life is felt.

The way human beings experience life—through our five-fold sensory toolkit—is to actually *participate* in our world, our story. We are not observers. Our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin are the biological gifts by which we interact with our God and the globe he has named as our home. Behind these senses lies a brain, wired to interpret, analyze, and respond to the inbox messages coming from our five faithful correspondents. And in

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress Publishing Group, 2002), 429.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew A. Elliott, *Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 54.

this brain is housed the capacity to know. This knowledge is more than recognition of sensory facts. This knowledge is more than cognitive interpretation and rational judgment. This knowledge is *knowing*: an intimate understanding, an affection, a feeling, an emotional experience.

To live the abundant life<sup>3</sup> envisioned by Jesus requires an appreciation for the ways we have been created. Denial of food for beings designed to eat will eventually lead to physical starvation, and death. Abstention of rationale decision-making will soon lead to bone-headed decisions, followed by the erosion or end of a life. Avoiding our emotions will also lead to a kind of death—a termination of meaning, beauty, relationship, unity, and love.

### **Relationship with God**

David Eckman writes of one result of emotional absence: the destruction of an experience with God.

Many Christians appear to have spiritual autism. They are like robots in their practice of Christianity. And they appear to have no emotional response whatsoever to the shower of affection the Trinity is pouring on them. Often this robotic, emotionless Christianity stems from belief that they must win the Father's love by their actions. Often it comes from a wounded, drooping heart so tightly guarded that it cannot believe it is loved.<sup>4</sup>

In my own experience of over 15 years of pastoral ministry I can count on one hand the number of Christians and non-Christians who struggle with connection to God due exclusively or primarily to *rational* roadblocks. Even in those few cases (primarily

<sup>3</sup> John 10:10

<sup>4</sup> David Eckman, *Knowing the Heart of the Father: Four Experiences with God That Will Change Your Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 87.

men) where significant questions about God's existence or Christ's divinity were raised, a chilling back story of family breakdown, sexual abuse, or legalistic religion loomed large. Every case presented specific and substantial *emotional* barriers to acceptance of God's goodwill, Jesus' love, and the faithful presence of the Holy Spirit. One unbelieving *Christian* friend of mine revealed his emotionally-informed agnosticism this way:

"Pastor, I want to believe God exists and that he loves me but I can't. I just can't *feel* him."

Emotional scarcity is just one enemy of intimate relations between Creator and human creature. There also lurks the hyper-presence, even *inundation* of feelings. Emotions, including grief, anger, disappointment, and despair, have the capacity to nudge us from an experience with God.

William P. Young's popular bestseller *The Shack* tells the fictional tale of a young father, Mack, who is coping with the emotional aftermath of the abduction and murder of his daughter. Amid grief and a persistent fog of dark feelings, he is encountered by God. Several divine-human conversations are devoted to the sorting out of Mack's hard questions about loss, pain, and disappointment with God. One query centers on the *affective* nature of humans and grief:

"I'm afraid of emotions," Mack admitted, a bit perturbed that she [God] seemed to make light of it. "I don't like how they feel. I've hurt others with them and I can't trust them at all. Did you create all of them or only the good ones?"

God's response:

"Emotions are the colors of the soul; they are spectacular and incredible. When you don't feel, the world becomes dull and colorless."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> William P. Young, *The Shack* (Newbury Park, California: Windblown Media, 2007), 196.

This perspective, that emotions are not evil or inherently counter-productive to a person's connection to God, is remarkable. I have known many Christians who assume *positive* feelings about life and God are somehow shallow or cheap. Happiness, joy, celebration, and a generally winsome spirit are too good to be true. Flip the coin, and I could share stories of many more followers of Jesus who connect their anger, disillusionment, and overall malaise to a *sinful* life, unworthy of acceptance by God. Either way, the presence of emotion raises questions about the man or woman's life with God. Good feelings are greeted with suspicion; bad feelings accepted as evidence of Divine disinterest or disapproval.

The argument of this project is that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*. This, of course, begins with our relationship to God, which is the first and most important focus of Christian discipleship. A life absent emotion lacks the capacity to enjoy God. A life full of emotion, wrongly understood, will likely corrupt a heavenward communion. An emotional life (even with the pathology of post-fallenness) can work toward an experience with God when feelings are appreciated and healed.

### **Relationship to Others**

The emotions are also central to our human-to-human encounters. Leonard Sweet observes that we inhabit "a hyperactive, hyperspeed, hypertext society" where "intimate relationships are not only uncommon [but] impractical." He prods us to "mind each other's business," which is the definition of "intimacy." Sweet links the development of this intimacy to "the cost of Christ's discipleship[.]" In other words, emotional

connection between human beings is part of the important work attended to by a disciple of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

Three of the greatest relational problems I have encountered in local church life find a richly toxic home in the absence of intimacy.

First, in a probably obvious case, marriage. George Barna reports what many pastors instinctively know: Christian divorce rates (United States) differ little from the non-Christian population (32 to 33%). He calls his sad findings “statistically identical.”<sup>7</sup> The destruction of marriages and families is a discipleship tragedy. But, in my experience, the impact of badly damaged (pre-divorce?) marriages is also dangerous for the *church*. The lack of intimacy (minding each other’s business) causes lack of support for a husband’s financial support of the church or a wife’s desire to give of her time and talents. “Pastor, I would like to give, serve, invest more but my spouse would kill me” has been a common comment throughout my ministry. Several high-capacity Christians have had their spiritual growth and missional hearts stunted by their significant other. And the absence of some truly great emerging disciples has, in my experience, too often caused others to fall short of their potential. Unstable marriages undermine the church. And, in my experience, unstable marriages *almost always* suffer from emotional atrophy.

Second, the important and central work of evangelism (relating to those beyond the perimeter of the church) can be impacted by the emotional well-being of Christian disciples. Dan Kimball has written persuasively about the need to rethink and renew our evangelistic energies.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Live Without* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2008), 23.

<sup>7</sup> George Barna, “New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released,” *The Barna Update* (March 31, 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=295>; Internet; accessed 13 August 2008.

We need to bridge this chasm of the Christian subculture by befriending people outside the church, inviting them to participate in community, and dialoguing with them. We need to be the light of Jesus and the living gospel to them, building their trust in us so that they will be ready to listen.<sup>8</sup>

Kimball's remedy in reaching non-Christians includes:

- befriending people
- inviting them to participate in community
- dialoging (not monologing) with them
- building their trust

Each of these skills (commitments) requires some measure of emotional awareness and aptitude. First, we must be able to detect what another person is feeling. Second, we must be able to recognize our own feelings and how actions based on these feelings might hinder or help another in their journey toward God. Emotional skills matter. This was painfully evident when a longtime non-Christian friend of mine accepted my invitation to a church event. He is a liberal arts teacher (and politically leftward) who associates Christians solely with rightwing politics and conservative agendas. Upon arrival on our campus, a church member (a wonderful Christian who happens to be politically far right) greeted my friend, asked about his occupation, and then said (with intent to joke), "You're not one of those wild liberals are you?"

This was a case of a theologically-sound but emotionally-deficient Christian not doing a very good job evangelistically. My experience has been that Christians have little problem embracing the biblical truth of soul-winning but nonetheless experience significant evangelistic resistance due to relational insecurity. Interpersonal skills (which

<sup>8</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 236.

we will later argue are tightly interwoven with emotions) are essential in a relationally centered enterprise like evangelism. And I can think of few other subjects (are there any?) with greater impact on the success and well-being of local churches.

A third important example where human interactions are impacted by emotions—and the church, in turn, is impacted by human interactions—is general church unity. Tom Sine calls for the church to return to its communal origins. He writes:

While they didn't all live under the same roof, they operated more like a large, organic family. They often lived in proximity and were involved in one another's daily lives, "breaking bread from house to house."<sup>9</sup>

The metaphor of family is commonly used when speaking of church community. We are "brothers and sisters" joined together in the "family of God" gathering to worship in our "church home." While familial language is helpful (and even inspirational) for the experience of church life it is also loaded and sometimes dangerous. The expectation that local congregations will function as *healthy* family is ambitious. This kind of relational care and interpersonal integrity is robust. Expectations of members and would-be members can easily be disappointed when dysfunction pervades the Christian family.

Several years ago, in a church where I was pastor, a "spiritual family" breakdown occurred that left a trail of frustration and pain. The end result was termination of an employee who reported directly to me, the loss of three families from the church, questioning church members, and a worn out leadership team. Some relational factors leading up to this unfortunate conclusion:

<sup>9</sup> Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 258.

- An inappropriate though technically in-bounds (non-sexual) relationship between a board member and staff member (where neither party recognized the emotionally-charged nature of their friendship)
- A board comprised of emotionally-weak (non-confrontational) men and women who failed to act against their own intuition
- An employee with inappropriate expectations of the pastor (myself)
- A pastor (myself) with people-pleasing tendencies, which resulted in a reluctance to clearly define and enforce unpopular boundaries and expectations
- A small group of melodramatic church members who were emotionally ill-equipped to deal with change (and especially difficult transitions)

The inability to properly recognize and respond to personal *feelings* was, in each of the above, a piece of a major church family crisis. While every person involved—elders, pastors, staff, and other church members—were theologically orthodox, morally committed, and generally well-intentioned, *emotional immaturity* destroyed a handful of relationships and nearly toppled a church. No one disagreed with biblical wisdom regarding accountability or conflict resolution. Everyone, including me, simply and regretfully failed in our intrapersonal and interpersonal management. Our emotional problems bred family problems.

### **Relationship with Self**

Henri Nouwen's *Here and Now* is a prudent and poetic collection of short essays, which deal extensively with personal, emotional health. Nouwen recognizes the powerful



grip of emotions on a human soul. While he observes the affective terrain in man's relationship to God and man's relationship to man, it is his insight into the internal impact, *within* a man, that is most revelatory.

First, he identifies what he calls the "real enemies" of human experience: "oughts" and "ifs." These opponents of well-being are the guilt we feel for past disappointments and worry we feel about future uncertainties. These twin, emotionally-wrought, conditions bring a kind of thievery, robbing us of present freedom. This condition leaves us unable to experience the indwelling Spirit of God and the basic *psyche* necessary to function as fruitful disciples of Jesus and children of our Heavenly Father. We are, in this state, at risk of physical malady, depression, or spiritual death. "God is a God of the present," Nouwen writes. If our emotions cause us to live in another *time* (past or future) we are wandering in a soulless wilderness.<sup>10</sup>

A second intrapersonal concern is the impact of other people's emotions on one's self: "Joy is contagious, just as sorrow is." Nouwen then writes about a friend whose positive emotional state impacts his own feelings about life. The *catching* nature of emotions is an important consideration. Just as we might avoid someone with a highly transmittable abdominal flu virus, we also must be aware of how emotionally sick people may impact our own psychological and spiritual health. While we cannot avoid people in need, we must recognize what prolonged exposure to their emotive toxins might do to us. Likewise, just as we may find physical benefit from interacting with friends who exercise

<sup>10</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 18-19.

regularly and eat healthfully, we can enjoy the positive emotional strength of friends who may “increase our heart’s capacity to choose ... joy.”<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, Nouwen argues for benefit that can be gained even when all is not emotionally well. He writes, “Some of the most hopeful and joyful moments of my life were moments of great emotional and physical pain.” He finds these difficult times, when he isn’t *feeling well*, to be important moments when he can choose greater reliance on and connection to God. Emotional health does not mean the elimination of affective low points. These periods of anguish or darkness can serve as appetizers, which increase our hunger for God and the life he envisions for us. Perception (and management) of negative emotional seasons is as important as the promotion of a more generally positive emotional life experience.<sup>12</sup>

A fourth emotive concern centers on a “real danger ... to get stuck in anger and resentment.” Nouwen warns that we can easily “start living as the ‘wounded one,’ always complaining that life isn’t ‘fair.’” Christians are certainly not immune from the game of life, where the outcomes often seemed *fixed* against us. This is true in the slights we may experience from biological family, workplace colleagues, or in our social networks. Bad luck, bad choices, bad genes—there are many factors that can lead us to conclude that we are getting the short end of the stick. Add to this, for disciples of Jesus, the experience of living in a church community. How many stories can pastors, church leaders, and members-at-large tell of “unfair” experiences *inside* the fellowship of the faithful? We don’t always get our way. Sometimes others get their way with us. We feel marginalized. We feel used. We feel neglected. We feel as if the church has not ministered to us

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 44.

properly. We simply feel let down. We must guard carefully what seems to be a natural human tendency to experience negative emotions as evidence that we have been dealt the spiritual shaft. Our affective well-being depends on it.<sup>13</sup>

A final example from Nouwen drills deeply into the experience of the well-intentioned, deeply compassionate, and maturing disciple of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission<sup>14</sup> calls us to advance the Kingdom of God. We are to increase the rolls of those who roll with Jesus. We are to push back the grip of evil in the world. We are to combat sin and alleviate the symptoms of sin in our world. Our mission is ambitious.

But what happens when all of our faithful efforts seem to fall short? Nouwen writes:

The more I think about the human suffering in our world and my desire to offer a healing response, the more I realize how crucial it is not to allow myself to become paralyzed by feelings of impotence and guilt. More important than ever is to be very faithful to my vocation to do well the few things I am called to do and hold on to the joy and peace they bring me.<sup>15</sup>

Altruistic and empathic feelings are natural for the Christian who desires a life of discipleship and service. But when the evidence of sin, of ground yet to be covered (and sometimes ground lost) awakens us to the reality of our unfinished business, feelings of despair are also natural. These emotions can numb our sensitivity to the problems of our world and the power of the gospel<sup>16</sup> as the force necessary to solve them. Bitterness, disappointment, despair, and hopelessness then become the opponent of Christian compassion and commitment. They act as anesthesia—removing our ability to feel the

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 1:16

intensity of pain all around us. And so we wonder, “What is wrong with me and what is wrong with this Christian hope?”

Through awareness and action against this condition a new emotional combination (joy and peace replacing impotence and guilt) is able to bring fresh energy. Attention to our feelings helps enable revitalized missional tendencies and allows Christians to experience the satisfaction of vocation in the movement of Jesus.

### Contemporary Challenges

We have now surveyed the potential value of attention to emotions in Christian discipleship. Once again, our thesis states: The argument of this project *is that recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*. Before we move to a brief overview of the arguments and applications in support of this contention, a word is in order about the contemporary situation.

Dallas Willard gave this assessment (in 2006):

But there is a great deal of disappointment expressed today about the character and the effects of Christian people, about Christian institutions, and—at least by implication—about the Christian faith and understanding of reality.... There is an obvious Great Disparity between, on the one hand, the *hope for life expressed in Jesus*—found real in the bible and in many shining examples from among his followers—and, on the other hand, the *actual day-to-day behavior, inner life, and social presence* of most of those who now profess adherence to him.<sup>17</sup>

The intended audience of *this* dissertation, Christian pastors, teachers, and church leaders, would, I think, largely agree with Willard’s less-than-glowing report. My experience in conversations with church leaders of many geographies, generations, and

<sup>17</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2006), ix-x.

denominations is a fairly widespread concern for the well-being of Christianity in general and their own local ministries in specific. Some of these concerns include:

- Church members who are under enormous personal and familial stress. The pace and pressures of life have rendered many church members unable to live a spiritually buoyant life. They are sinking in an ocean of busyness.
- Church members who, because of one or more generations of family dysfunction, are no longer trending (naturally) toward health in their marriages and parental responsibilities. They simply do not have, it seems, either the genetic nature or the experiential nurture to survive and succeed.
- Church members who have difficulty (as we mentioned earlier) relating to a God of love and compassion. Their own emotional baggage excludes them from an attraction to a Heavenly Father. Their feelings of inadequacy, shame, and resentment create a canyon not easily traversed.
- Church members who aren't very good *members*. For many of the above reasons, Christians who suffer from emotional immaturity or brokenness struggle in their ability to participate with other Christians in ministry. Hurt feelings, poor communication, the inability to understand (empathy) what the other is feeling—all of these make ministry “teams” a risky enterprise.
- Church members who can't handle *the truth*. Here I mean the words of God, theologies, biblical teachings, and the better life taught from the pulpit each week. Managing the hearing of a *preferred vision for life* is not

a simple thing. The ability to grow without frustration of setbacks is not easy. The ability to share truth with others—when others are not always true—is not easy. The goal of better thinking, better doing, better relating, and better feeling is the outflow of a relationship with Jesus, but can be damaging, when unfulfilled, to the hearer or the proclaimer of the message. Maybe this is why we are to speak the truth in love (truth with emotional excellence).

A critical indicator for the condition of discipleship effectiveness is a person's relationship to money. Jesus said as much: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."<sup>18</sup> You can determine the health of the heart (the work of discipleship) by the health of personal economics. Income, spending, debt, investments, generosity, materialism, accumulation, simplicity, savings, wisdom, addiction—look at a person's financial world and you will know a lot about their spiritual world (which is, in reality, all worlds, for we are spiritual through and through).

The late Larry Burkett, in a 2001 interview, delivered the sobering news.

Only 3% of Christians actually tithe today. Thirty-seven percent of those attending evangelical churches don't give anything at all to their local church in any way. And that's not a problem ... that's an indicator of a problem. It's a spiritual problem being reflected through their finances.

He went on, sharing some startling statistics.

Over the last decade, giving overall in Christianity has increased about 20%—but recreational spending increased almost 125% and debt spending increased 550% ...<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 6:21

<sup>19</sup> Allie Martin, "Burkett Says Misplaced Priorities at Crux of Debt Problem," *Agape Press* (August 14, 2001); available from <http://headlines.agapepress.org/archive/8/142001g.asp>; Internet; accessed 13 August 2008.

Mishandled finances, in my pastoral experience, have been a consistent source of pain and problems for disciples of Jesus. I have watched families slide away from church because the embarrassment, stress, and pressures of their excessive purchases put them in a money hole too deep to climb out of. I spent a day in divorce court with a church member, observing countless cases where the judge was not settling assets, but debts. I have watched many church members who desired to live much more fully for God unable to do so because their hearts were bound up with their technological toys. I have seen discouragement, stagnation, obsession, and material affections reveal diseased hearts and infect hearts with disease. And in nearly every case (as we will explore later) the issue was not the ability to figure a budget, to numerically organize a plan, or to clearly state a theological conviction for how they would *like* their finances to be. Almost always, the issue was emotional—not knowing how to deal with depressing times, failing to say “no” despite the urge to buy, lacking emotional maturity to live the biblical vision they claimed to embrace.

In summary, the financial condition is in large part an *emotional* condition, which is also is a spiritual condition, and, therefore, a discipleship condition.

### **Overview of Project**

Let us be clear: the argument of this project is not that emotional factors are alone responsible for the challenges of discipleship. The hope of this work is an increased awareness of the *contribution* feelings make in the overall

development of Christians and would-be Christians. This generation, like them all, provides unique problems for people of faith and an array of factors are involved in successfully navigating life's waters. Emotions, we argue, are one such factor.

*Recognition* and *recreation* of the affective life are both at issue in the pages that follow. Here is a brief summary of the pages ahead.

Chapter two surveys biblical materials on the subject of emotion. We will show the biblical reality of emotion in God's being and in his created beings. We will demonstrate from the Old and New Testaments the significance of emotion in human life. We will *recognize* emotion therein and see *recreational* teachings, designed to help people move from emotional sickness to health.

Chapter three surveys contemporary Christian sources on the subject of emotion. We will draw upon pastors, teachers, and therapists in an extra-biblical exploration of the role of feelings. Again, we will look for the *recognition* of emotions as legitimate and some perspectives on how to *recreate* the affective being toward progress as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Chapter four begins more specific attention toward a *recreational* plan. We report on the work of the *emotional intelligence* community of therapists and practitioners. Our goal here is to show parallels between biblical (and especially New Testament) teaching on emotion and emotional intelligence as a contemporary movement. We will recommend emotional intelligence's testing and tools as one medicine in the cabinet of psychological healing. This can be, we believe, a useful body of information that will aid discipleship development.



Chapter five continues building toward a practical solution by exploring the *table setting* as Jesus' preferred but often overlooked venue for intrapersonal and interpersonal development. We will argue from a number of perspectives that mealtimes are uniquely created for the purpose of emotional and social healing and growth.

Chapter six, our concluding chapter, will house a specific proposal for how emotion can be both *recognized* and *recreated* in local congregations. We will offer suggestions for how pastors, teachers, and church leaders can effectively introduce the subject of feelings and become guides in the affective transformation of church members.

### Definitions

One last item: to define what we mean by *emotion* and, therefore, what we do not mean. The work of this project is not an analysis of various viewpoints of emotion nor is it an attempt to clarify the precise physiological or existential quality of emotions. However, we need to have a working definition, as emotion is the subject of our investigation.

Here are some important questions that give shape to our definition:

1. Is emotion *cognitive* or *non-cognitive*? Matthew Elliott has an excellent treatment of this question in his *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, this question asks if emotions are part of our neurological makeup or outside the realm of the brain. Do we consider

<sup>20</sup> Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006), 16-55.

emotions as part of the governing system or something that is merely subservient to cognition? We hold the view that emotion is cognitive.

2. Are emotions a part of our pre-fall nature or are they a post-fall consequence of sin? We will argue (particularly in chapter two) that emotions are (biblically) both part of God's being and (as ones created in his image) part of our intended state of being.
3. Are emotions neutral? Can they be, depending on the circumstance, good or bad? Or are there certain emotions that are sinful and others that are holy? For example, is anger always evil and peacefulness always good? We assert that emotions are not inherently good or evil but become one or the other depending on the object or circumstance at issue.
4. Do emotions simply fall in line behind our logical brain? Or do emotions have some form of governance (influence) over the logical brain? Robert C. Roberts does excellent work with this question in *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*.<sup>21</sup> We maintain that emotions *are* informed by logical choices (I exercise even when I don't feel like it and then later I feel better). We also maintain that emotions can be the engine rather than the caboose. I may not be moved to action by *data* describing poverty in Africa but a *heart-wrenching story* prompts further research of the situation, and motivation to act.

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 3-31.

5. Do emotions have a role to play in moral development? Can they impact Christians in their discipleship progress (or regress)? These questions are a set-up, for our project assumes this reality.

We define *emotion*, then, as follows:

Emotion is a cognitive reality, embodied in God and created in human beings, expressed post-fall in both godly and sinful ways, with the power to influence and the vulnerability to be influenced, holding enormous potential in our moral lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HUMAN EMOTION IN THE SCRIPTURES

Feelings come and feelings go,  
And feelings are deceiving.  
My warrant is the Word of God,  
None else is worth believing.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In light of the many problems confronting twenty-first century Christian discipleship, articulated in the previous chapter, we now turn to the role emotion can play in working toward a solution. We will first build, in this present chapter, a biblical platform for the role of emotion in Christian discipleship. In this chapter we will show that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*, first and foremost, because canonical writings argue for such.

Our scriptural construction is two-fold.

- First, we will assert, biblically, that God himself has emotions, as do human beings, who are created in his “image.”<sup>2</sup>
- Second, we will assert, biblically, that in a post-fall world it is important to live emotions rightly, rather than under the influence of a sinful (fallen) persuasion. Therefore, we understand Christian discipleship to be the process of becoming like Christ (in his image), who lived a pre-fall life in a post-fall world—including with regard to his emotions.

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<sup>1</sup> This short, popular four-line rhyme is a prominent memory from my childhood.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

Some initial considerations.

1. We will neither go as deep nor as wide as others have done in constructing a biblical theology of emotion.<sup>3</sup> The *quantity* of material in the Old and New Testaments dealing with emotion is extensive—far greater than we have space to address in this work. Many passages, rich with emotional insight, are *qualitatively* worth thorough exegesis. Yet, for the parameters of our investigation, the vast majority of these will go untouched.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this project we will generalize where necessary and probe deeply only in parts of the John's gospel, for his accounting of Jesus' life and teachings is uniquely flavored with emotion. Our objective is simply to provide *sufficient evidence* for the presence and importance of emotion in the Bible, and especially in the life and teachings of Jesus. We simply want to answer the question, "Is the presence of emotion in Christian discipleship firmly rooted in Holy Scriptures?"
2. We should say on the front end that while our emphasis on emotion is crucial, it in no way diminishes the importance of the intellect. Later in this chapter we will address this consideration more thoroughly. But, for now, as we think about the presence of emotion in Christian discipleship, there should be no fear that we are arguing for an anti-intellectual approach to the biblical spirituality.

<sup>3</sup>For an excellent example, see: Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*.

<sup>4</sup>For a nice overview, see: Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* (Chicago, Illinois: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2005).

## A Brief Survey of God's and Our Emotions in the Old Testament

### *God's Emotions in the Old Testament*

The Hebrew God is portrayed as an emotion-filled deity in the Old Testament.

Voorwinde counts

contempt, despise, weep, bewail, weeping, dread, rejoice, rejoicing, abhor, loathe, tears, murmur, growl, roar, be boisterous, be indignant, indignation, storming, raging rage, love, pity, look upon with compassion, burning anger, rage, compassion, delight in, delight, pleasure, burn, be kindled, anger, be attached to, love, howl, make a howling, be vexed, indignant, angry, provoke to anger, vex, vexation, comfort, be sorry, console oneself, rue, repent of, ease oneself, infuriated, overflow, arrogance, fury, exult, vexed in his heart, jealous, ardour, zeal, jealousy, be wroth, and make wrathful

among the Old Testament record of God's personal emotions.<sup>5</sup> From Genesis to Malachi the eye-catching emotion of *anger* is referenced in total 239 times. One-hundred seventy-six of these refer to the anger of *God*. Seventy-four percent of the time God is the one who is filled with the emotion of anger.<sup>6</sup>

Genesis 6:6 reveals what is perhaps the earliest and clearest description of God's emotional self that we find in the Bible.

The Lord was grieved that he made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Here the author of Genesis reveals the emotions of God prior to the Great Flood.

In this short verse we can readily hear tones of anger, frustration, anguish, despair, and certainly love.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 271-277.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Of note, the emotion of *love* is mentioned 131 times in the Old Testament, and just 40 of these refer to God, or 31%.

Moses hears, in dramatic fashion, God describe the state of his (God's) own emotions in Genesis 34:5-6 (italics supplied).

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, *slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ...*"

Indeed, eight times<sup>7</sup> in the Old Testament—from Torah, Wisdom Literature, and Prophets, we find renditions of "slow to anger and abounding in love" in reference to God's emotional disposition.<sup>8</sup>

Elliott writes,

It is clear that the Old Testament presents Yahweh as an emotional God. He loves Israel, desires their obedience, delights in those who follow him, hates wickedness, is angered by disobedience and is jealous for Israel's loyalty.... To postulate a God without passion is to take the heart out of Jewish worship.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Human Emotions in the Old Testament***

God is not the only emotional one in the Old Testament, however. Human beings are recognized to have emotion, and are expected to manage these emotions in right ways. Psalm 43:5 describes one such emotional dilemma.

Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
 Why so disturbed within me?  
 Put your hope in God,  
 for I will yet praise him,  
 my Savior and my God.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:18, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2.

<sup>8</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 244. Elliott here notes the importance biblical writers place on contrasting "the emotions of the God of the Bible ... from both pagan deities of the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman gods of the New." The question is not *if* God has emotions, but *what* are their nature.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 105, 111. The author covers love, joy, hope, jealousy, fear, sorrow, and anger as the primary emotions of God in the biblical narrative.

Here we find an emotional choice: should I be “downcast” or filled with “hope”?

Emotions are felt deeply (“within me”). And, as we shall explore later, emotions are susceptible to the positive influence of God—the Emotional Creator who created emotional human beings.

The book of Proverbs—a kind of *manual* for living well—makes numerous references to the presence and wise management of emotions. Here are but a few (italics supplied).

A fool gives full vent to his *anger*,  
but a wise man keeps himself under control.<sup>10</sup>

A man's wisdom gives him *patience*;  
it is to his glory to overlook an offense.<sup>11</sup>

Even in laughter the heart may ache,  
and *joy* may end in *grief*.<sup>12</sup>

A *happy* heart makes the face *cheerful*,  
but *heartache* crushes the spirit.<sup>13</sup>

And one more reference, to the influence of alcohol on the emotions:

29 Who has *woe*? Who has *sorrow*?  
Who has strife? Who has complaints?  
Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?

30 Those who linger over wine,  
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.<sup>14</sup>

God is also concerned about the emotional attitude of *all* those who worship him (italics supplied).

Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be *joyful* at your

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 29:11

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 19:11

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 14:13

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 15:13

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 23:29-30



Feast—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your *joy* will be complete.<sup>15</sup>

The Old Testament, as we can begin to see from this brief survey, houses stories about God and his relation to human beings. This narrative—including many generations, both genders, several cultures, geographical diversity, and inclusive of the many and complex circumstances of life—includes descriptions of the *emotional* factor in our existence. The Deity of Israel is not simply intellectual or impersonal. We may include in his impressive list of qualities: immortal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, *and* “omni-emotive.” We may say that God is “all-emotional” because he is the source of all life, the First Embodiment of emotion, and originator of emotion in human beings. Our race is hardwired with love and anger, joy and peace, compassion and fear. What is striking about the Old Testament is not the presence of emotion in human beings, but the recognition of their rightful place in our creative makeup and the ways God wants us to experience emotions aright—especially in our post-fall world.

In summary of our Old Testament survey, we turn again to Elliott:

God is love. Love is the most basic of emotions, and God gives himself this name. God is personal, God is emotional and God feels all the emotions that love can produce. This is central to the character of God. Our emotions are part of being made in the image of God; they are a good and integral part of human existence.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 16:13-15

<sup>16</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 248.

## A Brief Introduction to Jesus' and Our Emotions in the New Testament

*Sixteen* distinct Greek words are used in the New Testament in reference to God the Father's emotions. *Twenty-five* are used for Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The prevalence of emotion in the life and teaching of Jesus prompts Guthrie to recognize that Jesus "does not stand aloof" from the emotional challenges we face as human beings.<sup>18</sup> John Mosqueda, in his book, *Jesus, Emotions and You*, agrees (italics supplied):

We know that Jesus possessed the greatest love of anyone who has ever lived, that he felt the deepest stirrings of a fully radiant *joy*, that he was moved by the purest storms of *anger*; but he was also stabbed by the deepest knife-wounds of *anguish*.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus was *versatile*—amazingly so. He was wonderfully skilled in changing *emotional* gears. Because of his marvelous *sensitivity*, he stayed in touch with his environment at all times, and responded accordingly. He never skipped an *emotional* heartbeat.<sup>20</sup>

He lived daily in a highly demanding atmosphere—one of *shifting moods and attitudes*—and he remained sober and resilient at every moment, aware of the needs of those around him.... The *emotions* that he felt for each experience sprang forth with truthfulness and precision.... *emotional acuity*.<sup>21</sup>

Edwards notices that Jesus' emotions were hardly "suppressed"—as if God in human form was someone less than human. The observation is noteworthy: if Christ's *full* humanity is important to our understanding of the incarnation, and this *full* expression of humanity included the *unmitigated* presence of emotion—the presence of such affirms the healthy or "natural" presence of emotion in human beings.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Voorwinde, 283, 285.

<sup>18</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, ed. Terry Muck, The Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 176.

<sup>19</sup> John Mosqueda, *Jesus, Emotions and You* (Westchester, Illinois: Good News Publishers, 1983), 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> Gene Edwards, *Living by the Highest Life: Living with the Indwelling Lord* (Jacksonville, Florida: SeedSowers Publishing, 1989), 49.

So what is recognizable about the life of Jesus? If we were to replicate his *being*, what would this look like? Would it include emotion? The Apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest expositor of the person and purpose of Jesus, says “yes.” Paul’s articulation of *fruit of the Spirit of Jesus*—or we might say “what people produce when the DNA, the personality, the *essence* of Jesus is in them—is striking. Galatians 5:22-23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Here is a summary of the key terms in this passage, including comment from Richards’ *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.<sup>23</sup>

Term	Richards’ Comment (italics supplied)	Our Comment
Love	Love is the grandest theme of Scripture. It is a divine <i>motivation</i> . It <i>moved</i> God to reach out to the lost; and it enables the lost to look up in response, as well as to reach out to others.... The divine principle of love infuses the believer, <i>moving</i> Christians as it moved God ...	Love is <i>emotive</i>
Joy	<i>Chairo</i> is the word for joy that is used most often in the NT. It has reference both to the subjective state of joy and things that bring joy.... Joy is an <i>emotion</i> that is evoked by remembering God and his work and by the confident expectation that God will act to deliver when troubles come. One’s relationship with God ... is a source of joy.	Joy is an <i>emotion</i>
Peace	Instead, “peace” in the NT is defined and enriched by the OT’s <i>shalom</i> . In every theologically significant use, “peace” is something rooted in one’s relationship with God and testifies to the restoration of human beings to <i>inner harmony</i> and to <i>harmonious relationships with others</i> .... The vital <i>health</i> and <i>wholeness</i> of a restored humanity is available in Jesus.	Peace speaks to state of <i>being</i> , both intrapersonally and interpersonally

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1985), 116, 303, 316, 362, 363, 375, 418, 423, 478, 481, 546.

Patience	The Greek word group ( <i>makrothymeo/makrothymia</i> ) focuses our attention on restraint: that capacity for self-control despite circumstances that might arouse <i>passions</i> or cause <i>agitation</i> .	Patience is the proper management of <i>passion</i> or emotion
Kindness	<i>Chrestotes</i> (appearing 10 times in the NT) conveys the idea of moral goodness that allows a person to be <i>friendly</i> and <i>kind</i> toward others	Weaker connection to emotion here. Kindness does speak to interpersonal health.
Goodness	<i>Agathos</i> views the good as useful or profitable and is the word chosen when moral goodness is being considered.	Weaker connection again. Goodness speaks more to moral wholeness.
Faithfulness	<i>Pistis</i> (“faith,” “belief”) and related words deal with relationships established by <i>trust</i> and maintained by trustworthiness.	Faithfulness relates to a kind of confidence, which is connected to an emotional state.
Gentleness	<i>Praos, praus, prautes, praotes</i> . These words indicate a mild, <i>soothing quality</i> , a quality that is to be expected in friends, benevolent rulers, tame animals, and mild medications.	Gentleness is an attribute that considers the emotions in others.
Self-Control	The Greek words for “self-control” are <i>enkrateia</i> and <i>enkrates</i> . They mean “to have power over oneself” and thus to be able to hold oneself in.... Those without self control ... are powerless, overwhelmed by the <i>passion</i> that tugs at and controls them.	Self-control is the mastery of the passions or emotions.

A fair interpretation of Paul’s list of qualities would include the *significant* presence of emotions—well-lived emotions—in the life of the disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus was filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—qualities which certainly can be understood as emotions or closely related to the emotions.

In a moment, we shall look much more closely at the emotions of Jesus in our study of John’s Gospel. But, to conclude this general introduction of the emotions in the New Testament, let us turn to the observations of Philip Yancey (*italics supplied*).

How would he [Jesus] have scored on a personality test?...

The personality that emerges from the Gospels differs radically from the image of Jesus I grew up with, an image I now recognize in some of the older Hollywood films about Jesus. In those films, Jesus recites his lines evenly and without *emotion*. He strides through life as the one calm character among a cast of flustered extras. Nothing rattles him. He dispenses wisdom in flat, measured tones. He is, in short, the Prozac Jesus. In contrast, the Gospels present a man who has such *charisma* that people will sit three days straight, without food, just to hear his riveting words. He seems *excitable*, *impulsively* “moved with *compassion*” or “filled with *pity*.” The Gospels reveal a range of Jesus’ *emotional* responses: sudden *sympathy* for a person with leprosy, *exuberance* over his disciples’ successes, a blast of *anger* at coldhearted legalists, *grief* over an unreceptive city, and then those awful cries of anguish in Gethsemane and on the cross. He had nearly inexhaustible *patience* with individuals but no patience at all with institutions and injustice.<sup>24</sup>

Before we pry further into the emotional makeup of Jesus, let us summarize what we have suggested to this point.

1. The Old Testament portrays a decidedly emotional (or emotion-filled)

God. This God also created human beings with emotion, and expects them to live these emotions in the ways he intends.

2. The New Testament portrays a decidedly emotional (or emotion-filled)

God. This is especially true in the person of Jesus Christ. We begin to see (in the Fruit of the Spirit of Jesus, e.g.) God’s desire that we, too, be filled with the emotional qualities of Jesus. This provides a clue to the importance of emotion in Christian discipleship.

### **The Gospel of John: A Unique Portrayal of Jesus and Emotion**

Richard Bauckham analyzes those followers of Jesus who inspired the writing of the four New Testament gospels in his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as*

<sup>24</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 88.

*Eyewitness Testimony*. The writer of the gospel of John, he concludes, is “John the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, the apostle of Jesus Christ.” This John, Bauckham maintains, is the “beloved disciple” mentioned in 1:35-40; 13:23-26; 19:25-27; 20:2-10; 21:2, 7, 20-24, and likely 18:15-16.<sup>25</sup>

The “beloved disciple” or “the disciple Jesus loved” lives up to his affectionate (*emotive?*) name with a notably-rich relational gospel. The author employs *nine* separate words depicting the emotions of Jesus and *28 of the 59* gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) accounts of Jesus’ emotions are located in John’s book—nearly 50%.<sup>26</sup> (We will explore three pathos-bathed dramas from his account a little later.) Bauckham notes that it is this John, an emotionally-sensitive man, who “takes the mother of Jesus into his home” and who claims a “special intimacy” with his Rabbi.<sup>27</sup>

Manning observes the attitude of the *beloved disciple*:

If John were to be asked, “What is your primary identity, your most coherent sense of yourself?” he would not reply “I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist,” but “I am the one Jesus loves.”.... To risk the passionate life, we must be “affected by” Jesus as John was; we must engage His experience with our lives rather than with our memories.<sup>28</sup>

If John was “affected” by Jesus, if he was impacted at an emotional level by the emotional reality of Jesus, and if these emotions touched his own emotional world, it reasons that he would *write* with unique understanding. Bauckham believes this to be true (*italics supplied*).

<sup>25</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 393. This is affirmed by Gary M. Burge, *John*, ed. Terry Muck, The Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Voorwinde.

<sup>27</sup> Bauckham.

<sup>28</sup> Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1994), 126.

[T]he Beloved Disciple is portrayed as a *perceptive* witness, with spiritual insight into the meaning of events of the Gospel story....special *intimacy* with Jesus.... The narrative of the two disciples at the tomb skillfully correlates the two. The Beloved Disciple arrives first, but Peter goes in first. Peter has the priority witness to the evidence, but the Beloved Disciple has the superiority in *perceiving* its significance....The point is that, like Peter, he provides the eyewitness testimony that later Christians need in order to believe without seeing, but, unlike Peter, he already *perceives* the significance of what they both see.<sup>29</sup>

Here is described a highly sensitive, situationally intuitive, emotionally aware human being. For perhaps many reasons, Jesus chose John<sup>30</sup> to be one of The Twelve who would uniquely witness and communicate the essence of Jesus' life and teachings. We must, in part, consider that John's ability to *feel* the *feelings* of Jesus and to know the *heart* of Jesus is included among the reasons. While the Old and New Testaments *generally* portray God and humans in emotional terms, with John's gospel we have a unique, "backstage" pass into the emotive soul of God.

Let us now consider three *movements* in John's eyewitness account.<sup>31</sup> First we will consider the zeal (or jealousy) of Jesus in the temple (John 2). Second, we will consider a mixture of emotions—including anger and grief—at the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>32</sup> Third, we will consider the emotions of Jesus and his disciples as they say farewell.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Jesus in the Temple (John 2:12-25)***

N.T. Wright, in his monumental *Jesus and the Victory of God*, writes,

Unless we are to imagine that Jesus' action was purely random and unreflexive—which itself would be exceedingly unlikely, granted all the

<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, 399.

<sup>30</sup> Mark 1:20

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps another term would be even more accurate. *Eyewitness* implies reporting on what one sees. *Touchwitness* is much more John's perspective. This is what he *felt* of and from Jesus Christ.

<sup>32</sup> John 11

<sup>33</sup> John 13-17

other things we know about him—we must suppose that what he did in the Temple was closely integrated with, perhaps even climactic to, the rest of his work.<sup>34</sup>

If this assessment is correct, then what is the *specific* intention of Jesus and how does this connect to the *overall* intention of Jesus' life? What is Jesus up to and what does John want to tell us about it? A chorus of scholars find agreement. Let us hear from three of them and then draw some conclusions.

Instead of contrasting God's house of prayer with a den of robbers, as in the Synoptics, he contrasts *my Father's house* with *a market* ... Jesus provocative act is based on his relation to God as his Son.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus' expression "my Father's house" reveals his feeling toward God. The merchandising of privilege was an insult to God and a desecration of the Father's house.... Jesus' vehemence revealed his inward passion for the Father and his jealous guardianship of the Father's interests.<sup>36</sup>

Jesus is acting out of his relationship with the Father. As Messiah and God's Son, he is driven to defend and promote God's interests in the world. When he sees the human ruin of God's house, he is overwhelmed with a desire to act.<sup>37</sup>

Jesus identifies the driving force behind his emotional outburst: "Zeal for your house."<sup>38</sup> The Son of God is defending his Father's territory, his Father's honor, his Father's rightful place. Mosqueda notes that "it can be good to be angry. It all depends on what we are angry about, and on how we express it."<sup>39</sup> In the case of Jesus, *God in Flesh* insisting upon respect and love for *The Heavenly Father*, we have such an acceptable case. Jesus unleashes zeal—jealousy, anger,

<sup>34</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1996), 414.

<sup>35</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, ed. Grant R. Osbourne, The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 82.

<sup>36</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols., The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 44.

<sup>37</sup> Burge, 96.

<sup>38</sup> John 2:17

<sup>39</sup> Mosqueda, 62.



love—in the name of the One he loves, the One he has been in communion with for eternity.

The argument of Jesus is hardly cool, intellectual, respectable, and lawyerly. Tenney says, “Jesus’ words must have impressed the crowd sufficiently that they were remembered.” He says the crowd must have been “enraged,” filled with “animosity” and the situation, indeed, “exploded.”<sup>40</sup> Burge calls it a “shocking spectacle.”<sup>41</sup> Mosqueda says, “The emotional response of the crowd was one of annoyance, irritation, anger....The people were moody ...”<sup>42</sup> Burge concurs that “Jesus’ activity was not merely upsetting, it was outrageous....the scene is dramatic, provocative, upsetting.... The cleansing of the temple is troubling”<sup>43</sup>

Voorwinde makes a fascinating observation about this incident:

The relationship of the Father and the Son would seem to be reflected in the relationship between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple.<sup>44</sup>

And the opposite may be true as well. Because John seems to have bonded with Jesus—on a deep, emotional level—the Apostle has insight into the way Jesus *felt* about his Father, and about the *feelings* God had for his Son. We will see this more fully when we explore Jesus’ farewell, where Jesus affectionally prays to his Father that his disciples “may be one *as we are one.*”<sup>45</sup> The dream of Jesus is that humans would experience a

<sup>40</sup> Tenney, 44.

<sup>41</sup> Burge, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Mosqueda, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Burge, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Voorwinde, 111.

<sup>45</sup> John 17:11

*like* intimacy—with real emotions—that is always shared by his Father and himself. No wonder “the disciple Jesus loved” describes the dream of heavenly community this way: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes.”<sup>46</sup> There and then is found ultimate emotional healing—the reality of total oneness with Father, Son, and Spirit.

### ***Jesus and the Death of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)***

More references to Jesus’ emotions are found in chapter 11 than in any other single chapter of the fourth gospel. The most numerous record in John of the emotions of Jesus is found in chapter 11.<sup>47</sup> Here, Jesus encounters death, incredible grief, and a personally loved family: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Whereas John 2 reveals Jesus’ emotions in his relationship to God, John 11 reveals Jesus emotions in relationship to human beings.

Here is a summary of the emotionally-centered and relationally-intimate language in the story of Jesus and the Death of Lazarus (italics supplied).

- This Mary ... was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and *wiped his feet with her hair*. (verse 2)
- So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you *love* is sick.” (verse 3)
- Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (verse 5)
- “Our *friend* Lazarus” (verse 11)
- and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to *comfort* them (verse 19)
- Jews who had been ... *comforting* her [Mary] (verse 31)
- When Jesus saw her *weeping*, and the Jews who had come along with her also *weeping*, he was *deeply moved* in spirit and *troubled*. (verse 33)
- Jesus *wept*. (verse 35)
- Then the Jews said, “See how he *loved* him!” (verse 36)

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 21:4

<sup>47</sup> Voorwinde, 139.

- Jesus, once more *deeply moved*, came to the tomb. (verse 38)

Whitacre states what is made obvious in the biblical narrative, “Jesus had a special relationship with this man and his sisters.” He also believes John (the *beloved disciple*) is intentional in “emphasizing Jesus’ love for Lazarus and his sisters.” The one who personally felt an emotional connection to Jesus is the one who paid attention to the emotions of Jesus for God, and now for his closest friends.<sup>48</sup> We see “[t]he depth of intensity of Jesus’ feelings” for his friends. Jesus, who might have grieved privately, or at least attempted to minimize the strong expression of his own emotions, shows the world the he is an emotional creature. As both God and man, he conveys what both Creator and creature have inside them.<sup>49</sup>

Let us unpack for a moment the specific emotions of Jesus recorded in John 11.

What are these emotions and what causes them?

Voorwinde interprets Jesus’ reaction as “purely visceral” caused by “the sight of a weeping” Mary.<sup>50</sup> Mosqueda also suggests “Jesus was moved with *feelings* of compassion” for the people he saw grieving.<sup>51</sup> Burge agrees, noting that “when Jesus sees and hears their wailing, he is moved powerfully.” He adds however,

Jesus’ tears (11:35) are not for Lazarus, whose removal from the grave is imminent and whose life is going to show God’s glory. ... Jesus’ tears should be connected to the anger he is feeling so deeply.<sup>52</sup>

Whitacre concurs.

Death is the more likely object of his anger. In a Gospel which life is one of the primary themes, death is clearly the great enemy.... He is weeping with those who weep because he loves them. The grief caused by death is

<sup>48</sup> Whitacre, 288-289.

<sup>49</sup> Voorwinde, 187, 189.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>51</sup> Mosqueda, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Burge, 317-318.

one facet of death's evil that caused his anger. He is angry at death and saddened by grief. In both cases the reason is the same, namely, his love for his friends. The love of God for us and his wrath toward that which corrupts and destroys us are two sides of a single coin.<sup>53</sup>

Here we detect a similar idea from our review of Jesus' outburst in the temple.

There he reveals emotions of love for his Father, and he is zealous (angry, jealous, motivated, moved) against anything that counters this love. Here his love is for a beloved family, his friends. Death is the enemy. And so he is angry at death, jealous for life, motivated to respond, *moved* by an impressive emotional eruption.

Tenney summarizes nicely the words used for Jesus' feelings in this narrative.

His feeling is expressed by three words: "deeply moved," "troubled" (v.33), and "wept" (v. 35). The first of these (*emebrimesato*) means literally to "snort like a horse" and generally connotes anger.... The second word, "troubled" (*etaraxen*), expresses agitation, confusion, or disorganization.<sup>54</sup>

Verse 35's "wept" is from the Greek *dakryo*, which means "sheds tears."<sup>55</sup>

The response, in verse 36, of those who noticed these tears: "See how he loved him!" Evidently this *Christ Cry* was visible and memorable. The emotions of Jesus were made public. The *beloved disciple*, who was so attentive to feelings, made them permanently public through his gospel record.

Two important themes continue to emerge from our general survey of scripture and more specific exploration in John.

- First, emotions are an integral part of what it means to be a human being—and, strikingly, what it means to be God. Being "made in the image of God seems to include *being made in his emotional image* as well."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Whitacre, 289.

<sup>54</sup> Tenney, 119.

<sup>55</sup> Whitacre, 289.

- Second, God, both by example and instruction, is communicating to human beings that emotion needs to be rightfully expressed. Apparently, the emotional side of human beings *fell* just as the intellectual. (Interestingly, *fear* is the reason given for man's initial *hiding* from God.<sup>57</sup> Sin causes wrong emotions, wrong emotions cause sin. Rightly felt and rightly expressed emotions involve directing emotions rightly.) Therefore, Jesus can be angry for the sake of his Father or his friend, without sin. (The *beloved disciple* says we can *love* the wrong things, too.)<sup>58</sup> We will soon explore these matters more fully.

Next we turn to the *private* conversation of Jesus and his disciples—made public by only one gospel—the one written by the *beloved disciple*.

### ***Jesus' Farewell to His Disciples (John 13-17)***

We have come to perhaps the epicenter of emotional teaching in the scriptures. If the Bible, as a whole, speaks of the presence of emotion in God and humans, and the need to live our *feelings* well, John's gospel does so even more. And if John's gospel, as a whole, speaks of the presence of emotion in God (Jesus) and humans, and the need to live our *feelings* well, the account of Jesus' farewell conversation and communion with his disciples does so even more. Here is a brief summary of the emotion-bathed content in this four-chapter narrative.

- *Love* is mentioned just six times in chapters 1-12. *Love* is mentioned 31 times in chapters 13-17.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>57</sup> Genesis 3:10

<sup>58</sup> 1 John 2:15

<sup>59</sup> Whitacre, 327.

- This discourse is a run-up to “show[ing] them the full extent of his love.”<sup>60</sup>
- Jesus identifies his followers not as servants, but *friends*. The term *philo* “conveys a great ... sense of intimacy.”<sup>61</sup>
- Jesus uses the term *little children*, “an affectionate expression.”<sup>62</sup>
- Jesus speaks of peace, joy, hope, and instructs his disciples to “love one another.”<sup>63</sup>
- Jesus introduces the *parakletos*—“comforter, counselor, advocate, strengthener”—who will support the disciples, not leaving them “orphaned.”<sup>64</sup>
- The devil puts something in Judas’ *heart*.<sup>65</sup>
- Jesus endures the “bitterness of betrayal.”<sup>66</sup>
- Peter is filled with “zeal” in refusing the washing of his feet.<sup>67</sup>
- In this discussion Jesus is looking toward the physical cross. However, Mosqueda comments it is also “the acute *emotional* pain that would engulf his inner being.”<sup>68</sup>
- Burge suggests the farewell discourse “emphasizes that neither doctrine nor ethics can alone define Christian discipleship. It reminds us that remaining in Christ, having an interior experience of Jesus (as a branch nourished and strengthened by a vine), is a nonnegotiable feature of following Jesus.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>60</sup> John 13:1

<sup>61</sup> Whitacre, 379.

<sup>62</sup> Burge, 376. See 13:33.

<sup>63</sup> John 14:27, 15:11, 14:11, 13:34

<sup>64</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 335.

<sup>65</sup> Burge, 368. See 13:27.

<sup>66</sup> Tenney, 139.

<sup>67</sup> Burge, 370. See 13:8.

<sup>68</sup> Mosqueda, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Burge, 423. See 15:1-8.

- Jesus says things such as, “the Father has loved me,” “Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you,” and “[the Holy Spirit] will bring glory to me.”<sup>70</sup> Whitacre observes, “The relations between the Father, the Son and the Spirit are described in more detail here than anywhere else in the Bible.”<sup>71</sup>
- This meal setting “is a cultural symbol of personal intimacy.”<sup>72</sup>
- Finally, Jesus says, in 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” A mark of Christian discipleship includes the emotion of love for others.

So what can we learn about emotion from this experience of Jesus and his disciples in John chapters 13-17?

First, that *God has emotion*. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all relate to one another with *feeling*. Emotion is part of what it means to be God. Jesus, who is the “image of the invisible God” and the “exact representation of his being,”<sup>73</sup> reveals a God who has emotions toward human beings. “For God so loved the world”<sup>74</sup> is revealed in the life of Jesus—a God who loves us, gets appropriately angry at us and on our behalf, and a God who was *motivated* to give his life for us on the cross.

Jesus defines the purpose of the Holy Spirit, in the farewell discourse, this way:

When the Counselor comes, who I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> John 15:9, 17:1, 16:14

<sup>71</sup> Whitacre, 340.

<sup>72</sup> Burge, 372. See 13:2.

<sup>73</sup> Hebrews 1:1-3

<sup>74</sup> John 3:16

<sup>75</sup> John 15:26-27

Truthful testimony about Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit—and the work of Jesus’ disciples. Honest accounting (the kind our *beloved disciple* does in this gospel) of who Jesus is, what he is like, and, therefore, what God is like, is the foundation of Christian discipleship. That John embeds this objective in the most intensive emotional event in scriptures—the final conversations of Jesus before the crucifixion—is noteworthy. Getting God’s character right is a prerequisite to getting Christian discipleship right. And that character includes powerful emotions expressed in sanctified ways.

Second, we see that Jesus both expresses his own emotions and allows the emotions of his disciples be manifest: Peter’s passion<sup>76</sup>, Thomas’ fear<sup>77</sup>, Judas’ disappointment<sup>78</sup>, the disciples’ grief<sup>79</sup>, and John’s love.<sup>80</sup> The appreciation Jesus has for emotional vulnerability, honesty, and connection is conveyed nicely by Manning.

On a recent five-day silent retreat, I spent the entire time in John’s Gospel. Whenever a sentence caused my heart to stir I wrote it out longhand in a journal. The first of many entries was also the last: “The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus.... He leaned back on Jesus’ breast” (John 13:23, 25). We must not hurry past this scene in search of deeper revelation, or we will miss a magnificent insight. John lays his head on the heart of God, on the breast of the Man whom the council of Nicea defined as “being co-equal and consubstantial to the Father ... God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God.” This passage should not be reduced to a historical memory. It can become a personal encounter, radically affecting our understanding of who God is and what our relationship with Jesus is meant to be. God allows a young Jew, reclining in the rags of his twenty-odd years, to listen to His heartbeat!<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> John 13:9

<sup>77</sup> John 14:5

<sup>78</sup> John 13:27

<sup>79</sup> John 16:17-18

<sup>80</sup> John 13:23

<sup>81</sup> Manning, 124.



An important lesson of the farewell discourse is the presence of a certain kind of fellowship. The community of Jesus (this *first* one) was comprised of men who were filled with emotions and were free to express their feelings. Even disappointment with Jesus (why aren't you taking the throne?) was allowed. The *ekklesia* (gathering, church) of Jesus was not a place where emotions were minimized, manipulated, or thought of as something to be purged from the body. Emotions were understood to be an essential part of God, humanity, and the proper functioning of first Christian community.

In conclusion to our survey of John's Jesus, we may say that the *beloved disciple* has given us a blessed gift. With Jesus we have both the highest picture of God and the highest picture of a human being. The fact that John portrays the *emotions* of this ultimate God-Man gives us prized insight into the role of feelings in our spiritual discovery and discipleship growth. While we find substantial evidence for the proper role of emotions throughout the Holy Scriptures, the Fourth Gospel gives us an especially closer look.<sup>82</sup>

### **Answering Two Concerns about Emotions and the Bible**

N.T. Wright observes that postmodernism is "the hermeneutic of suspicion of everything."<sup>83</sup> This conclusion sheds light on two plausible skepticisms to the role of emotion in Christian discipleship. First, because postmoderns *doubt first*, the proposal of *feelings* in the spiritual development of Christians will be met with questions. Second, in an ironic twist of Wright's assertion, because modernism has wed the intellect and largely divorced the emotion, feelings are very much associated with postmodernism, and this scary word has been met with plenty of suspicion by the established (modern) church

<sup>82</sup> Voorwinde, 268.

<sup>83</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London, England: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2000), 116.

community. So we are under attack by at least two camps: those who are postmodern skeptics and those who are skeptical of postmodernism and its openness to explanations beyond the intellect, such as, emotions. We now submit a brief response to these concerns.

### ***Are emotions anti-intellectual?***

Matthew Elliott's *Faithful Feelings* provides a first-rate exploration of biblical emotions and their relationship to the intellect. A summary of his core arguments is in order.

Elliott believes there are two possible answers to the question, "What are the emotions?" He refers to these as "cognitive theory" and "non-cognitive" theory. The distinction is simply this: "[A]re emotions separate from the intellect or are they inseparably linked to the cognitive process?" His answer: "It is clear that the cognitive element in emotion can no longer be ignored....Simply put, emotion requires cognition."<sup>84</sup>

He points out that in the Old Testament "[t]he righteous base their emotions on the knowledge of God."<sup>85</sup> Their feelings are founded upon the mighty acts of God in their history, the character of God, and love from and for God. Among Elliott's many references is Psalm 1:1-2:

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

<sup>84</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 18, 19, 27.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 82.

“The emphasis of ‘happy’ is on the present state of the ones who follow God.”

Proper emotions are linked to the infusion of God’s law. The transformed mind influences one’s feelings.<sup>86</sup>

Tverberg supports Elliott by pointing out that:

In Hebrew, the heart (*lev or levav*) is the center of human thought and spiritual life. We tend to think that the heart refers mainly to our emotions, but in Hebrew it refers to one’s mind and thoughts as well.<sup>87</sup>

One famous example is from the life of David. In Psalm 51 he laments his sin *first* with an *intellectual* acknowledgement: “For I know my transgressions.”<sup>88</sup> The *left brain* understanding of God’s law and David’s violation is clear to this transgressing king. But then he goes on to pray for restored emotions.<sup>89</sup>

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed  
rejoice....Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit  
within me.

The confession of the intellect leads to the prayed-for transformation of the emotions—with the hub of his *heart* pulling the two together. And then the emotions, finally, have their influence on the intellect.<sup>90</sup>

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways ...”

The simple graphic below will show these relationships.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 82-91.

<sup>87</sup> Lois and Bruce Okkema Tverberg, *Listening to the Language of the Bible: Hearing It through Jesus’ Ears* (Holland, Michigan: En-Gedi Resource Center, Inc., 2006), 61.

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 51:3

<sup>89</sup> Psalm 51:8, 10

<sup>90</sup> Psalm 51:12-13

<sup>91</sup> Psalm 51:3, 8, 10, 12-13

(1) David <i>intellectually</i> understands his guilt, which prompts a desire for <i>emotional</i> change.	(2) David prays for <i>emotional</i> healing, which he sees as tied to <i>knowledge</i> . This is centered in <i>heart change</i> .	(3) <i>Emotional</i> healing allows David to <i>intellectually</i> help others understand God.
Intellect influences emotion.	Both intellect and emotion intertwined in the heart.	Emotion influences intellect.

A second example of the relationship between intellect and emotion, which is both cognitive and *heart-centered*, is the command to love God in Deuteronomy 6:5.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Matthew rephrases this way:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>92</sup>

Again we see a *holistic* view of human beings. We serve God with our thoughts and feelings. Elliott writes,

A cognitive view of emotion can bring these two extremes into balance. Worship includes genuine emotion based on genuine understanding.<sup>93</sup>

Edwards and Burge each provide wisdom for the practical application of emotion and intellect in Christian discipleship.

When three newly converted Christians start on the adventure of the Christian life, one being rather emotional, another rather strong in his determination, and the third seeming to carry everything about life in his head, not one of these has an advantage over the other two. The truth of the matter is, each one will have to be taken out of that which is his primary characteristic. Or, to state it clearly, whatever you are, *that* has to be broken.... And how shall he break the will of the evangelist, subdue the emotions of the charismatic, and goodness knows what to the intellect? By making available to each of them an abundance of encounters with the

<sup>92</sup> Matthew 22:37

<sup>93</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 178.

other realms—the spiritual, that is, the heavenly places—which are in Christ Jesus.<sup>94</sup>

We live in an age that is eager for experience. Sermons are often measured by the “emotional work” that can be done in twenty minutes. The comment “that was a great service” can easily refer to the worship band. Preaching themes are often filtered through therapeutic categories, and for many Christians, the final validity of the Christian walk is not what I believe (a cognitive category) or how I live (a moral imperative) but what I have experienced. All three are an essential part of the Christian life.<sup>95</sup>

In each case the value of emotion and intellect (with morality) is affirmed in relationship to the other. *Emotionalism* in Christian discipleship is not the answer. *Intellectualism* is not the answer. Rather, a view of the *mind* and *heart* as both under the influence of God and of the other is desired.

We conclude our response to anti-intellectual criticisms of emotion in Christian discipleship with a notice: in the next chapter we will explore *emotional intelligence*, which is a current field of study with much to say about how we can apply emotional maturity to the work of Christian discipleship. We will see that “non-cognitive intelligence” is a term often used for the emotions. While some of these theorists may understand *feelings* to be truly separate from cognition, our embrace of their excellent work does not necessitate an acceptance of this view. We affirm a view, which we believe to be biblical, that “brings emotion and reason into a unified whole.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Gene Edwards, *The Inward Journey: A Story of God's Transforming Love* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), 47.

<sup>95</sup> Burge, 406.

<sup>96</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 237.

*Are twenty-first century emotions the same as first century emotions?*

A second concern we must briefly consider—as we are presently building a case for emotions in Christian discipleship from *the Bible*—is the transferability of biblical material on emotions to our present day. Marcus Benjamin notes, “All cultures have very different frameworks, expectations and expressions of emotion, not to mention suppression and inhibitions.”<sup>97</sup>

Bruce J. Malina’s important work *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* is a thorough investigation of societal differences between the world of Jesus and our own. Here is a summary of his observations.

1. He argues a person in the first century Mediterranean world “did not share or comprehend our idea of the ‘individual’ at all....Instead of individualism, what we find ... is what might be called collectivism....interrelatedness.”<sup>98</sup>
2. He believes a contemporary of Jesus would, therefore, “always see himself or herself through the eyes of others.” In other words, emotions would be much more reflective of the way the *group* was feeling, rather than the individual.<sup>99</sup>
3. Therefore, the Bible is not interested in “inner motivations that are quite personal; to reasons based on personality, childhood experiences, personal development, interpersonal ability in terms of poise, IQ, emotional control, personal story, highly personal reasons ...”<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Voorwinde, 26. The author quotes from a private, dated February 14, 1991.

<sup>98</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights for Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 61-62.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 61.

4. As a result, “it was culturally assumed that only God knew the individual heart ...”<sup>101</sup>

5. Malina also suggests that “[i]f you were a student of psychology and were to evaluate the people presented in the New Testament, you would ... categorize them as anti-introspective, or not at all psychologically-minded. The whole point is that in this aspect of their culture, they were not like we are at all.”<sup>102</sup>

These assertions call into question how we might understand emotions in twenty-first century Christian discipleship if we are to ask the Bible for help. Is the first century culture so very different that we can hardly relate?

Malina does confess that “envy”—which is the “most grievous evil” in the times of Jesus, is an “emotion” and emotions were understood to be part of the “makeup” of human beings.<sup>103</sup> Cahill comments that, “In Greek psychological theory, emotion was deemed a *daimon*, a spirit or demon that came to possess one.” While not a positive endorsement of emotion, their presence was recognized.<sup>104</sup> Elliott is confident that,

Emotions were considered a major topic of philosophical inquiry at the time of the New Testament. The emotions had an important place in literature and society.... [E]motion was seen as a crucial part of human life and the human soul.<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps we can draw the following conclusions from the cultural divide.

1. Social structures, cultural values, and relational challenges may in many ways be very different in New Testament life than our own.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 68-69, 108, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Cahill, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World before and after Jesus* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 204.

<sup>105</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 78-79.

2. People of the first century may have had greater or lesser, or even different understandings of emotion than we do. However, one's perception is not, in fact, reality. In other words, it is probable that they and we suffer from imperfect knowledge of the emotions. This in no way negates the presence of *feelings* or God's opinion of them.
3. Given the many stories of the scriptures—both Old and New Testaments—which reveal human and divine emotion in ways we can readily understand, it seems the differences between cultures are not so great as to undermine biblical foundations of the emotion in Christian discipleship.

Above all, perhaps our greatest challenge is articulated by the insightful C. S.

Lewis:

[Jesus] was not at all like the psychologist's picture of the integrated, balanced, adjusted, happily married, employed, popular citizen. You can't really be very well 'adjusted' to your world if it says you 'have a devil' and ends by nailing you up naked to a stake of wood.<sup>106</sup>

Jesus was significantly (even wildly?) emotional. His life was unsettling in many ways to his contemporaries. While certainly a product of his time and culture, Jesus expressed feelings, in the open, that challenged the political, religious, and social structures of his day.

### **Responses to the Biblical Record of Emotions**

How shall we apply the reality of an *emotional* God, who created *emotional* human beings, who wishes us to live our *emotional* lives *well*? What can we extrapolate

<sup>106</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London, England: Jeffrey Bles, 1960), 67., quoted in Yancey, 90.



from even a cursory look at scripture, John's biography of Jesus, and the *beloved disciple's* remarkable accounting of the intimate, final hours of Jesus with his disciples?

First, the theological revelation that God (and most beautifully, Jesus Christ) is an emotional being, one who has feelings for the other members of his Trinity, and human beings, has enormous implications. "For God so loved the world" is the motivation for sending Jesus to earth.<sup>107</sup> Apparently, the reason God mettles in human affairs is *because* of his *feelings* for us. Mosqueda emphasizes this point:

The Creator-God once lived as a man. To say that he *feels* for us is to understate the matter. The truth could never be declared strongly enough.<sup>108</sup>

The understanding and embrace of this reality helps us to no longer live in fear of God. We are freed from contrasting our *overly emotional* selves with a logical, rational Deity. A separation from God that we may often feel is no longer necessary for the reason that we assume him to be a wholly different creature than we—he, pure logic, we, emotional wrecks. We *share* his image, and, therefore, enjoy a strong *emotional* bond.<sup>109</sup>

Secondly, therefore, a "recovery of ... true self as the beloved" enables us to live our lives with "passion"—emotions fully and rightly expressed.<sup>110</sup> Burge notes "[o]nce we embrace the significance of this notion, our attitudes toward this world completely change." We see our lives differently.<sup>111</sup> A recognition that God *is love*—that he is, as we said earlier, *omni-emotional*—encourages us to move beyond a narrow view of who we are and what God wants from us. *Feelings* are no longer to be ignored or eliminated, but lived out *in the ways of Jesus*. The emotional Christ confronts our attempts to define

<sup>107</sup> John 3:16

<sup>108</sup> Mosqueda, 33.

<sup>109</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1988), 172.

<sup>110</sup> Manning, 125.

<sup>111</sup> Burge, 407.

Christian discipleship as simply getting the right information in our heads so we can do the right things. Following Jesus is about both thinking and *feeling* as he did about life. As a result, our “doing” is influenced by our minds and our hearts, which are *both* influenced by him.

Burge notes:

Discipleship is about how to discover peace when surrounded by all manner of negative and misplaced emotions.<sup>112</sup>

Peterson marvels at the combination of moral commitment and emotional intensity in the early church.

How did the Christian community maintain its fire without getting caught up in the violence, whether with words or swords? How did the Christians stay on track on the path following Jesus?<sup>113</sup>

Essentially, his questions assume two important characteristics of discipleship: passion and morality. Spiritual maturity in the Christian tradition includes the heart and the soul. And this is accomplished by “a definite, conscious act of choice ... yield[ing] one’s rights to Another.”<sup>114</sup> Here we see the value of spiritual *disciplines* in shaping—both curtailing and creating—emotions in us. Elliott puts it nicely when he writes, “We are responsible for our emotions because they are based on ... our stated moral beliefs.”<sup>115</sup>

A third and final extrapolation from our survey of biblical emotion would simply be this: emotion is, biblically, an essential part of Christian discipleship. Burge

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>113</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation in the Ways Jesus Is the Way* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 264.

<sup>114</sup> Mosqueda, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 39.

concludes: “Christian experience must necessarily have a mystical, spiritual, non-quantifiable dimension.”<sup>116</sup> Elliott agrees, writing:

Christian emotions should be the most intense, the most vibrant, and the most pervasive things we feel as they are based on the most important things in our life: our relationship to God and his great love for us; our eternal future; and the work of Christ. If we are faithful in making our core heart values and beliefs those of the Bible, our emotions will be faithfully conformed to these truths.... Our emotions will show the reality of our faith.<sup>117</sup>

### **A Look Ahead**

In the chapters that follow we explore how a biblically-based understanding of emotions can influence twenty-first century Christian discipleship. We will do so in three ways.

First, we will explore some perspectives from those contemporary Christian pastors, teachers, and therapists who work in the “trenches” with people. We will hear from those who care deeply about discipleship growth, those who are among the best at understanding how God wants to change minds and hearts in our generation. We will see what they consider to be the role of emotion in a variety of discipleship categories: connection to God, financial stewardship, faith-sharing, interpersonal reconciliation, physical health, and more. Just as we would consider the opinions of cardiologists for the physical heart, we will consult those “soul physicians” who work to heal and grow the emotions of people in the realm of Christian discipleship.

Second, we will introduce a contemporary view of emotional development called emotional intelligence. In particular, we will recommend the work of Reuven Bar-on,

<sup>116</sup> Burge, 426.

<sup>117</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 264.

who believes the maturing of our feelings leads to an experience of “well-being.”<sup>118</sup>

Notably, Tverberg writes, “[T]he Hebrew word *shalom* ... carries a ... connotation of well-being, health, safety, prosperity, wholeness, completeness.”<sup>119</sup> So, when Jesus tells his disciples, during the farewell discourse, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,” he is envisioning an experience of *shalom*, well-being, we might even say a kind of “emotionally-intelligent” life.<sup>120</sup>

Third, we will explore the remarkable use of *meals* in the ministry of Jesus for the purpose of discipleship growth—and especially the emotional aspects of such. The emotionally-rich farewell of Jesus in John 13-17 is set around a dinner table.<sup>121</sup> Peterson, writing of the common use of table venues in the ministry of Jesus for the purpose of emotional connectedness, notes, “The prominence of these meals keeps us in intimate touch” with the people we share them with.<sup>122</sup> And Elliott, whose extensive work on biblical emotion has enriched our understandings in this chapter, concludes his work by saying (*italics supplied*),

We should not neglect this study’s implication for the life of the church. How we love each other has everything to do with how we feel about one another. Love will draw us into fellowship. In an era of churches focusing on professional stage presentations and great music, *perhaps some of our churches need to revive the potluck dinner, family night and the church picnic*. The church family has the most wonderful reasons to rejoice and joy and laughter should characterize our fellowship together. We are called to enjoy one another’s company just as Jesus made best friends.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Cary Cherniss and Daniel Goleman, *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select for, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 17.

<sup>119</sup> Tverberg, 13.

<sup>120</sup> John 14:27

<sup>121</sup> Burge, 378.

<sup>122</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2006), 79.

<sup>123</sup> Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 266.

We will assert that the success of emotion in Christian discipleship necessarily includes the intentional practice of eating together—the setting Christ chose for emotional instruction and development.

Finally, we will offer a vision of Christian discipleship that includes both the intellectual and the emotional. What does a more holistic view of spiritual growth look like? How might this impact our personal lives and the collective life of local churches?

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have built a case for the purposeful presence (God's intention) of emotions in the lives of human beings. We have shown that God has emotions, he has passed them along to us, they are damaged because of sin, but susceptible to positive transformation by the influence of Jesus. Overall, we have shown, biblically, that recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship. Emotions are a central piece in the human puzzle. Their redemption is necessary that we might walk toward Christ-centered wholeness.

We conclude this chapter with the words of John Wesley.

The 'emotions' are a crucial part of human existence, some would even say they are the defining aspect of human life. Because of this, theology—the Church's reflections on God and humanity—must, in every generation, come to grips with affectivity. Theology must understand the causes, the nature, and the importance of felt experience within the religious life. Is the great range of scriptural language about the 'heart' dispensable ornamentation which only clouds the real message of the Gospel, or does this emotion-language itself convey and constitute, in large measure, the real message?<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup> G.S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in Christian Life and Theology*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, vol. 1 (London, England: The Scarecrow Press, 1989), 1., quoted in Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*, 14.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HUMAN EMOTION IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Feelings are a primary blessing *and* a primary problem for human life. We cannot live without them and we can hardly live with them. Hence they are also central for spiritual formation in the Christian tradition. In the restoration of the individual to God, feelings too must be renovated: old ones removed in many cases, or at least thoroughly modified, and new ones installed or at least heightened into a new prominence.

Dallas Willard<sup>1</sup>

Ignoring the emotions is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God.... Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice.... However, we often turn a deaf ear—through emotional denial, distortion, or disengagement.

Dan Allender<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate cause of all holy emotions: affections that correspond to ultimate truth ... virtuous emotions are signs of the life of the Spirit.

Eric L. Johnson<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

In our previous chapter we explored the significance of emotions in biblical writings with a particular eye on the affections of Jesus and his affection teachings. We

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress Publishing Group, 2002), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Allender and Temper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1994), 24, 25., quoted in Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 408.

discovered a God who feels, who created human beings to feel, and who seeks a restoration of our feelings as an important part of spiritual transformation under the discipleship regime of Jesus Christ.

Now we turn from the canonical record of antiquity to the non-canonical, but essential, works of contemporary Christianity. In this chapter we will analyze the writings of four academics (an ethics professor, religious studies professor, philosophy professor, and New Testament professor), five well-known pastors, four psychologists, a leadership coach, two pollsters, a popular personal finance guru, and a Franciscan priest. Each has written (some extensively) from the perspective of their discipline on the topic of emotions in Christian discipleship. The purpose of our present chapter then, (in service of our thesis: that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*) is the exposure of *recognizers* and *recreators* from the current Christian world.

Before we move forward we must set a few things in order.

1. This chapter constitutes a *survey* of selected theorists and practitioners and in no way represents, scientifically, the opinion of any sector of the church. It is not our argument that the role of emotions is widely or narrowly recognized; neither are we suggesting, statistically or anecdotally, that feelings are growing or receding in the discipleship activities of Christians. Rather, this chapter will simply demonstrate the important role various Christian authors have given emotion in a *variety* of Christian arenas: financial stewardship, evangelism, spiritual leadership, interpersonal relationships, and more. Our purpose is the identification

of collective concerns—shared by our “group” of contributors—as well as the specific considerations of each, according to their unique perspective.

2. What purpose does consultation of contemporary authors serve in the construction of our case: that emotion should have a place in Christian discipleship? The *biblical* materials provided us with ample evidence that God (and uniquely Jesus Christ) considers emotion to be a core component of *human beings*. He made us to feel, and the proper development of this aspect of our humanity is part of the spiritual development (or discipleship) we need to experience in our post-fall world. God’s intention is conveyed in the *unique* and *authoritative* biblical narrative. *Contemporary* materials make a different, but not unrelated or unconnected, case. Jesus tells his disciples (as he is leaving the earth) that he is “with you always”<sup>4</sup> and that he is sending them “the Spirit of truth” who will “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”<sup>5</sup> It is our contention that the Spirit “teaches” and “reminds” about the original biblical record, and particularly *Jesus*, through the inspired *pen* of current Christian pastors, teachers, and therapists. Our recognition of these present contributors capitalizes on Jesus’ promise, and gifts us with fresh insight into emotion, humanity, and the challenges and opportunities of Christian discipleship at the beginning of the new millennium.

The progression of our chapter is as follows: we will first explore current problems with emotion and Christian life; next we will survey various arguments for the place of emotion in Christian life; then we will turn to specific *arenas* of interest where

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>5</sup> John 14:17, 26



the inclusion of emotion might have impact; and finally, we will look at some recommended methods for the development of healthy emotions.

### Current Problems

Jim Palmer, a pastor, community leader, and human rights advocate, has written two popular books dealing with the difficulties of living as a disciple of Jesus in our times: *Divine Nobodies*<sup>6</sup> and *Wide Open Spaces*.<sup>7</sup> The subtitles, *Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity* and *Shredding Religion to Find God*, point the finger at church-as-we-know-it as the primary culprit for the difficulty. Palmer writes that his Christian experience (in church and school) had “removed mystery from life” and he also observed this tragedy in the lives of others, who “have lost ... wind, fire, salt, and yeast.”<sup>8</sup>

His prosecution of the church includes an important argument.

[M]y religious conditioning taught me to mistrust my emotions. Following your feelings was akin to trusting a three-year-old with a loaded gun.<sup>9</sup>

And then he puts his often humorous, sarcastic, and accusatory pen at the mistaken theology behind this destructive teaching.

Yes, it’s true, the first thing the Bible says about humankind is how we are all made in God’s image, but it’s foolish to think this trickled on past our brains all the way down into the dark well of our “sinful” emotions. God’s image thing simply didn’t get that far. The important part is your head, where right beliefs, rational thinking, and objective, logical processes flow.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Palmer, *Divine Nobodies: Shedding Religion to Find God (and the Unlikely People Who Help You)* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Jim Palmer, *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, *Divine Nobodies: Shedding Religion to Find God (and the Unlikely People Who Help You)*, 56, 180.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The distinguished professor of ethics at Baylor University, Robert Roberts, agrees, lamenting that “in recent theology the emotions still have not been given a thorough treatment.” This has contributed to a devaluation of feelings: “When we describe someone as an ‘emotional type,’ we do not intend to give a compliment.”<sup>11</sup> Eric Johnson, a psychologist and professor of pastoral theology, reinforces this observation, arguing that “some Christians are highly suspicious of emotions,” which has led to a hesitancy to embrace the field of psychology in general and the affective world of human beings in specific.<sup>12</sup>

The statistical studies of George Barna have led the pollster to believe that “We Have Defined ‘Discipleship’ as Head Knowledge Rather than Complete Transformation” and this has resulted in a lack of “passion.” In other words, Christianity has cultivated rational thought and objective fact in its members, but has left the emotional world at bay.<sup>13</sup> The Barna Group’s president, David Kinnamen, reports there are “[f]ifty million adult residents in [the United States] ... who admit they have significant emotional baggage” as a result of negative relational encounters with Christians. A leading cause of non-churched people’s distaste for the church is neglect of the emotive state of those who claim to follow Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

A popular writer and speaker, the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, joins the chorus of those concerned about the left-brain dominance of contemporary Christian discipleship. Like Kinnamen, he sees that

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<sup>11</sup> Roberts, vii, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, 251, 598.

<sup>13</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 89, 90, 92, 98, 108.

<sup>14</sup> David Kinnamen, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 32.

Christians are inclined to speak with great gusto about how grace alone is efficacious, but we have no answers when people ask how they can experience this redeeming, life-changing grace.<sup>15</sup>

Rohr contends the absence of genuine experience would be addressed if we shifted from an almost total emphasis on logic, order, head knowledge, and factual information in favor of a more holistic view of life and discipleship—“[m]ore art than science, more poetry than prose, more spirit than rational ...”<sup>16</sup>

Christian men have been particularly damaged by the cognitively leftward tilt of discipleship, according to the bestselling author and therapist John Eldredge. His blunt assessment, that “Christianity ... has done terrible things to men” draws its foundation in the fact that “[w]e have not invited a man to know and live from his deep heart.” Eldredge maintains the absence of passion in men has prevented them from feeling relationally connected to God.<sup>17</sup> Recognition of this spiritual crisis motivated Cloud and Townsend’s *How People Grow*. This work on the subject of spiritual transformation was written because

we wanted to bring back the idea of working on relational and emotional issues back into the mainstream of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth should affect relationship problems, emotional problems ...<sup>18</sup>

The authors connect the inattention to the affective state of Christian disciples to a number of both intrapersonal and interpersonal dysfunctions, including the breakdown of core relationships and clinical depression.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), xiii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>17</sup> John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 7, 8, 130.

<sup>18</sup> Henry and John Townsend Cloud, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 237, 357.

Two writers have addressed the deficit of emotion in discipleship head-on. Peter Scazzero, a pastor, in his books *The Emotionally Healthy Church*<sup>20</sup> and *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*<sup>21</sup>, and Matthew Elliott, an academic, previously cited in this dissertation, in two books, *Faithful Feelings* and *Feel*. Scazzero asks the hard question of why Christians often cease participation in a local church community. His answer:

They were sincere followers of Jesus Christ, but they struggled as much as anyone else with their marriages, divorces, friendships, parenting, singleness, sexuality, addictions, insecurities, drive for approval, and feelings of failure and depression at work, church, and home.<sup>22</sup>

The author takes aim at an insufficient spiritual development program.

[T]he spirituality of most current discipleship models often only adds an additional protective layer against people growing up emotionally. Because people are having real, and helpful, spiritual experiences in certain areas of their lives—such as worship, prayer, Bible studies, and fellowship—they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, even if their relational life and interior life is not in order.<sup>23</sup>

Elliott makes perhaps the most impassioned case (of those we shall survey) against a rationally-exclusive Christian discipleship. He believes contemporary Christianity has largely bought into ideas of thinkers who are decidedly non-biblical: Plato, Descartes, Hume, Darwin, James, Freud and others. This has led the church to embrace “the belief that emotions are unreliable, dangerous” and we should pursue logical religious obligation over spiritual relational “*passion*.”<sup>24</sup> The dark consequence of relegating emotion to the list of forbidden topics is the destructive avenues many Christians choose to walk in order to find affective experiences. Elliott argues an array of

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>24</sup> Elliott, *Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart*, 2, 3, 14-15, 59.

unhealthy actions—sexual, physical, financial—are often taken because no positive alternative is given. Simply put, “They can be evidence of a person who has lived in an emotional box . . .” *Rational* outlets are not an adequate answer for *emotive* desires.<sup>25</sup>

The problems of diseased emotional behavior are noticed by one of Christianity’s leading thinkers and writers on matters of spiritual transformation and maturity. Dallas Willard, the author of several books on Christian discipleship, including *The Great Omission*,<sup>26</sup> *The Divine Conspiracy*,<sup>27</sup> *Renovation of the Heart*,<sup>28</sup> and *The Spirit of the Disciplines*,<sup>29</sup> is leery of those who are “mastered by their feelings” and “believe that their feelings must be satisfied.”<sup>30</sup> He holds great concern that the Christian world is “thickly populated with people who are neurotic or paralyzed by their devotion and willing bondage to how they feel.”<sup>31</sup>

So, then, is Willard anti-emotion? Does he believe the affective life is contrary to proper Christian discipleship? Is the problem of personal and relational immaturity the *over-emphasis* of emotions?

### **Toward A Theology and Thought of the Emotions**

Willard’s answer is nuanced. On the one hand, he is certainly not in favor of lowering the drawbridge to allow the armies of emotion to storm the castle of Christian discipleship.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 38-74.

<sup>26</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*.

<sup>27</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life with God* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*.

<sup>29</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 118-119.

<sup>31</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 99-100.

Today ... we commonly depend upon the emotional pull of stories and images to move people. We fail to understand that, in the very nature of the human mind, emotion does not reliably generate belief or faith, if it generates it at all.<sup>32</sup>

True disciples, he asserts, “get off the conveyer belt of emotion and desire” if they sense movement toward “the buzz saw of sin.”<sup>33</sup> Willard clearly views human feelings as a ripe environment for the growth of spiritual pathogens. But that is not all. He writes:

Even the feelings that harm us are, for the most part, not bad in themselves, but are somehow not properly limited or subordinated. They are out of order.<sup>34</sup>

Far from the abolition of emotion, Willard believes “[f]eelings have a crucial role in life” that include spiritual growth and maturation. The concern is not with the presence of passion and affective instincts but with a sinful approach to them. Both rational mind and emotional mind can be under the influence of good or evil.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, Willard concludes:

Psychological and theological understanding of the spiritual life must go hand in hand. Neither of them is complete without the other. A psychology that is Christian, in the sense of a comprehensive understanding of the facts of the spiritual life and growth, should be a top priority for disciples of Jesus ...<sup>36</sup>

Many of the subjects of our present survey, expectedly, share this *comprehensive* view, urging the inclusion of both rational and emotional components of a theology of Christian discipleship. Allender believes we should embrace the “sum of our being,” which includes both “our will” and “our emotions.”<sup>37</sup> Palmer is “discovering that a significant element of living the Christian life is following my feelings” and now

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<sup>32</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, 194.

<sup>33</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 119.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Dan B. Allender, *To Be Told: Know Your Story, Shape Your Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2005), 60.

recognizes that God sometimes inspires his “heart” to then influence his “head.”<sup>38</sup>

Eldredge dreams of “the recovery and release of a man’s heart, his passions,” which are part of the Creator’s original human design.<sup>39</sup> He believes “[e]motions are the *voice* of the heart” and that “Christianity begins with an invitation to desire.”<sup>40</sup>

Roberts’ work marries emotions with Christian “ethics.” He argues that:

Christian virtues are, in large part, a matter of being disposed to a properly Christian joy, contrition, gratitude, hope, compassion, and peace. The spiritual Christian is a mature Christian, and the mature Christian is one who feels these emotions in the Christian way. She is “emotionally mature,” because the Christian teachings have shaped her heart, and thus disposed her to behavior characteristic of the kingdom of God.<sup>41</sup>

Christian discipleship, in his view, brings the emotions under the influence of Godliness and, in an important turnabout, suggests that Spirit-bathed affections act in *motivating* Godliness. “The involvement of emotions in ... [the] character of our lives is pervasive and deep.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Johnson claims, the purpose of the Bible as a “soul-care book” is the restoration of human beings to a pre-fall state. And this includes the baptism of our affections.<sup>43</sup>

The act of spiritual attentiveness to our emotional makeup is critical. Johnson argues:

emotions are signs of subjective reality, particularly one’s perceptions of values, significance and love, an indicator of aspects of one’s story and one’s current heart-orientation. Self-examination must be especially attuned to emotion signs of ethical and spiritual brokenness and alienation, like shame and guilt.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Palmer, *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*, 21, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Eldredge, 18.

<sup>40</sup> John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003), 42, 230.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts, 7, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, 27-30.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

It is through “joint emotional experience with God” (as opposed to intellectual or rationale exposure) that we find both diagnosis and remedy for the sickly emotions in us. Once again, emotions are understood to be gifts from God, marred by sin, and renovated through connection to Spirit-centered values, which are relational and affective in nature.<sup>45</sup> Oord and Lodahl submit: “[L]ove is the core of holiness.”<sup>46</sup>

McKnight sees this reality in Jesus, the personification of holiness, who is “profoundly emotional.”<sup>47</sup> Elliott finds the Scriptures to be “teeming with emotions.” Therefore, a biblical “spirituality is all about how we are *feeling*—whether we are *feeling* life or numb to it.” After all, “emotions [are] central to [God’s] character.”<sup>48</sup> Because this is true, Elliott preaches:

- Stop struggling to keep your emotions in check.
- Emotion is not an illogical reflex.
- Emotional moments and emotional understandings often lead to the greatest clarity in our thinking and understanding.
- Emotion was made to supply the energy and vitality to our lives.
- God wants our emotions to drive us toward him ...
- Passion drives fanatical discipleship.<sup>49</sup>

If the above claims are an accurate assessment of the role of emotion in the life of human beings in general and Christian disciples in particular, we can agree with Scazzero

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 503.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Jay and Michael Lodahl Oord, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005), 70.

<sup>47</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2004), 114.

<sup>48</sup> Elliott, *Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart*, 20, 24, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 47, 52, 54, 56, 73, 91.



that “Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly” and “emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable.”<sup>50</sup>

This brings to conclusion our general contemporary survey of the problems of emotion in relation to Christian discipleship and a few suggestions for a proper inclusion. Those we have chosen to consult agree that there are at least two main problems: neglect and misuse. Many contemporary Christians have not thought of emotion as important to spiritual development (and, in fact, have viewed the affections as contrary to it). And, perhaps as a consequence of this abandonment or repulsion, feelings have been used by disciples of Jesus as a guide to action without the influence or consultation of Christ-centered values. As a result, the emotions become the enemy of discipleship. *So perhaps we have a vicious cycle: the emotions are viewed as anti-spiritual, they are left unattended by spirituality, emotions live on anyhow in unspiritual ways, critics see these emotions as anti-spiritual (which they are, at least in the object of their affection) and therefore denounce the emotions, which drives them further away from spiritual influence, and so on and so forth.*

We, therefore, can agree with Willard, who is hardly one blindly pushing a touchy-feely discipleship without high regard for the intellect, cognition, logic, and the left-brain:

Healthy feelings, properly ordered among themselves, are essential to a good life. So if we are to be formed in Christlikeness, we must take good care of our feelings and not just let them “happen.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*, 7, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 121.

And now we turn to four specific areas of Christian discipleship—evangelism, financial stewardship, spiritual leadership, and interpersonal relationships—to explore how emotion can influence them for good or ill.

### **Evangelism and Emotion**

McKnight has written an essential book on the role of relationship, experience, emotion, and their influence on evangelism, with his *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels*.<sup>52</sup> He urges Christians to consider the importance of a potential convert's life story—the history of human interactions and connections, life accomplishments and disappointments—as important elements in overall receptivity and for clues in how best to facilitate the spiritual process.<sup>53</sup> A person's "psychological condition has much to do with how one is converted" and a major "obstacle [can be lack of] psychological health." Most certainly, an aspect of repentance (conversion) is "Psycho-emotional." An important question to ask: "Is the person emotionally ... available?"<sup>54</sup>

Hidden in this query are many nuances of the emotional-relational being:

- The person's sense of "identity"
- Condition of important relationships
- The presence of "crisis" or "life tension"
- Basic "motivation" or "desire"
- The "emotional and psychological consequences of conversion"
- "Social consequences of conversion"<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 14, 18-19, 28, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 4, 59, 67-68, 77, 83.

McKnight argues the Christian who is engaging the non-Christian must pay attention to the relational or emotional “chemistry” between them and whatever “appeal” is being given (in conversation, e.g.) must pay attention both to the “cognitive” and the “affective.” It is possible to *damage* the potential conversion with emotional immaturity or ignorance.<sup>56</sup>

A well-recognized and well-respected advocate for the priority of evangelism in the life of the local church agrees. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, has written two books on the subject of evangelism. His first, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, includes a forceful argument for the careful use of emotions in this arena.

Another powerful magnet that draws people to God is an *authentic emotional life*. Tragically, many Christians have gotten confused about how to express their feelings. Some well-meaning but misguided pastors and leaders have taught that dedicated Christians should never get angry, and that expressing sadness or hurt or grief are signs of low faith or shallow character.... But in their valiant attempts, two negative consequences have emerged. The first is what I call “emotional vertigo.” That’s when a person outlaws certain feelings for so long that he eventually enters a state of total emotional confusion. In fact, he loses the ability to experience feelings altogether.... [I]n his desperate attempt to “Christianize” his feelings, he’s manipulated them for so long that he’s left in a helpless state of emotional apathy and disorientation.... The second consequence is that seekers are quickly repelled by emotional inauthenticity.... [Y]our feelings are important.... And if you’ll address them in a healthy and open fashion, your emotional authenticity will point those around you to the God at work within you.<sup>57</sup>

Hybels’ later book, *A Walk Across The Room*, also fingers emotional maturity as a key factor in evangelistic motivation and effectiveness. He writes of those prone to build

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 84-85, 88-89.

<sup>57</sup> Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 59-61.

relationships with non-churched people, “They have cultivated a heart posture ...”<sup>58</sup> John Ortberg, another well-respected local church pastor, asks, “[H]ow much damage have joyless Christians done to the cause of Christ?” These disciples thwart evangelistic efforts through their depression-induced inactivity or through their emotionally-destructive encounters with potential converts.<sup>59</sup> And, once again, Willard:

How many people are radically and permanently repelled from The Way by Christians who are unfeeling, stiff, unapproachable, boringly lifeless, obsessive, and dissatisfied?<sup>60</sup>

The experiential opinion of McKnight, Hybels, Ortberg, and Willard is reinforced by Kinnamen’s data. His research indicates that how religion “feels” ranks highest in non-churched people’s assessment of whether or not they want to join a church (69 percent). While we may argue that how spirituality “feels” is not a fully-acceptable measure, we can recognize that those *out* of the church are paying close attention to emotional experiences in relation to spiritual community. Feelings matter in evangelism.<sup>61</sup>

### **Financial Stewardship and Emotions**

Another area of consideration is the role of emotion in the use of money by the disciple of Jesus. What are the primary challenges of financial stewardship? What keeps a person from the faithful acquisition, giving, saving, and disciplined spending of financial resources? When families find themselves in significant debt, what are common reasons?

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<sup>58</sup> Bill Hybels, *Just Walk across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 27.

<sup>59</sup> John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 63-64.

<sup>60</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Kinnamen, 72.

How do churches produce consistent givers of tithe and generous investors in the kingdom of God?

An extensive analysis of the financial habits of Christians and non-Christians is not the work of this particular project. Nor are we attempting a substantial investigation of the various stewardship trends and realities in the Christian world. We are certain *most* pastors and church leaders would need no statistical data or wide-ranging survey to conclude the great difficulty financial mismanagement causes church members and the churches where they belong.

Consultation of the popular work of one well-known Christian teacher on the subject of money gives our current argument an important contribution. Dave Ramsey's bestseller, *The Total Money Makeover*, makes several important claims.

First, he is convinced "personal finance is 80 percent behavior and just 20 percent head knowledge." In other words, teaching people the math, giving them the formulas, and instructing them on *how-to* balance the check book or *how-to* maximize compound interest is only one-fifth of the equation.<sup>62</sup>

Ramsey talks about the strong emotional component surrounding financial life. The reason money can cause such strife is precisely because it impacts our feelings. He writes:

What to do isn't the problem; doing it is. If I can control the guy in the mirror, I can be skinny and rich....The challenge is you. You are the problem with your money.<sup>63</sup>

A central affective deficiency is the inability "to delay pleasure for a greater result." When emotional immaturity is present, the need to have something *now*, no

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<sup>62</sup> Dave Ramsey, *The Total Money Makeover: A Proven Plan for Financial Fitness* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007), ix.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 4.

matter the cost, is very real. It is also the case that one member of the household may be strong (financially, emotionally) and another very weak. To the strong, he writes:

For your own good, for the good of your family and your future, grow a backbone. When something is wrong, stand up and say it is wrong, and don't back down.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, in a book that calls for a transformation in the way the reader manages his or her money, Ramsey points out that doing things differently is not always easy. "Change is painful. Few people have the courage to seek out change." Once again, another element of emotional maturity comes to the surface.<sup>65</sup>

Cloud and Townsend affirm the significant emotional dynamic in personal finance, including and especially the toll it can take on a marriage.<sup>66</sup> They share Ramsey's burden, who believes he "was given a calling: to show people the truth about debt and money and to give them hope ..."<sup>67</sup>

### **Spiritual Leadership and Emotion**

A third area of Christian discipleship we shall now touch upon (in our endeavor to show the general applicability of emotion in contemporary Christian context) is spiritual leadership. Recognition of affections in connection with pastoral ministry is not unique to our generation.<sup>68</sup> But in concert with our chapter's objective (the contemporary scene) we will explore a single author, pastor, and leadership coach, Reggie McNeal. Once again, a reminder, it is not our attempt to deal extensively or empirically with this issue, but merely to demonstrate the wide reach of emotions in spiritual life.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6, 11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>66</sup> Cloud, 153.

<sup>67</sup> Ramsey, ix.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, 62.

*A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* is McNeal's argument that Christian leadership is more than learning certain left-brain management skills. He believes "leadership is a work of heart" and that pastors must "intentionally look after their own hearts in the midst of dealing with the hearts of others." There is a tremendous "emotional ... wear and tear" on those men and women who vision, organize, and shepherd congregations. The temptation to be popular with those who sit in the pew can "eventually leave [pastors] emotionally burned-out and empty."<sup>69</sup>

His survey of four biblical leaders (Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus) brings many lessons. McNeal is convinced the foremost work of God is "the human heart," especially those of leaders. This is important because "all leaders ultimately fear ... rejection," need to care for those who are hurting, are in danger of losing "passion," run the risk of "emotional illness," and stare down "the greatest emotional threat to the leader ... [b]etrayal."<sup>70</sup>

As a result, it is critical for spiritual leaders to be candid with God—especially with regard to their feelings. Openness to Jesus is therapeutic. God solicits our unbridled communication. This is true even if we have "feelings that are at times immature, contradictory, and even embarrassing." Affective honesty is required.<sup>71</sup>

Spiritual leaders must pay attention to some specific dangers. These include "a sick or conflicted marriage [that] drains energy from the leader's emotional reserve" or a "leader's family of origin [who] considered anger to be an inappropriate emotion."

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<sup>69</sup> Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (New York, New York: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xi, xii, 16, 59.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., xiii, 7, 8, 9, 22, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 31-34.

Inattention to these and other problems can lead to an “emotional virus” that may kill the pastor and his congregation.”<sup>72</sup> Therefore:

If the leader does not exercise emotional rehabilitation, the scars will show. The leader needs to avoid institutionalizing negative emotional and psychological reactions to the past. Otherwise, the leader becomes vulnerable to emotional triggers that spark inappropriate behaviors and attitudes.<sup>73</sup>

Churches are filled with emotional creatures. The pastor is one such creature. The proper maintenance and care of his or her emotions, however, takes on even greater significance than the “average” church member. The affective health of the spiritual leader will naturally infect the congregation. This is the argument McNeal makes—one that calls for the discipleship of a Christian overseer to go beyond basic leadership training.

### **Relationships (with God and Others) and Emotion**

#### ***God***

Our final “sample” area (there are many other discipleship concerns we could address) is that of relationships: both with God and one another. If the primary commandment of Jesus is to love God and one another, emotional well-being must somehow have a seat at the table.<sup>74</sup>

First, let’s explore the issue of God, ourselves, and our affectionate interactions. Palmer believes one must “[u]ncover your true reasons for wanting God”<sup>75</sup> and “should

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 121, 165.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>74</sup> Mark 12:30-31

<sup>75</sup> Palmer, *Divine Nobodies: Shedding Religion to Find God (and the Unlikely People Who Help You)*, xxv.



be able to know him directly, not just *about* him through some set of theological propositions.” Our feelings are a primary way of “experiencing God.” The author nudges:

Maybe you’ve been experiencing God your entire life but missed it because you weren’t aware that God expresses himself inside of you through feelings. Apparently humankind is from Mars, and God is from Venus. We want to figure God out in our head, while God wants us to feel him in our heart.<sup>76</sup>

This is why, contends Roberts, worship should be emotional. The act of confession itself produces “a gospel emotion,” which is not “guilt” but “contrition ... characterized by confident hope in God’s mercy ... a gracious affection ...”<sup>77</sup> Scazzero agrees:

Emotional health powerfully anchors me in the love of God by affirming that I am worthy of feeling, worthy of being alive, and lovable ...<sup>78</sup>

Here, according to McKnight, we find “in [God] ... a safe haven, a place of love, fellowship and intimacy.” The result of our interactions with Jesus should be increased emotional health, affectionate well-being, and the spiritual restoration of our feelings.<sup>79</sup> This is true, says Willard, because “he is full of joy” and has an “affectionate regard ... for all his creatures.” Therefore, upon encounter with Jesus “we must turn away or shamelessly adore him.”<sup>80</sup>

## ***Others***

The emotionally-rich territory that is communion with God naturally influences our emotional life with others. “If God created me as a being with emotions” it should

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<sup>76</sup> Palmer, *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*, 5, 17, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*, 21, 104-105.

<sup>78</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*, 54.

<sup>79</sup> McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels*, 189.

<sup>80</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life with God*, 19, 62, 64.

have consequential “emotive capacity” in the life he has given me.<sup>81</sup> The scriptures deal with “relational and emotional areas” extensively in order to repair and grow human relationships.<sup>82</sup> One area of particular importance Roberts indicates:

It would be better to try to conceive of humility as a matter of viewing everybody as ultimately or basically equal....if such a belief can be integrated into a person’s emotional life, it will allow humility [to cast out] comparison with others.<sup>83</sup>

He goes on to recognize a number of emotionally-relevant biblical topics, which impact human relationships, including “anger,” “joy,” “gratitude,” “hope,” “peace,” and “compassion”.<sup>84</sup> Scazzero agrees, understanding that “[e]motional health ... concerns itself primarily with loving others ...[.]”<sup>85</sup> Crabb adds that a congregation should be a “passionate people [with] mutual affection that the members of the Trinity have for each other.” Simply put, the interpersonal emotional life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit provides an important basis for the communal life of Christ’s church. Holy affections are a primary goal for Christian disciples.<sup>86</sup>

A summary of our glimpse at four areas of Christian discipleship—evangelism, financial stewardship, spiritual leadership, and relationships—may fairly conclude, at minimum, a strong hint that emotion plays an invaluable role in spiritual growth. The consequences of the general absence or presence of biblical emotions (which opened our chapter) have now been fleshed out (if lightly) in four critical areas of church life. Even without statistical measurements, we are confident in saying *most* pastors and church leaders would recognize the challenges of discipleship life in the areas we have chosen to

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<sup>81</sup> Palmer, *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> Cloud, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*, 83.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 105, 114, 130, 148, 165, 179.

<sup>85</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*, 47.

<sup>86</sup> Lawrence J. Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999), 512.

survey. Equally so, we are confident the word of those we have consulted adds credibility to the import of emotion. To these we turn a final time in the interest of how emotion can be formed for the cause of spiritual growth and maturity.

### **Spiritual Formation and Emotion**

The absence of “emotional, physical, and spiritual margin” is a primary opponent in the battle for greater spiritual health. McNeal calls for the erection of “psychological ... [b]oundaries” in an effort to create a kind of necessary space. This, fundamentally, means a “recovery of Sabbath.”<sup>87</sup> Sabbath is also prescribed by Scazzero<sup>88</sup> and Ortberg<sup>89</sup> as an important commitment to organize time in favor of spiritual and emotional development.

And what shall fill this time? McNeal says “friendships that can be nurturing.” Emotionally-drained life often comes by only interacting primarily with people who emotionally drain us. When we are surrounded by people who do not appreciate our emotional well-being they may challenge us in ways that are discipleship destructive.<sup>90</sup> We can also take Sabbath time to “figure out what hot buttons” we have in life.<sup>91</sup> We are free to ask important questions:

What moves me most deeply? What do I most enjoy doing? Where do I find the greatest pleasure and joy? What is it about this activity, idea, or person that brings me such a sense of life?<sup>92</sup>

Rohr connects sabbatical disciplines with important reflection as well:

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<sup>87</sup> McNeal, 85, 119, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*, 56.

<sup>89</sup> Ortberg, 70.

<sup>90</sup> McNeal, 127.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>92</sup> Allender, *To Be Told: Know Your Story, Shape Your Life*, 63, 68.

What is my agenda? What is my predisposition? What are my prejudices? What are my angers?... This discernment process is often called the third eye or the third ear. It refers to the ability to stand away from ourselves and listen ... Most people *become* their thoughts. They do not *have* thoughts and feelings; their thoughts and feelings have them.<sup>93</sup>

Eldredge would have men invest Sabbath with “[a]dventure, with all its requisite danger and wildness [something that] is deeply spiritual longing written into the soul ...”<sup>94</sup> Cloud and Townsend see it as an opportunity of “feeling forgiveness” and a chance to “[m]editat[e] on and memoriz[e] Scripture verses about forgiveness and grace ...”<sup>95</sup> Scazzero agrees, arguing for “practices of contemplative spirituality—silence, solitude,...meditation on Scripture ...”<sup>96</sup> Elliott believes “[f]ocus on how emotionally full the people and stories of the bible really are” can help.<sup>97</sup> Johnson adds “internalization of godly emotion” and “reflecting deeply on topics like God’s beauty” and simply “getting outdoors.” He says:

Christians need to attend particularly to *God’s loves* so that their affective life more and more reflects God’s. Consequently, affective meditation on the Scriptures/gospel (and books based on them) can increase the degree of emotional investment one has in God and his ways and can change the structure of the brain and the experience of the soul accordingly.<sup>98</sup>

Beyond “Sabbath” we can choose Christian psychotherapy, which may help us see that “our emotions are more often within our control than we tend to image.”<sup>99</sup> Johnson agrees that “experiential therapy” can help us replace harmful emotions associated with certain past events “so that healthier emotion patterns” can come to life—

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<sup>93</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 104.

<sup>94</sup> Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Cloud, 166.

<sup>96</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ*, 56.

<sup>97</sup> Elliott, *Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart*, 107.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, 503-505, 599.

<sup>99</sup> Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*, 28.

seeing our lives anew, through God's eyes.<sup>100</sup> Ortberg argues for a "[d]iscipline of celebration," whereby we actually do things that bring us joy, and that, perhaps, maybe we each could use a "Joy Mentor."<sup>101</sup>

Willard thinks we can also "feel strong revulsion toward the wrong feeling." Emotions, then, fight off other emotions. This "is a matter of opening ourselves to and carefully cultivating love, joy, and peace," which are the *good armies of emotion* that can destroy the bad.<sup>102</sup> This, he writes, is the

central teaching of Jesus about the good heart ... [We must] deal with all those day-to-day attitudes that keep the pot of human evil boiling: contempt and hostility toward others, sexual lust and disgust in the heart, the will to manipulate others verbally, revenge and payback, and so forth. These, Jesus tells us, can be replaced with genuine compassion, purity, and goodwill as we grow new "insides."<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusion

The goal of this current chapter has been the addition of credible, contemporary voices to the foundation of Scripture established in the previous chapter with regard to emotion and Christian discipleship.

We have shown, through a reputable chorus of Christian writers, pastors, academics, and therapists, that the role of emotion in the discipleship teachings of Jesus is substantially recognized today. The absence of emotional content is a problem. The presence of emotional content is a warranted inclusion. It touches a wide array of discipleship concerns. And there are practical remedies (which we will explore in much

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<sup>100</sup> Johnson, 599.

<sup>101</sup> Ortberg, 67-69.

<sup>102</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 119, 137.

<sup>103</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, 21.

greater detail in chapters three and four) for the enhancement of emotional maturity in the lives of Christians.

The absence of contemporary voices on this issue would not negate the Word of God. The presence of such voices does not, in itself, bring us to conclusion on the matter. What it does, however, is add momentum to our central argument, that we are created in God's image as wonderfully emotion-filled beings, and that attention to this reality can help recreate us in the likeness of our Creator. Indeed, *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter, building on the foundation of biblical and contemporary materials, which demonstrated the importance of emotion in Christian discipleship, is to begin working toward effective *solutions*. Our argument, that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*, calls not only for *recognition* but also *recreation*. While this and the following chapter will also beg for *awareness* of emotions, each will speak to a way of *implementing* emotional thought in our discipleship work.

And so we will do three things in this chapter.

First, we will generally survey emotional intelligence theory and its proponents. Before inserting emotional intelligence into the world of Christianity, we must know a little bit about its content and qualities.

Second, we will show remarkable connections between emotional intelligence and Christian discipleship as envisioned in the New Testament. This will help us see that emotional intelligence is an acceptable (and profitable) way of amplifying the goals of Jesus for the life of Christians.

Third, we will introduce some ways that emotional intelligence can be of specific benefit to Christian discipleship.

## Emotional Intelligence

In recent years we have witnessed an “unparalleled burst of scientific studies of emotion.”<sup>1</sup> Psychologist Daniel Goleman believes this is a course correction away from an unhealthy tact toward cognitive analysis alone. He argues, “We have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational ... in human life.”<sup>2</sup> Goleman, the most famous figure among several prominent social scientists, psychotherapists, and neuroscientists, has set out with his lesser-known colleagues in an attempt to redirect “intelligence” theory toward emotion. He refers to the current interest in emotional studies as “an emerging science.”<sup>3</sup>

I will argue in this chapter—drawing from an array of theorists and practitioners—that the essence of emotional intelligence is an important and useful way of understanding human existence. Therefore, I will argue it is a critical lens for an effective view of Christian discipleship—for our *existence* is the focal point of spiritual development goals. I will demonstrate that Jesus had emotional intelligence in mind (and heart) throughout his teachings. And, borrowing from Goleman, I will argue that “we have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational” *in discipleship*.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), xi. A simple *Google* search will reveal countless books, assessment tools, and training seminars for anyone interested and becoming a student or teacher of Emotional Intelligence. This has become big business.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 4.



## A Brief Survey of Emotional Intelligence

The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) was a precursor to scholarship and clinical exercise of emotional intelligence in the Twentieth Century.<sup>4</sup> E. L. Thorndike, in the 1920s, gave definition to the concept, claiming "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations" is a kind of *social intelligence* worth consideration.<sup>5</sup> David Wechsler wrote of "non-intellective aspects of general intelligence" in the 1940s,<sup>6</sup> as did his contemporary, R. W. Leeper, who connected "emotional thought with "logical thought" in 1948.<sup>7</sup> B. Luener, a German, first used the term "emotion intelligence" in a 1966 article.<sup>8</sup>

The 1980s brought Howard Gardner, who wrote of "multiple intelligences" and Reuven Bar-On, a clinical psychologist, who revolutionized emotional intelligence exploration with his development of "emotional quotient."<sup>9</sup> Bar-On's clinical research showed both the validity and practical applicability of emotional intelligence. His early research led to the development of the Bar-On EQ-I, a project including more than 10,000 people. Bar-On's highly-regarded assessment tools now serve emotional intelligence clinicians around the world.<sup>10</sup>

The 1990s popularized emotional intelligence through the work of Jack Mayer, Peter Salovey, and Caruso but especially through the writings of Daniel Goleman. His

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen J. Stein and Howard E. Book, *The Eq Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success* (Mississauga, Ontario: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd, 2006; reprint, 2006), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Cherniss and Goleman, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Henry L. Thompson, *High Performing Systems, Inc.: Eq-I Certification Workshop* (Watkinsville, Georgia: High Performing Systems, Inc., 2005), 2-1.

<sup>7</sup> Stein and Book, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Sparrow and Amanda Knight, *Applied Ei: The Importance of Attitudes in Developing Emotional Intelligence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Stein and Book, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, 4-1.

1995 bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, generated enormous awareness and popular interest in emotional intelligence. Today, there are more than 60 emotional intelligence inventories,<sup>11</sup> dozens of books, and thousands of published scholarly articles.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Well-Being***<sup>13</sup>

Clinical psychologist Reuven Bar-On defines emotional and social intelligence as “an array of emotional, personal, and social abilities and skills that influence one’s overall ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.”<sup>14</sup> His primary evaluation tool, *BarOn EQ-i*, diagnoses “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats”<sup>15</sup> in 15 components of emotional health, or “well-being.”<sup>16</sup> These components include Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, Self-Actualization, Empathy, Social Responsibility, Interpersonal Relationship, Stress Tolerance, Impulse Control, Reality Testing, Flexibility, Problem Solving, Optimism, and Happiness. Bar-On’s evaluative term is “emotional quotient” (“EQ”), which measures a person’s relative health in each area. Steven Stein and Howard Book, co-authors of *The EQ Edge*,<sup>17</sup> skillfully explain how to use EQ-i in each of its various components.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2-1.

<sup>12</sup> An important online warehouse for emotional intelligence publication is <http://eiconsortium.org>. Accessed: November 6, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> See Reuven Bar-On, “The Bar-on Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (Esi),” *Psicothema* 18 (2006).

<sup>14</sup> Reuven Bar-On and Rich Handley, *The Last Corporate Secret* (New Braunfels, Texas: Pro-Philes Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>16</sup> Cherniss and Goleman, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Stein and Book.

*Attitudes*<sup>18</sup>

British practitioners Tim Sparrow and Amanda Knight maintain that our *attitudes* about life are the key to emotional intelligence. An “attitude is an evaluative position that we hold about a thing, a person, an idea, or perhaps an organization.”<sup>19</sup> When various stimuli (conversations, life circumstances, problems, opportunities) come our way, it is our attitude that informs our response, for good or ill. Our attitudes govern our interpretation of life. Our interpretations govern our actions. The authors argue that both thoughts *and* feelings pour into our experience, and we must choose what we will do. We need to remain aware of both intellectual *and* emotional inputs in order to act effectively.<sup>20</sup> Often, by not taking our emotions into account, we develop an unhealthy attitude, which produces a less than optimal action/reaction. Ultimately, all human beings are “in control of, and responsible for their actions.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Sparrow and Knight can say that “choicefulness” is equivalent to emotional intelligence.<sup>22</sup> Emotionally mature human beings have the capacity to be aware of their attitudes, and, thus, make choices to improve negative ones or to act freely of such.

*Cognitive Abilities*<sup>23</sup>

John Mayer and Peter Salovey have developed a cognitive approach to emotional intelligence. Their definition: “[T]he ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s

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<sup>18</sup> Sparrow and Knight.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27-29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>23</sup> Cherniss and Goleman, 17.

thinking and action.”<sup>24</sup> They view emotional intelligence as a set of skills to be discovered, learned, and mastered. Salovey has co-authored a book with David Caruso entitled *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager*.<sup>25</sup> This manager is aware of his and others’ emotions on an intellectual level. He is intelligent in “integrating” emotions and developing “strategies” for their use. He will “identify,” “use,” “understand,” and “manage” them for the corporate good.<sup>26</sup> This tactical approach differs from Bar-On’s state of “well-being” or Sparrow and Knight’s awareness of “attitude.”

### **Competence**

Daniel Goleman has written extensively, and famously, on emotional intelligence. His bestselling *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, popularized the field of study.<sup>27</sup> Other works (some co-authored) include *Primal Leadership: Realizing The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace*, and *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. Goleman uses the term “*emotional competence*,” which means emotions can be “learned” like any other “skill.”<sup>28</sup> He explains how discoveries in neuroscience show us that the actual physiology of the brain can be altered through training.<sup>29</sup> He writes, “The human brain is designed to change itself in response to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> David R. Caruso and Peter Salovey, *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager: How to Develop and Use the Four Key Emotional Skills of Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 146-150.

<sup>27</sup> Stein and Book, 1. A number of authors credit Goleman in this regard.

<sup>28</sup> Cherniss and Goleman, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, 1-49. The purview of this paper does not include the biological science of neurological anatomy. With the increase in imaging technology, our ability to understand the inner-workings of the brain has opened up significant opportunities of new understanding. See also Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 13-29.

accumulated experience.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, when Goleman speaks of emotional intelligence as “being able ... to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings; to handle relationships smoothly,”<sup>31</sup> these are skills to be developed. Just as we can increase the stamina of the heart or strength in the quadriceps, we can develop our brains, the seat of cognitive and emotional life.<sup>32</sup>

A special word is in order for Goleman’s newest (October 2006) book *Social Intelligence*. Across the board, emotional intelligence theorists deal with “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” intelligence.<sup>33</sup> *Social Intelligence* effectively and extensively deals with the latter. The interconnectedness of our brains from biological<sup>34</sup> and sociological standpoints is compelling. Even our physical health can improve or decline in response to the positive or negative emotional “contagion”<sup>35</sup> of those around us. “We must reconsider the pat assumption that we are immune to toxic social encounters.”<sup>36</sup>

Goleman insists that we must develop “forgiveness,”<sup>37</sup> “compassion,”<sup>38</sup> and “empathy”<sup>39</sup> if we are to combat our social ills and encourage social strength. And, because these are competencies to be learned and developed, we should be about “building a society’s capacity” in these areas.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, p. xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Goleman, and others, offer a variety of emotional training exercises, which we will examine later. These discoveries give profound meaning to Romans 12:2, “...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

<sup>33</sup> Sparrow and Knight, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, 321-328., for example.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-249.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

### ***Universal Morality***<sup>41</sup>

Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel examine what they call *Moral Intelligence*. They claim it differs from emotional intelligence, yet the “four principles” of their moral intelligence theory include: “integrity,” “responsibility,” “compassion,” and “forgiveness,” which closely approximate the concepts in the emotional intelligence field.<sup>42</sup> They deal with “moral viruses,” which are defined by statements such as, “I’m not worth very much” and “Most people can’t be trusted.”<sup>43</sup> They also write about dealing with “destructive emotions,” such as “greed, hate or jealousy.”<sup>44</sup> Moral intelligence is the ability to understand and practice a set of widely held moral truths that pertain to both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

### ***Beyond The Field***

A number of writers on organizational dynamics, who are not in the emotional intelligence community, nonetheless have much to say about *emotional and social intelligence*. Here is a sampling.

- Patrick Lencioni claims “absence of trust” and “unwillingness to be vulnerable” are the foundational reasons for “team dysfunction.” This leads to “fear of conflict” and “lack of commitment” and “avoidance of accountability” and “inattention to results.”<sup>45</sup> Interpersonal intelligence (emotional acumen) determines the health and success of group life.

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<sup>41</sup> Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel, *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance & Leadership Success* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Wharton School Publishing, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team : A Leadership Fable*, 1st ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2002), 188.

- Max De Pree says we must provide an atmosphere of “hospitality” in our organizations. We must help one another “feel authentic and needed and worthwhile.”<sup>46</sup> “[B]eing cared about as an individual”<sup>47</sup> is an essential desire of people in our organizations.
- In a remarkable new book, *Mavericks at Work*, the authors write of the importance of “not just encouraging people to learn new skills but encouraging a diverse group of people to sit in a room, try new things, mess up, get embarrassed, and learn how to bounce back—together.”<sup>48</sup>
- Margaret Wheatley says, “Although we live in a world completely revolutionized by information, it is important to remember that it is knowledge we are seeking, not information. Unlike information, knowledge involves us and our deeper motivations and dynamics as human beings.”<sup>49</sup>
- In the church world, Bonem and Patterson say we must be “pulse takers.” We must “[k]now what others are thinking and feeling ...”<sup>50</sup>
- Leonard Sweet writes, “A mature soul has learned to read the energy fields of others. Some people give off low vibrations; others are high-wattage. Some people suck energy out of you; others plug you into the energies of the universe.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Max De Pree, *Called to Serve : Creating and Nurturing the Effective Volunteer Board* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 69.

<sup>47</sup> Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Double Day, 1989), 67.

<sup>48</sup> William C. Taylor and Polly LaBarre, *Mavericks at Work: Why the Most Original Minds in Business Win* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 233.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 154.

<sup>50</sup> Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair : Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams*, 1st ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2005), 100.

<sup>51</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 106.

- Andy Stanley, pastor of North Point Community Church, challenges his staff and pastors everywhere to “cheat the church” in order to spend generous amounts of time with family. For Stanley, being faithful as a disciple of Jesus means relational health at home more than organizational progress at work. Stanley has crafted a vision for his local church that puts family health (interpersonal intelligence) above productivity.<sup>52</sup>
- Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship, encourages us to be responsive to *heaviness* in our relational world—and to act promptly in healing those endangered relationships. He believes the Holy Spirit uses our emotions to redirect our energies toward people, especially family.<sup>53</sup>

These examples—from the business and church world—show a collective awareness of the need for a sort of *emotional intelligence*, supporting the specific work of the emotional intelligence community. There is a substantial recognition that the health of our relationships largely determines the quality of our lives and organizations. Hence, Jim Collins supports his claim that “getting the right people on the bus” is of paramount importance with, “Whether someone is the ‘right person’ has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities than with specific knowledge, background, or skills.”<sup>54</sup> Largely, this is a kind of emotional and social intelligence.

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<sup>52</sup> Andy Stanley, “Focused Leadership,” in *Leadership Summit* (South Barrington, Illinois: 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, “Dead Leader Walking,” in *Leadership Summit* (South Barrington, Illinois: 2006).

<sup>54</sup> James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... And Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 63-64.



## Critique

While I will argue for the use of emotional intelligence as an effective way to better understand Christian discipleship, there are four important cautions.

1. Emotional intelligence organizations have produced an array of tools designed to *measure* an individual's emotional and social health. Sparrow and Knight aptly point out that "it is misleading nonsense to reduce somebody's emotional intelligence to a single figure."<sup>55</sup> Choosing the best tools is critical.<sup>56</sup> And after selecting a tool for yourself or your organization, respecting the limitations of the assessment is important. Just as IQ tests or spiritual gifts inventories can inappropriately and less-than-perfectly "define" a person, equating a person's relational and personal success with a "score" on a brief exam is problematic. These tools should be used to assist the process of growth more than grading the emotional effectiveness or value of people.
2. Peter Drucker offers stern words for consideration: "Don't start with personality. Don't start with the usual silly questions such as does he get along with people, or does she have initiative? These characteristics may be meaningful in describing a personality, but they don't tell you how people perform."<sup>57</sup> The danger of "touchy-feely" decision-making is real. A person's "emotional quotient" may not tell the whole story of well-being, emotional health, or job performance. Just being a "good guy" does not mean a person is qualified to effectively serve in a

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<sup>55</sup> Sparrow and Knight, 33.

<sup>56</sup> An hour with *Google* will unveil countless inventories. Some appear credible and others seem as if they were thrown together in an afternoon. Many want your money—in large sum.

<sup>57</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Practices and Principles*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1990), 146.

particular area of an organization or church. Spiritual gifts (calling) and talents still matter.

3. In *Moral Intelligence*, Lennick and Kiel speak of a “moral compass.” They write of “universal principles”<sup>58</sup> known commonly to all people. However, emotional intelligence literature, including *Moral Intelligence*, provides no basis for these truths. Lennick and Kiel say the core question is: “What do you value, and what are your most important beliefs?”<sup>59</sup> This leaves a definition of moral, emotional, or social intelligence up to each individual. If Christian discipleship is to embrace the work of emotional intelligence in its *own* definition, Jesus must replace the individual as the “moral compass.” A decision to take seriously an emotional component in our understanding of spiritual development requires an even more serious understanding (and re-examination) of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
4. As we have seen, some emotional intelligence theorists have closely associated their work with business and management literature. If this human science is corrupted by business leaders to control people and expand financial profits, danger lurks. If this human science is corrupted by *church* leaders to control people and expand pastoral power, danger lurks. Is our use of these psychological discoveries *helpful* or *hurtful*? We must use this *emerging science* with wisdom and humility. A greater awareness of people must be used to help them fulfill God’s purposes for their life.

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<sup>58</sup> Lennick and Kiel, xxxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 39.

Now that we have briefly summarized the world of emotional intelligence, we turn to the issue of Christian discipleship. Does this field of affective study comport to the teachings of Jesus? Is it in concert with the goals of spiritual transformation as taught in the New Testament?

### **Jesus: Emotional Intelligence Practitioner?**

I will now argue that Jesus had a kind of *emotional intelligence* in mind (and heart) as he taught his followers what it meant to be his disciples. Our evidence is twofold. First, a brief evaluation of some notable New Testament passages will indicate the importance of emotional intelligence. Second, a comparative examination of Jesus' life and teachings, against a prominent emotional intelligence tool, will demonstrate striking similarities.

### **Some Notable New Testament Passages**

#### ***Mark 12:31***

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.

A prominent teacher (rabbi) asks Jesus (also a rabbi) to clarify the most significant piece of his (Jesus') discipleship curriculum. Emphatically, Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18, establishes loving your neighbor and loving yourself (along with love for God) as the *three-fold thesis*. Social intelligence (interpersonal health) mirrors love for your neighbor. Emotional intelligence

(intrapersonal health) mirrors love of self. The field of emotional intelligence appears to address two-thirds of Jesus core discipleship philosophy.

Jesus	Applied EI, Goleman
“Love Neighbor”	Interpersonal, <i>Social Intelligence</i>
“Love Yourself”	Intrapersonal, <i>Emotional Intelligence</i>

### ***John 13:34-35***

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

How do we measure one’s development as a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is recognized by his or her capacity to love others. Interpersonal health is *the evidence* of growing maturity in the way of Jesus Christ.

### ***Galatians 5:22-23***

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Men and women influenced by the Spirit of Jesus will bear certain characteristics. These eight “fruits” resemble the intrapersonal (emotional intelligence) and interpersonal (social intelligence) qualities defined by the emotional intelligence community. These qualities mark a disciple of Jesus, and an emotionally intelligent human being. We take the BarOn EQ-i inventory, for a comparative example.

Galatians 5:22-23	BarOn EQ-i <sup>60</sup>
“Love”	<i>Manifest by all factors?</i>
“Joy”	“Optimism”
“Peace”	“Happiness”
“Patience”	“Stress Tolerance”
“Kindness”	“Empathy”
“Goodness”	“Empathy”
“Faithfulness”	“Social Responsibility”
“Gentleness”	“Interpersonal Relationship”
“Self-Control”	“Impulse Control”

### *1 Corinthians 13:2, 4-5*

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith than can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.... Love is patient, love is kind. It does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Here, Paul does two things. First, he distinguishes between knowledge (cognition) and love (emotion). Cognitive excellence without emotional excellence is “nothing.” Secondly, the characteristics of “love” (*the* word associated with Christian discipleship) show remarkable proximity to emotional intelligence.

1 Corinthians 13:2, 4-5	Emotional Intelligence (not BarOn)
“Patient”	“Flexibility” <sup>61</sup>
“Kind”	“Kind regards” <sup>62</sup>
“Does not boast”	“Relative regard” <sup>63</sup>
“Is not proud”	“Empathetic Accuracy” <sup>64</sup>
“Is not rude”	“Social Cognition” <sup>65</sup>
“Is not self-seeking”	“Awareness of Others” <sup>66</sup>
“Is not easily angered”	“Emotional expression and control” <sup>67</sup>
“Keeps not record of wrongs”	“Forgiveness” <sup>68</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Bar-On and Handley, *The Last Corporate Secret*, iv.

<sup>61</sup> Sparrow and Knight, 146.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>64</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, 84.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>66</sup> Sparrow and Knight, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 156.

Beyond these four biblical examples, I submit (without specific notation) that many core discipleship passages in the New Testament argue for some kind of *emotional intelligence*: interpersonal and intrapersonal. For example, when James asks, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?”<sup>69</sup> he demands a discipleship of relational love. Intellectual assent to certain theological positions is not enough. Empathy motivating empathetic *action* is the answer.<sup>70</sup> Sparrow and Knight rightly point out that “[e]motion stems from the Latin word ‘movere’, meaning ‘to move.’ Our emotions prompt motion.”<sup>71</sup>

### Comparing Jesus with *BarOn EQ-i*

It is useful to compare the teachings of Jesus with one of the major contemporary emotional intelligence models to demonstrate the potential usefulness of Christian discipleship’s embrace of this new research. I have chosen the *BarOn EQ-i* inventory.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Lennick and Kiel, 7.

<sup>69</sup> James 2:14.

<sup>70</sup> James 2:15-17.

<sup>71</sup> Sparrow and Knight, 25.

<sup>72</sup> While various theorists approach emotional intelligence from differing viewpoints, there is essential agreement for the human qualities at issue. Therefore, almost any assessment would provide a respectable representation for the others.

Jesus by Example	Jesus' Teaching	BarOn EQ-i
"I am he" <sup>73</sup>	"Wipe dust off your feet" <sup>74</sup>	Self-Regard
"Yours be done" <sup>75</sup>	"Cut it off" <sup>76</sup>	Emotional Self-Awareness
"Get behind me, Satan" <sup>77</sup>	"Let your yes be yes" <sup>78</sup>	Assertiveness
"I do not accept praise" <sup>79</sup>	"Hate his father" <sup>80</sup>	Independence
"Quiet! Be Still!" <sup>81</sup>	"Holy Spirit will teach you" <sup>82</sup>	Self-Actualization
"Moved with compassion" <sup>83</sup>	"Which of these ... was a neighbor?" <sup>84</sup>	Empathy
"Who touched my clothes?" <sup>85</sup>	"I was hungry" <sup>86</sup>	Social Responsibility
"See how he loved him" <sup>87</sup>	"Mary has chosen what is better" <sup>88</sup>	Interpersonal Relationship
"Everything is possible for you" <sup>89</sup>	"What were you arguing about?" <sup>90</sup>	Reality Testing
"My time has not come" <sup>91</sup>	"Seek first his kingdom" <sup>92</sup>	Flexibility
"Give to Caesar" <sup>93</sup>	"Give them something to eat" <sup>94</sup>	Problem Solving
"Let's go to the other side" <sup>95</sup>	"Do not worry" <sup>96</sup>	Stress Tolerance
"Forgive them" <sup>97</sup>	"Love your enemies" <sup>98</sup>	Impulse Control

<sup>73</sup> John 18:8.<sup>74</sup> Luke 10:11.<sup>75</sup> Luke 22:42.<sup>76</sup> Matthew 5:30.<sup>77</sup> Mark 8:33.<sup>78</sup> Matthew 5:37.<sup>79</sup> John 5:41.<sup>80</sup> Luke 14:26.<sup>81</sup> Mark 4:39.<sup>82</sup> Luke 12:12.<sup>83</sup> Mark 1:41.<sup>84</sup> Luke 10:36.<sup>85</sup> Mark 5:30.<sup>86</sup> Matthew 25:35.<sup>87</sup> John 11:36.<sup>88</sup> Luke 10:42.<sup>89</sup> Mark 14:36.<sup>90</sup> Mark 9:33.<sup>91</sup> John 2:4.<sup>92</sup> Matthew 6:33.<sup>93</sup> Matthew 22:21.<sup>94</sup> Luke 9:13.<sup>95</sup> Luke 8:22.<sup>96</sup> Luke 12:22.<sup>97</sup> Luke 23:34.

“Zacchaeus” <sup>99</sup>	“Do not let your hearts be troubled” <sup>100</sup>	Optimism
“Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” <sup>101</sup>	“Sabbath was made for man” <sup>102</sup>	Happiness

These relationships provide a striking reality: Jesus was thinking about *emotional intelligence* long before Daniel Goleman’s 1995 bestseller.<sup>103</sup> “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”<sup>104</sup> is a compelling assertion that Jesus matured in love for his Father and with people. Jesus was emotionally and socially intelligent. His commission to the first disciples, to recruit more disciples, “teaching them to obey everything,”<sup>105</sup> can be faithfully understood to mean allegiance to a program of learning centered on love for God, themselves, and one another. They were called to become like their Master.

### Emotional Intelligence in the Service of Christian Discipleship

#### *A Word of Caution*

Eugene Peterson, in his extraordinary book, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, writes:

We have an abundance of educational courses for teaching right thinking about God in the community—Bible studies, catechetical curricula, Sunday School classes. And we have many imaginative programs for training in behaviors that are obedient to the scriptural commands to help and heal, form missions, and evangelize the world. But whoever heard of a class on love? And whoever heard of a love program? And the reason is

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<sup>98</sup> Matthew 5:44.

<sup>99</sup> Luke 19:5.

<sup>100</sup> John 14:1.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew 12:8.

<sup>102</sup> Mark 2:27.

<sup>103</sup> <http://provost.syr.edu/lectures/goleman.asp> is one of many sources reporting that *Emotional Intelligence* has sold over 5 million copies. Accessed: November 6, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Luke 2:52.

<sup>105</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.



that love cannot be reduced to what can be taught in a classroom or what can be formulated in a program.<sup>106</sup>

If he is correct, what shall we do with emotional intelligence?

It is hard to argue with Peterson's assertions that people "are not admitted to the community by presenting credentials of love skills," and that we should not conduct "periodic peer reviews on love." It is easy to embrace his assertions that "knowledge does not turn into acts of love automatically" and "learning to love can't be reduced to ideas about love."<sup>107</sup>

At the same time, however, we can emphatically affirm his call that the church of Jesus Christ must be about "*Establishing a Love Identity*."<sup>108</sup> Love is the *quality* of Christian discipleship and the word that must delineate the efforts and agendas of Jesus-driven churches. John writes, "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."<sup>109</sup>

With Peterson's cautions and affirmations in mind, I submit the "emerging science" of emotional intelligence can be a key piece of an emerging, and effective, discipleship.

### ***Emotional Intelligence: Recognition and Recreation***

Emotional intelligence is a gift to Christian discipleship in two ways.

First, it raises awareness of the importance of emotional maturity. Human beings can live more successfully when their own feelings and the feelings of others are

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<sup>106</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 314.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 312-314.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>109</sup> 1 John 3:11.

understood, interpreted, and appreciated. As we have noted earlier, loving ourselves and loving others is, in good measure, interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness and growth: we are affectively smart. While biblical sources provide us with a theological imperative and contemporary Christian sources provide us with ecclesiological confidence, research done by the psychological community (even non-Christian) can give us a kind of insight that, while not superseding the former two, does bring in a third, unique, strength. The biopsychological (brain physiology) discoveries in conjunction with the psychotherapeutic learnings—provided by the emotional intelligence community—grant us fresh knowing into the way humans work and are supposed to work. We understand our creative state better.<sup>110</sup>

Prior to any specific testing, therapy, or emotional intelligence coaching, the simple reality of our emotional selves can be of great benefit to Christian disciples. Better understanding of human functioning has the potential, in itself, to release a man or woman mired in discipleship (or life) stagnation.

Two examples.

First, let's suppose a man is finding little satisfaction in his service to the church. He has tried numerous areas of service—from the worship team to high school ministry to a ministry with service to the poor. The *spiritual gifts placement* committee is beside themselves, unable to figure out the source of this man's unsuccessful participatory voyage. Let's say, for example, they have thoroughly explored: theology of service, spiritual calling, spiritual gifts inventory, cognitive intelligence, aptitude, achievement proficiency, vocational interest, and personality traits.<sup>111</sup> In every way this Christian

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<sup>110</sup> Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, 13-101.

<sup>111</sup> Thompson, 2-3.

seems to be on track for fruitful and rewarding ministry. However, upon further (emotional) investigation, it is found that this man has a huge anger problem, which sets him “off” at the slightest disturbance, or, it is discovered that this man has almost no assertiveness (he is afraid to do something new). This (affective) information would be of great use to this man, and to the pastor or church leader assisting in his introduction to service.

A second example would be, say, a children’s Sunday School class, seemingly unable to figure out how to: (a) gain more volunteers to the ministry and (b) how to think through a plan to deal with the wide-range of parenting styles leading to competing opinions about how the ministry should be run. The *BarOn EQ-i* assessment ranks “Problem Solving” among 15 emotionally intelligence indicators. Here is its definition:

Ability to identify and define problems and generate and implement solutions; sensing problem, confident and motivated to tackle it; defining and formulating the problem, generating multiple solutions, making decision to implement. Linked to being conscientious, disciplined, methodical, systematic and persistent in solving problems.<sup>112</sup>

Awareness that there *may* be emotional issues (immaturities, lack of affective well-being) could lead a pastor or church leader to (a) ensure that an individual(s) is placed in the ministry with high levels of problem solving qualities and (b) work toward developing greater levels of problem solving in the existing team.

Beyond these specific examples, greater alertness to the presence and potential (positive or negative) of emotional intelligence could be significant in helping church members grow as Christian disciples. Recognition and interpretation of negative feelings might avoid the cessation or destruction of otherwise positive spiritual growth. Paying attention to *strong feelings*, like anger or disgust, might cause one to quickly identify the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 3-29.

object of emotion. Vitriolic feelings toward a person may be damaging to spiritual growth while hatred of poverty or injustice may be signs of spiritual sensitivities. And, perhaps most pervasive in American culture, the ability to properly identify and respond to *stressful* emotions in a mature way could be of great advantage to the Christian.

Overall, in conjunction with biblical and contemporary Christian materials, emotional intelligence realities enable Christians to affirm the presence of emotions in life and to deny a view that feelings are ancillary or contrary to proper human functioning.

A second gift of emotional intelligence (beyond recognition) is the recreation of emotions. More than saying, “emotions are reality and you are either emotionally intelligence, average, or wanting,” emotional intelligence literature provide therapeutic help. Practitioners have created and are using materials designed to assist men and women in their pursuit of great emotional health and well-being. Here, perhaps, emotional intelligence material has a certain advantage over biblical and contemporary Christian materials, for it gives us specific tools in constructing an emotionally-strong life. Better yet, the inspiration of scripture and the affirmation of current Christian teachers find a faithful partner in the ways and means of these helping cousins.

For diagnosis, one excellent resource is the *BarOn Eq-i*, which we have mentioned earlier. A trained counselor can assist a client (church member) in assessment of his or her emotional health through use of the 133-question assessment questionnaire, where responses range from “Very Seldom or Not True of Me” to “Very Often or True of Me.” For example, here are the 10 questions which pertain to “Social Responsibility,” one component of emotional intelligence.

- I like helping people.
- It doesn't bother me to take advantage of people, especially if they deserve it.
- Others find it hard to depend on me.
- I would stop and help a crying child find his or her parents, even if I had to be somewhere else at the same time.
- I care what happens to other people.
- If I could get away with breaking the law in certain situations, I would.
- I'm able to respect others.
- I'm sensitive to the feelings of others.
- I think it's important to be a law-abiding citizen.
- It's hard for me to see people suffer.<sup>113</sup>

The parallels with biblical commands are obvious. But, for our present argument, the advantages are in the integrity of the test and a helpful format for evaluation.

“Validity indicators” help determine if the test-taker’s answers are likely accurate.

Falsely high scores or low scores are flagged, as are sporadic scores that may indicate lack of seriousness in taking the assessment tool.<sup>114</sup>

Out of diagnosis flows remedy. The counselor or coach will use the data collected to help form an action plan toward progress in affective acumen and well-being.

*Emotional Intelligence in Action: Training and Coaching Activities for Leaders and Managers* is one good resource for assisting people in intrapersonal and intrapersonal development. This resource is intended for a corporate (marketplace) setting, but could be easily adapted for a church. It follows the *BarOn* model.<sup>115</sup>

Following the above diagnostic example (Social Responsibility), this practical guide encourages participants “to shift their attention from problems and deficiencies of the workplace to the resources that are currently present and available to support the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 3-18.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 4-2.

<sup>115</sup> Marcia and L. Bonita Patterson and James Bradford Terrell Hughes, *Emotional Intelligence in Action: Training and Coaching Activities for Leaders and Managers* (San Francisco, California: Pfeiffer, 2005).

people and their enterprise.” Then, for about an hour, they act alone and in groups, identifying, writing, and discussing those things for which they are appreciative. They are encouraged, in this exercise, to speak about the things they like in others and how they can help others better. The exercise is simple, but on-point.<sup>116</sup>

In our concluding chapter, we will explore application further.

### Summary

I’ve come to three conclusions in this chapter.

1. **Emotional intelligence is real, and it matters.** Many of the theorists and practitioners in the emotional intelligence community are serious scientists who research and write carefully and persuasively. Interpersonal and intrapersonal health comprises a core foundation for living well as a human being. Whatever deficiencies may be found in one or another of the various models, the major point, that intelligence of the heart is of enormous importance, is simply compelling. The general purpose of psychotherapy is to help people live better lives—with themselves and with others.<sup>117</sup> Emotional intelligence is an insightful way of understanding people and of facilitating their movement toward health.
2. **Emotional intelligence illuminates a portion of Jesus’ teaching on how to live well as human beings.** In his *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus tells us to be “meek,” “merciful,” “pure in heart,” “peacemakers,” “salt,” “light,” to “settle matters quickly,” to “love your enemies,” and to “not judge.” Incorporating these

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 223-227.

<sup>117</sup> I am blessed, as a pastor, to work with a handful of skilled and caring therapists who have done much good for the people in and around our congregation. Above all, they are master “helpers.”

*relationally intelligent* teachings into our lives makes us “wise.”<sup>118</sup> The parallels between the teachings of Jesus and the work of contemporary emotional intelligence theorists are notable. Therefore, I assert emotional intelligence provides a helpful window into Jesus’ vision of *ekklesia*: exceptional relationships forming the basis of extraordinary community.

**3. Emotional intelligence provides practical assessment and coaching tools for the development of greater emotional intelligence in men and women.**

Discipleship objectives can, therefore, be aided by use of these materials. Once again, the argument of this project has been that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*. Emotional intelligence theory and practice provides an excellent way of thinking and helping Christian leaders and church pastors assist congregations in their goal to become more fully formed in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>118</sup> Matthew 5:1-7:29.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ROLE OF TABLE IN HUMAN EMOTION AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

#### Introduction

Summary

In the previous chapter we argued a current field of study, emotional and social intelligence, effectively articulates two-thirds of Jesus discipleship: loving yourself and loving others. We noted striking parallels between the life skills identified by these twenty-first century theorists and first century Jesus of Nazareth. The Fruits of the Spirit, we showed, are noticeably mirrored by the diagnostic and therapeutic tools developed by the various practitioners in this family of mental health professionals. We have suggested many of the most prevalent and difficult discipleship problems of our generation—financial ruin, family breakdown, intimacy with God—might be helped by growth in emotional and social intelligence.

In this chapter we will show that *recognition and recreation of human emotions* finds a geographic home at the dinner table. We will show how Jesus used the table for such, how the present world is suffering from its neglect, and, finally, how the contemporary table, because of its intrapersonal and interpersonal power *is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*.



## Connecting Emotional and Social Intelligence and The Table

If chapter four disturbed our thinking regarding the *content* of a church's discipleship program, chapter five will dislodge the primary *place* for "church" itself. Jesus' intention, through his Holy Spirit and his human beings, is to "build my church."<sup>1</sup> The English *church* is from the Greek *ekklesia*, which simply means "gathering." The word was used for formal or informal, secular or spiritual gatherings. The New Testament never refers to *church* as a physical location. *Ekklesia* was the assembly, not the arena.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is using *metaphorical* language when he says, "build my church." The objective of Jesus is not mortar, but men; not property, but people. He, as flesh and blood, is the cornerstone of this gathering, this church.<sup>3</sup> And there is a kind of gathering Jesus has in mind. We will refer to this as:

### *The Ekklesia of Eating*

In this chapter we will demonstrate:

1. **Jesus was far more interested in lunch than liturgy.** Mealtime environments were the backdrops of choice for his attraction, integration, and instruction of disciples. The biblical evidence will forge an *overwhelming* case that Jesus and his followers were best known (loved or hated) for their use of meals as the primary means of practicing and promoting their new spiritual movement. We

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Goodrick, John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Strongest Niv Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 1682. See also, for archaeological and general historical evidence of the early church's lack of church buildings as predominant meeting places Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:20.

will *claim* Jesus' many teachings about eating with people, in *contrast* with the total absence of corporate worship service instruction.<sup>4</sup>

2. **Food (and meals) holds unique importance for the social well-being of human beings.** We will explore the relationship between culture and food and examine the current social *health* of mealtime environments in North America. This survey will demonstrate the social brilliance of Jesus in using tables and chairs rather than pulpits and pews as the furniture most likely to foster the kind of community he was after—an emotionally and socially intelligent congregation. The inclusion of emotion in the discipleship culture of a church finds a strong ally in the table setting.<sup>5</sup>
3. **A return to the centrality of eating together—a return to Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> Century model—would be an enormous shift in the way we design local church budgets, hire staff, train church members, and leverage our time and energy in church “work.”** This change in teaching and practice would battle the isolations that destroy Jesus' communal vision. “Churched” and “unchurched” would come together more easily. Conversing rather than converting would be our primary goal. Pigments and pocketbooks would ebb from their separatist power. Black and white, rich and poor, eating together; this is Jesus' gospel story.

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<sup>4</sup> W. Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 6-7., quoted in Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 40.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that while today's churches are often racially and culturally “segregated,” frequently due to visual and auditory “tastes” in music, preaching, liturgy, our actual taste buds more quickly embrace a wide range of cuisine and ethnically-themed restaurants. *We eat multi-culturally better than we worship multi-culturally.* Perhaps leading with our eyes and ears is less effective than our tongues in forming multi-cultural ministries. Could it be that food will bring us together? Maybe eating together is more beneficial than “amen-ing” together.

The difficult question, “Is this a friendly church?” would be more often answered “yes” when food and drink rather than the stage become the focal point.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Importance of Food To Jesus**

Of all the means by which Jesus could have chosen to be remembered, he chose to be remembered by a meal. What he considered memorable and characteristic of his ministry was his table-fellowship. The meal, one of humankind’s most basic and common practices, was transformed by Jesus into an occasion of divine encounter. It was in the sharing of food and drink that he invited his companions to share in the grace of God. The quintessence of Jesus’ redemptive mission was revealed in his eating with sinners, repentant and unrepentant alike.<sup>7</sup>

The culmination of Jesus’ messages to the seven churches—*ekklesias*, gatherings—in Revelation is striking.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus alerts the first disciple-communities to a most assuredly familiar plea: “Let me eat with you!”

The stories of Jesus and food must have been well-known at the time of John’s inspired book of *Revelation*. Gordon T. Smith writes, “Meals were a central way in which

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<sup>6</sup> Has anyone ever asked you, “Was that a friendly movie theater?” Probably not. Your experience is this: The attendant takes your ticket and points you toward your theater. You walk into a room with nice chairs aligned in rows. You watch the production—in the dark. And then you leave. The question is usually, “How was the movie?” That’s because the purpose is not to experience relationship. It isn’t *designed* for friendliness. And neither is Sunday Morning in America. Instead of wringing our pastoral hands because the atmosphere isn’t relationally warm (or hoping the congregational 30-second greeting will suffice) we should change the way we gather.

<sup>7</sup> C.T. MacMahan, “Meals as Type-Scenes in the Gospel of Luke” (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 1., quoted in Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners*, ed. D.A. Carson, 19 vols., New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 19 (Downers Grove, Illinois: Varsity Press, 2005), 163.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 3:20,22

Jesus portrayed the values and vision of the covenant and the meaning of the rule of God.”<sup>9</sup> Eugene Peterson argues “*the* primary ... venue for evangelism in Jesus life was the meal.”<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on Jesus’ example, Christine Pohl writes, “A shared meal is the activity most closely tied to the reality of God’s Kingdom, ...”<sup>11</sup> N.T. Wright calls eating together as disciples of Jesus the “central Christian action.”<sup>12</sup> Martin Marty agrees, writing, the “central Christian way of knowing the presence of God, this meal ...”<sup>13</sup> Upon review of the New Testament, Peterson concludes, “the meal became a focal point in the early church for participating in Jesus’ work of salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

Many Christians familiar with the Jesus story would no doubt look to the Last Supper as the proscribed expression of eating for Christians. Indeed, Peterson calls it “the definitive practice, the focal point that keeps us attentive and responsive to Jesus as present and saving.”<sup>15</sup> But there is far more than the Passover Supper and its new meaning to Jesus’ practice and preaching regarding mealtime environments and the Christian experience. A chorus of scholars agree.

The Last Supper should be viewed in connection with all the other memorable meals at which he [Jesus] was a guest and a host. Every time believers gather around the bread and wine, Jesus again lovingly extends his table fellowship to sinners, lavishly feeds them with the living bread, and accepts them as his friends.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon T. Smith, *A Holy Meal: The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, 215.

<sup>11</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (New York: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion*, second ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Martin E. Marty, *The Lord's Supper* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Varsity Press, 2004), 142.

For if one looks carefully at the evangelist's [Luke's] references to food, one may perceive in them an eschatological significance. This suggests that the first Christian meals were an anamnesis, not just of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, but of the entire table fellowship that Jesus engaged in from his baptism to his ascension....[There] is eviden[ce of a] theme of Jesus table fellowship ...<sup>17</sup>

The fledgling Jesus movement continued the practice of celebrating special meals, demonstrating continuity with the Jesus tradition, but very quickly narrowed the practice almost exclusively to the celebration of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, the founding meal is only one link in a long chain of meals which Jesus shared with his followers and which they continued after Easter ... the last supper has its historical roots in this chain of gatherings.<sup>19</sup>

Luke's Gospel seems particularly enamored with Jesus' mealtime ministry. Here is a sampling, demonstrating its pervasiveness:

- Levi's response to Jesus' call is to throw a meal and invite both Jesus and guests. (5:27-30)
- Jesus' ministry is distinguished from John the Baptist's and the Pharisees because his disciples eat and drink. (5:33)
- Jesus defends his disciples' hunger on the Sabbath. (6:1)
- "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied." (6:21)
- Jesus feeds 5000. (9:10-17)
- Jesus eats at a Pharisee's house, teaches table etiquette, the way a Christian should make an invitation list, and heaven is described as a banquet. (14:1-23)
- Jesus is accused of eating with sinners. (15:1-2)
- God's grace is described as a Father throwing a great meal for his wayward child. (15:22-24)
- The Last Supper. (22:14-20)
- Jesus eats with his disciples twice after the resurrection. (24:13-43)

We may also note culinary answers to the following sample of "gospel"

questions:

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<sup>17</sup> Arthur A. Just, Jr., *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1993), 14, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, 214. Quoting: Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1971), 289-90.

- What was Jesus' first miracle? Making wine. (John 2)
- What is the only miracle performed by Jesus included in all four gospels? Feeding the 5000. (Matthew 16, Mark 6, Luke 9, John 6)
- What event are we to remember Jesus by? A supper. (Luke 22)
- To what foods does Jesus compare himself? Bread and water. (John 4, John 6)
- What did Jesus instruct after healing the little girl? Give her something to eat. (Luke 8)

An informal word count in the gospels reveals the frequency of mealtime

language:

- Eat=60 times
- Food=18 times
- Table=18 times
- Bread=62 times
- Drink=36 times
- Meal=4 times
- Banquet=17 times
- Feast=5 times
- Wine=19 times
- Fish=33 times
- Grain=9 times
- Honey=2 times
- Supper=6 times
- Dinner=9 times
- Breakfast=1 time

Finally, Jesus' mealtime emphasis finds an appropriate place in the overall biblical account. Leonard Sweet points to Genesis 2:16 and Revelation 22:17 as "the first and last commands of the Bible: eat freely and drink freely."<sup>20</sup> Blomberg reminds us that the original sin was not eating properly, and that nearly every Old Testament figure encountered food in a significant, memorable way.<sup>21</sup> Smith argues

the meal is a central motif in the Bible.... Jesus ate with his followers, with his friends, and with outcasts. It was so much a part of his ministry

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<sup>20</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Water Brook Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 33-36.

and his life that one almost gets the sense that when he wasn't preaching and teaching he was eating. In so doing, he was identifying with the ancient Jewish practice of meal fellowship.<sup>22</sup>

### **Jesus Meals Different Than Others of His Day**

While Jesus connected with Israel's long history of significant meal-centered experiences, his practice and teaching were decidedly unique. How were they different and what were the implications? Arthur Just is blunt in his scholarly conclusions.

I will argue that *Jesus' table fellowship* is one of the reasons he is put to death by the chief priests, his antagonists in Jerusalem, and the Pharisees.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus' food, his manners, and most of all his table companions, were, in fact, odorous to the cultural elite of his day. And lethal for Jesus. Simply put, Jesus ate with everybody, and eating with everybody was a liberal approach to social interactions intolerable for the restrictive social construct of the day.

Vander Zee notes the cultural situation in First Century Israel: "Eating and the etiquette of the table were deeply significant in ordinary Jewish life, and textured with religious meaning. Among Jews in Jesus' day, *who* you ate with was as important as *what* you ate and *how* you ate it."<sup>24</sup> Sharing a meal meant political partnership, personal camaraderie, societal acceptance, and spiritual salvation. An invitation (or acceptance) to a dinner party removed "shame," brought "honor," implied "equalitarian" status, "forgiveness," and a relationship without "borders."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, 11, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Just, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Vander Zee, 141.

<sup>25</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 19, 20, 48, 62.

Blomberg carefully details the Old Testament and intertestamental periods, which ushered in the arrival of Jesus.

By the time one reaches the New Testament era, keeping a kosher table was one of the top three or four boundary markers that visibly set Jews apart from their neighbours and kept them from fellowship with Gentiles. [T]he significance of the fact that Jesus would set the stage for the abolition of these laws in early Christian practice can scarcely be overestimated.<sup>26</sup>

Blomberg articulates the supposed *dangers* of dining with the *wrong* people—those deemed *wicked*. He also points out the infrequency of appeals (in both Old Testament and intertestamental literature) for compassion to those outside Jewish circles. He argues the primary social purpose of Jewish meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—was to “draw boundaries” that others were not to cross. Jews feared contamination, “strangers,” and did not believe their “holiness might rub off and clean what which was unclean.” Instead meals were for “insiders” who quarantined themselves from dirty people.<sup>27</sup>

Harmut Stegemann articulates the most restrictive regimen:

Admitted to the Essenes’ community meals were only full members who were free of handicaps—no women, and no minors. Also excluded from participation, however, were full members who temporarily found themselves in a condition of ritual uncleanness—for example ... after the death of a family member.<sup>28</sup>

Feeley-Harnik continues the list of those most often excluded:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 45, 48, 51, 53, 64, 65, 85, 86.

<sup>28</sup> H. Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist and Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 191-192., quoted in Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners*, 79



Jews of mixed or illegitimate origin, ... tax collectors, herdsman, peddlers, or tanners, the physically deformed, the *am ha-arez* or mass of the population, Samaritans, and, to a certain extent, women.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus' departure from the mealtime *religion* of his rabbinic contemporaries is astonishing. A casual reading of the gospels finds Jesus dining with Jews and Gentiles, men and women, clergymen and tax collectors, adults and children, prostitutes, the physically deformed, and with the indiscriminate masses. When Jesus hosts 5000 people for a fish-and-bread meal, it is true that "the multitude ... almost certainly come[s] from a wide cross-section of Galilean society.... [T]here is no possibility of being selective with the guest list ..."<sup>30</sup>

Jesus' vision for a *gathering* (church, *ekklesia*) of grand diversity and broad acceptance required a robust mealtime curriculum. As we noted earlier, his culinary teaching and practice populate the New Testament biographies. And the teaching continued through the Holy Spirit, post-ascension. Peter's food-themed trance and subsequent interaction with the Gentile Cornelius<sup>31</sup> simultaneously proclaimed both cleanness of all foods and all people. Mealtime experiences helped catapult the early church into multi-cultural territory. Pohl astutely writes that

shared meals were a significant setting for struggling with cultural boundaries in the early church, especially in working through the incorporation of Gentiles into the early communities.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the punch line of Peter's startling experience is found in Acts 10:25:

"Peter entered the [Gentile Cornelius'] house." These words reveal a social connection

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<sup>29</sup> G. Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981), 42., quoted in Just, 132.

<sup>30</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 105-06.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 10:1-11:18

<sup>32</sup> Pohl, 31-32.

unacceptable before the decisive intervention of Jesus—a mini-*ekklesia* emblematic of the emerging Christian congregation. Eating together was the historically successful (and highly controversial) means of growing the early church. Blomberg concludes these experiences—these culinary and social choices—were central for the expansion of the Jesus movement.

[T]he unifying theme that emerges ... is one that may be called ‘contagious holiness’.... [Jesus] does not assume he will be defiled by associating with corrupt people. Rather, his purity can rub off on them and change them for the better.... [I]t remains striking how willing he was to socialize, even in the intimacy of table fellowship, with anyone and everyone for the sake of accomplishing his mission.”<sup>33</sup>

### **The Qualitative Benefits of Eating Like Jesus**

Even if twenty-first century Christians embrace the reality of Jesus’ table-centric ministry, and his vision for a generous hospitality, we must ask what the substantive outcome of these meals would be. What *kind* of communities might be created through these interactions?

#### ***Relational Intimacy with One Another***

Martin Marty suggests the “benefit” of these meals is a reminder for each person that he or she “is a social being who shares common miseries and joys.... It serves to lift a person beyond mere *me*-ness.” We “belong” to a common “story” and there is a “special lure in congregating” that is second only to the “intimacy” of “sexual union.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 128-29.

<sup>34</sup> Marty, 10, 13, 14, 28.

Wright concurs that “by eating the meal you share in the story” and you are now a “family.”<sup>35</sup>

Heron adds,

Those who ate together were bound together by that simple sharing....The meal itself established a bond between those who shared in it: it did not merely symbolize the bond, but actually constituted it.<sup>36</sup>

The rich communion experienced by participants of Christ-motivated meals stemmed from several important factors. Basic physical protection, in the Hebrew tradition, was understood. To eat in someone’s home was to enjoy safety from the danger.<sup>37</sup> The competitive and cruel nature of a rigid social segregation—slave and free, alien and citizen, rich and poor—was dissolved at the table. No matter one’s political class, you were co-equal in the family of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> And perhaps most significant, all guests were blessed by the host in the name of Jesus Christ. The cursed diseases of life—stress, toil, fear, alienation—were healed as they enjoyed the fellowship of one another.<sup>39</sup>

This new *Ekklesia of Eating*—a church unified through food—insisted upon an environment rich in acceptance and belonging. In a world where the table represented exclusion and social insecurity, Christians rebelled. If following Jesus example meant anything, it would acting counter-culturally at meal times. These would be gatherings of grace and goodwill for *all* people.

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<sup>35</sup> Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion*, 12, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Alasdair I.C. Heron, *Table and Tradition* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1983), 25., quoted in Vander Zee, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Pohl, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Vander Zee, 146.

### *Relational Intimacy with Jesus*

One man participated in every meal Jesus attended: that man was Jesus himself. The meals of Jesus brought people together *and* they brought people to Jesus. Disciples fell in love with one another. Disciples fell in love with Jesus. Without Jesus, a meal is missing the pivotal table mate. So how are we, post ascension, to eat with Christ? Jesus famously said, “Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.”<sup>40</sup> His final words in Matthew’s gospel: “I will be with you always.”<sup>41</sup> And at the Last Supper, Jesus says he is *in* the food, and that we should remember him every time we eat.<sup>42</sup> The Holy Spirit brings Jesus into every willing dining room. Therefore, according to Pohl, “practitioners of hospitality ... often report that they feel closest to God in times of shared meals.”<sup>43</sup>

This experience requires simple recognition. If Jesus is already at the table, we should acknowledge it. We should pay attention. Praying before the meal—stating that Jesus has accepted our invitation and we have accepted his—reminds all who eat of Christ’s participation. And there is great power in the ambiance of Jesus.

If heaven and earth are mystically united during breakfast, lunch, and dinner where Jesus partakes, the present is also wedded to the promised future. With every meal, Jesus invites to us to look forward to the “Great Banquet” envisioned, for example, in Luke 14 and Revelation 19.<sup>44</sup> Wright submits “at every celebration of the Jesus-meal—*God’s future comes to meet us.*”<sup>45</sup> Pohl agrees, writing, “Especially in the context of

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew 18:20

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>42</sup> Luke 22:19-20

<sup>43</sup> Pohl, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 29, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion*, 47.

shared meals, the presence of God's Kingdom is prefigured, revealed and reflected."<sup>46</sup>

The oft-prayed words, "Father, thank you for this food, and we look forward to one day dining with you in paradise," affirm the eschatological significance of eating. We are drawn both to the cross and the coming of Jesus Christ when we break bread together.<sup>47</sup>

Pannenberg is bold in saying, "Everything that separates from God is removed in the table fellowship that Jesus practised."<sup>48</sup>

The kitchen table has become the Most Holy Place, where God, in full intensity and intimacy, *is*.

### Conclusions

The contours of Christ's communal vision were shaped and studied amid the routine experience of eating. In this chapter we have asserted that mealtimes were of enormous consequence to Jesus, his exceptional inclusion of all people differed widely from the other religious teachers of his day, and the intended outcome of these gatherings (again, *ekklesia*, church) was heartfelt connection between people and with Jesus. We can reasonably conclude, given the New Testament record, that eating and drinking together is the primary activity taught by Jesus for the development and growth of his Kingdom on earth. Indeed, the early church

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<sup>46</sup> Pohl, 30.

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting that some twenty-one times throughout the Old Testament the "promised land" is referred to as "a land flowing with milk and honey." First, it gives context to the Christian idea of food and heaven in relationship. Second, milk and honey are hardly "staples." Coffee is mixed with cream and sugar. Ice cream *is* cream and sugar. Cornbread comes to life with butter and honey, as pancakes with butter and syrup. Yogurt, pudding, cheesecake ... a land flowing with dairy and sweet is a land we understand, and desire. The "feast" of Jesus is far more than nutrients—it is a circus of taste.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 286., quoted in Smith, 15.

“devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread.... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts ...”<sup>49</sup>

What this means for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christianity we will now explore.

### **Food and Culture**

No matter who we are or where we live on this planet, all life revolves around food. Yet food is more than the sustenance we need to stay alive; it is part of our culture and tradition and can be the very thing that defines us as a people. Food has the power to create relationships, change perspectives, and take us places we never thought possible.

It is through food that we create moments of togetherness; through food that we express ourselves; through food that we share times of celebration and sorrow; and through food that we mark the changing seasons and the passing of time. Food adds creativity to our days and excitement to our nights. It nourishes our minds, our bodies, and our souls.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Why the Table Matters***

To this point we have argued that Jesus mealtime experiences were the central place for the introduction and expansion of His Kingdom. We also submitted that his intention was the continuation of this practice, most notably evident in the Last Supper command to remember him whenever we eat. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are ordained opportunities to interact with Jesus and one another in community. We agree with Smith, “[E]ating is a spiritual practice ... that satisfies the deepest longings of our souls.”<sup>51</sup> Because God is creative (and Creator), we can appreciate the words of Margaret Visser, who experiences dining as “an artistic social construct.” She believes “a meal has a

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 2:42, 46

<sup>50</sup> Patricia Harris, David Lyon, Sue McLaughlin, *The Meaning of Food: The Companion to the Pbs Television Series* (Guilford, Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press, 2005), vi.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, 9.

definite plot, the intention of which is to intrigue, stimulate, and satisfy.”<sup>52</sup> Hot, cold, salty, sweet, rich, light, sour, spicy, bland—the variety of tastes and textures in the foods we eat signal a God who desires each meal to be a *remembering* of his creative intention. We are connected to the Garden of Eden (where God gave us food and himself), the Upper Room (where God gave us food and himself), and the Banquet of Heaven (where God will give us food and himself).

Human beings enjoy a unique experience with food. While animals share our basic requirement to *feed* in order to sustain life, we alone enhance this biological urge “into the ritual art of *dining*.” Food is more than sustenance. Food is social. Food is essential to the way we interact with other human beings. Eating alone does not satisfy.

One striking example:

For its first three decades, the U.S. space program dispensed with tables aboard spacecraft, since engineers argued that they wasted space. But when American astronauts spent a long tour aboard the Soviet Mir space station, they reported that meals shared around a common table turned out to be a huge boost to morale. Based on that experience, Al Holland, resident psychologist at NASA’s Johnson Space Center, successfully argued for a dinner table aboard the International Space Station.<sup>53</sup>

Space travel, of course, is not the only time we desire a table. Weddings, funerals, birthdays, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, Christmas, reunions, farewells—it is hard to imagine a significant gathering without the experience of eating and drinking together. We recognize the inherent value of food to our collective human experience. And some foods (or drinks) enjoy especially unique qualities.

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<sup>52</sup> Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 14-15.

<sup>53</sup> Harris, viii, 8-9.

The omnipresence of coffee at our social appointments intrigues the cultural critic Leonard Sweet. Coffee, he argues, is a “conversational drink” and the more we drink the more we talk with one another! In fact, coffee invites us to draw others to the table. We somehow know that the “experience [of coffee] is enhanced far beyond the ordinary simply by sharing it with someone else.”<sup>54</sup> Could it be that food and drink in general (and coffee, in particular) is God’s mysterious elixir, luring us to hear and be heard by one another? Could it be that food’s purpose is both fueling the body *and* The Body? Frederick Buechner thinks so, writing, “to eat is to acknowledge our dependence—both on food and on each other.”<sup>55</sup>

### **The Troubled Table**

If the consumption of food and the conception of community are profoundly linked—by God—how are we doing in twenty-first century North America? Nearly 20 years ago sociologist Ray Oldenburg sounded the alarm: the dinner bell is broken. In his classic *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg laments the unique construction of America’s suburbs, which, he believes, has led to the destruction of social life. His diagnosis:

Increasingly, [our] citizens are encouraged to find their relaxation, entertainment, companionships, even safety, almost entirely within the privacy of homes that have become more a retreat from society than a connection to it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 12, 162, 127.

<sup>55</sup> Frederick Beuchner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological Abc* (New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 12., quoted in Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 97.

<sup>56</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Good Great Places: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999), xxix.



We have collectively made several choices, he argues, that have contributed to this “retreat.”

First, we have chosen the automobile as our primary mode of transportation. This has allowed our work places to be geographically distanced from our homes. As a result, we spend substantial and ever-increasing amounts of time in our cars.<sup>57</sup> A casual Internet search will offer numerous websites reporting the latest eye-popping data for commute times in cities across the continent. Suffice to say, the problem of excessive drive times is recognized in 2007 as it was in 1989, when Oldenburg’s book was published. A result: we have less time to cook, eat, and be together.<sup>58</sup>

Second, we have chosen to invest heavily in “home entertainment,” which has replaced “informal public life among the American Middle Class.” Oldenburg (again, 1989) warns of “sound and video systems, VCRs, cable connections ... [and] the satellite dish.”<sup>59</sup> Could he have envisioned the impact of high-definition, flat-and-wide screen television, on-demand movies and video games, exquisite audio components—*home* theaters that rival the traditional movie theater experience? Could he have envisioned the (private) entertainment prowess of the Internet?<sup>60</sup>

Third, we have chosen to “privatize” our housing.<sup>61</sup> Simply put, our homes are not places where guests come and go freely. Pohl agrees with Oldenburg, and argues this is a key difference between the culture Jesus embraced in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and our own.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 3-7.

<sup>58</sup> The desire for “fast food”—food that can eaten in the car, alone—is understandable. We will explore this in a moment.

<sup>59</sup> Oldenburg, 12.

<sup>60</sup> We recently purchased a new 42-inch television for my Father. His response upon watching a baseball game on it for the first time: “This is better than going to the stadium!”

<sup>61</sup> Oldenburg, xxiv.

With urbanization and industrialization, the household has become smaller and more private. It is a cherished retreat from the world into which one admits few strangers.<sup>62</sup>

The privatization of our homes is evident in the alarm systems, signs reading “No Solicitation,” one-road entrance, cul-de-sac design for planned neighborhoods, and the sheer inability to get to a person’s house without a car. A home visit almost always requires an appointment.<sup>63</sup>

Fourth, we have chosen not to create accessible public playgrounds, what the author calls “Third Places.”<sup>64</sup> These are “cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of community.”<sup>65</sup> The primary experience of these places is human connection. “Conversation is the main activity.... Nothing more clearly indicates a third place than that the talk there is good; that it is lively, scintillating, colorful, and engaging.”<sup>66</sup> And the prop most often found in these places: food.<sup>67</sup> Conversation and food—housed, unlike modern *private* homes in a *public* place.<sup>68</sup>

We can readily acknowledge that since the 1980s the challenges of long commutes and exceptionally great home entertainment, enjoyed in “the privacy of our own homes,” have grown more difficult. But efforts have been made to create the kind of public environments envisioned by Oldenburg. And one well-known company has blossomed in this endeavor. Sweet is direct: “Starbucks knows that conversations need

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<sup>62</sup> Pohl, 57.

<sup>63</sup> A friend who is an architect in downtown Atlanta rues the inability to walk from place to place in the suburbs. In his neighborhood, it is not uncommon to walk the sidewalks from house to house, business to business, stopping along the way to chat ... unannounced.

<sup>64</sup> Oldenburg, 14-19. “First places” are our homes and “second places” are our places of work.

<sup>65</sup> From the subtitle.

<sup>66</sup> Oldenburg, 26.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Five of the author’s six chapters illustrating third places are: beer gardens, pubs, cafes, taverns, and coffeehouses.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 39.

‘third places’ in which to thrive.” And Starbucks is thriving with six thousand U.S. locations and four thousand internationally.<sup>69</sup>

Starbucks, according to sociologist George Ritzer of the University of Maryland, is favorably different and has avoided the pitfalls of other “McDonalized” companies. He writes pessimistically (in his 2004 *The McDonaldization of Society*) of the fast food industry’s approach to dining, including its “mediocre” food and poor customer service.<sup>70</sup> The author’s concern, however, is not only for the businesses he believes are selling us short. He is also troubled by the motivations and values of the consumers, and therefore, our common community.

For consumers, McDonald’s offers the best available way to get from being hungry to being full. In a society where both parents are likely to work or where a single parent is struggling to keep up, efficiently satisfying hunger is very attractive.<sup>71</sup>

The nutritional value of the food and the quality of conversational experience are not important factors in choosing a fast food meal. The pressing dilemma, according to Ritzer, is, “how much time it will take” to get the food on the table and into the stomach.<sup>72</sup> And so, even as Starbucks (and other quality companies) have made an effort to brew good coffee, in an attractive environment, and even in a place where the barista knows you by name, we must ask: What is the conversational quality of these places? Are people connecting food and fellowship? Are they, as Oldenburg envisions, places of laughter, healing, and joy?<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Revised new century edition ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 85, 194.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>73</sup> Oldenburg, 43-65.

Eugene Peterson is skeptical of restaurants' ability to achieve the kind of table fellowship Jesus envisions. He calls for a return to the homemade meal. His prophetic assessment is that we, in our culinary habits, have been influenced by the world, "fitting into the sociological trends of the time." He believes we are now controlled by "the machine and its metaphors." In large part, he argues, this is because the way our food is prepared and eaten—in restaurants, cooked by strangers, with pre-set formulas, and so we now consume without creating. We have become nameless, without the "culture of the table" and the "imagination" God intended. We should be living meal metaphors. Instead, he writes,

The centrality of the meal in our lives is greatly diminished. We still eat, of course, but the intricate cultural world of the meal has disintegrated. The exponential rise of fast-food meals means that there is little leisure for conversation; the vast explosion of restaurants is evidence that far less food preparation and clean-up take place in our homes; in many homes the television set is the dominant presence at family meals, virtually eliminating personal relationships and conversations; the frequency with which pre-prepared and frozen meals are used erodes the culture of family recipes and common work. All this, and more, means that the meal is no longer easily accessible or natural as the setting in which to encounter the risen Christ ....<sup>74</sup>

Is Oldenburg or Peterson's diagnosis and remedy for the dining ills of America correct? Is our problem the need for better public encounters or do we need our homes to be more open, more public? Whoever is right, they both agree: our culture starves for the kind of community known only at a true table of *fellowship*.

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<sup>74</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, 215-16.

### Summary

In this chapter we have noted humanity's universal recognition: food is central to our cultures and our fellowship. Food not only has biological nutritional import, but sociological significance. Something is missing when we are not eating together. And so we know, intuitively, what Jesus taught explicitly: dining is a (and arguably *the*) core experience which mends, grows, sustains, and manifests what it means to be God's created human family. The liturgy of Jesus—lunch—is a primary way we worship God and the means of learning to love one another.

Mealtime environments are suffering in North America, however. We, in the United States, have become a *Fast Food Nation*.<sup>75</sup> While an effort has been made in recent years to “go organic”—to improve the quality of our food and return to the way food was originally intended to be, the conversational and communal importance of our meals remains endangered. There is no widespread movement to “go organic” by getting back to mealtimes as slow, relationally-intensive experiences. The natural, culinary rhythms of Jesus are scarce. Our modern day coffeehouses seem to have greater “drive-through” than “hang-out” qualities.<sup>76</sup> Microwaves have shortened preparation time; but they have done little to elongate the dining experience. For many of us, the dining room table has become a desk, a workbench, or a place to stack the mail—a far cry from the sacred spot where we eat His Body and drink His Blood, together.

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<sup>75</sup> Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> As a frequent guest of our local Starbucks, my unofficial observation: for every 50 people who buy a cup of coffee, 49 grab-and-go and one stays to engage in conversation.

If eating well together is vital to the health of our human family, and yet so often neglected, what can be done to repair and restore our common brokenness? And who will take the lead?

We now turn to the role of the church, Christ's *Ekklesia*.

### **The Possibilities of Food for the Church**

[St.] Benedict sought to create religious communities on the model of extended rural family. His vision stood in contrast to other monastic orders of the early Middle Ages, many of which seemed to compete with each other to eat the least, sleep the least, subject the body to the greatest hardship, and most fully abstain from the comfort of human company. Benedict, in contrast, sought to gather individuals to work, pray, and eat together as a family of faith. His writings pay close attention to meals, from encouraging the working of the land to requiring that the monks all serve in the kitchen in turn. It was likewise important, he wrote, for the monks to sit down together to dine.<sup>77</sup>

### **Church, Culture, God, and Food**

Daniel Sack tracks the social significance of food in his book *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*.<sup>78</sup> He argues that since World War II, American churches have committed heavily to building “kitchens and fellowship halls” as the “heart” of the campus. Sizeable amounts of money, physical space, and architectural energy have been invested in the construction of these dining areas. Sack wonders why, in a country where food is readily available, churches as diverse as St. Pauls Evangelical and Reformed Church and Willow Creek Community Church would spend “so much of their resources ... feeding their members ...” His conclusion:

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<sup>77</sup> Harris, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Sack.

It's because Americans go to church for more than teaching and prayer. They go looking for community.... Americans hunger for community, for connections with other people.... [F]ood is essential ... because it provides a center for community; it meets a common need and nourishes life together.<sup>79</sup>

Joseph Myers, in his book *The Search To Belong*,<sup>80</sup> recounts a frustrating (and eye-opening) Sunday School experience. As the group's leader, Myers prepared excellent study materials and learning experiences. He also provided donuts and coffee each week, to facilitate social connections. Something unexpected happened: as attendance rose, his heart sank. He found the group's hunger for study was dwarfed by their desire to just talk (and eat) with one another. "All they want to do is socialize," he complained to his wife. He stopped bringing food to see if this would change the focus of the group. Instead, he found class-wide discontent: they missed the donuts! Myers had had enough. "If they want to remain so self-centered and shallow, I can no longer be the teacher." He resigned from his teaching position. And the Sunday School group? "The class grew."

What did the author learn from this experience?

I have grown up, too. I am now aware that those in the class *needed* to connect socially. There was nothing superficial about the relationships. The relationships were significant and shaped the growth of many.<sup>81</sup>

Myers contends our society's appetite for community is ravenous. We are hungry for connections. And this has implications for the church. "We live in a

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (El Cajon, California: emergentYS books, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

culture that now prioritizes belonging over believing,” he writes. And this compels the church to create “environments” that encourage the development of meaningful human interaction. We need both a budget for hymnals *and* donuts. He believes, as we noted earlier, that homes have become private, and, therefore, less effective in facilitating connections. And so the church itself must create “public space.”<sup>82</sup> Neil Cole argues our public space must, in fact, be *spaces*—plural. He believes the church must “decentralize,” and “bring Christ to people where they live.” While many churches enjoy kitchens and fellowship halls on their campus—are these places optimal for the expansion of Christ’s community? Cole says no. He agrees with Oldenburg’s “third place” vision—and claims it for the development of God’s Kingdom. Christian community, he believes, can flourish in coffee houses and cafes.<sup>83</sup>

Cole also grieves the heavy financial and manpower commitment many churches make for sixty minutes of worship (preaching and music) each weekend. What if we distributed these energies to places “where life happens”?<sup>84</sup> If Sweet’s rhetorical questions are true: “[I]s God a reality to be experienced or a belief to be remembered?” and “[I]s Christ a living force to be experienced or a historical figure to be reckoned with?” we must seriously consider where the presence of Jesus is most felt. If food and friendship are uniquely linked for human communities, and if food and discipleship are uniquely linked by Jesus, could the church better pursue its mission in the kitchen than the cathedral? Should it invest

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 6, 129-132.

<sup>83</sup> Cole, xxvi, 38-41.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. From the subtitle.



as much (or more) in the development of dining rooms as in eye-popping auditoriums?<sup>85</sup> Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel writes:

There is not really much difference between talking about food and talking about religion. In most religions access to the divine occurs through the consumption of food—eating or drinking of, with, or for the deity is a common basic ritual. The profound significance of food in our daily lives has a great deal to do with our thirst for eternal life.<sup>86</sup>

### Fundamental Questions

A fresh approach to food-oriented experiences in our church communities is critical. This most certainly includes what happens in our own kitchens (the burden of Peterson) and in food establishments in our towns (the burden of Cole, and Myers). It also involves our church buildings themselves—can they be more like Starbucks (a burden of Sweet)?

It also raises important (and challenging) questions for the current culture of many congregations—churches that no longer emphasize an *Ekklesia of Eating*.

Some issues:

- **Who we eat with.** Are we prepared to sit with those who society (or our own selves) wishes would sit at another table? Are we prepared to expand our invitation list? Are we prepared to be more than consumers of food and the presence of those few we know best? Are we prepared to RSVP

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<sup>85</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Harris, 35, 40.

affirmatively to men and women of different races, religions, generations?<sup>87</sup>

- **Our commitment of time.** Are we prepared to “waste time” by eating longer, slower? Are we prepared to make mealtimes conducive to conversation because they are not longer rushed? Are we ready to do battle against “fast food?” Are we able to “linger” after the dishes are cleared and the coffee is poured?<sup>88</sup>
- **Our commitment to growing culinary competence.** Are we prepared to train ourselves by consistently practicing new dining disciplines? Can we extend invitations and practice hospitality even though we may not be “experts?” Pohl admonishes, “Inability to cook should not be a barrier to offering welcome....[P]ick up a pizza or open cans of soup .. .without apology.”<sup>89</sup> Bottom line: do we have the courage to become chefs, cooks, waiters, waitresses, maitre des, and the bussers of tables?
- **Our theological vision of “church.”** Are we prepared to embrace the way of Jesus—where table fellowship is pervasive—and recognize the shortcomings of our current culture, both societal and religious. Are we prepared to fundamentally *rethink* what it means to “do church?” Can we agree with Blomberg “that Jesus’ practice was not something unique to his mission or ministry but remains a model for Christians everywhere.”?<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Pohl, 10.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life: You Can Move Ahead No Matter What* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2004), 203.

<sup>89</sup> Pohl, 156.

<sup>90</sup> Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, 29.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have shown the primacy of table in the ministry of Jesus and in the contemporary culture. Mealtime environments are enormously consequential in the description of human community. Our ability to relate to one another and *grow* in our emotional and social intelligence is proven and prodded in this important setting. We were designed to eat together, not only for physical nourishment, but emotional, as well. Recognition and recreation of human *emotions*, which is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship, is well-served by intentionality in both public cafes and private dining room tables.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary

The argument of this project has been that *recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship*.

Our introductory chapter demonstrated the breadth of relational issues—connection to God, fellow man, and with ourselves—impacted by our emotions. We saw problems in an array of discipleship arenas—financial, marital, evangelistic, and corporate church life—where emotions (for good or ill) play a significant role. While many factors (rationale, genetic, familial, corporate, theological, physiological, e.g.) contribute to the overall challenges of effective discipleship, emotion should also be considered as a prime culprit (when dysfunctional) and solution (when healthy).

Chapter two showed substantial evidence for the presence of emotion in God’s character and the character of created, pre-fallen human beings. Feelings were shown to be both part of the human problem and linked to spiritual solutions. Emotions were shown to be pervasive in the scriptures: Old Testament, New Testament, and uniquely pertinent to the portrayal of Christ and his teachings in the gospel of John. They are both *recognized* and offered up for *recreation*. In general, the canonical evidence cast a spotlight on the presence, pitfalls, and potential of human emotions.

Chapter three surveyed contemporary Christian pastors, teachers, and therapists on the role of emotion in human beings and the discipleship process. We found a notable concern that the emotions are not currently well-understood, taught, or healthfully lived out in Christian communities. We also mined our sources for a theological definition of emotions. Four examples of discipleship were explored in light of human emotions: evangelism, financial stewardship, spiritual leadership, and human relationships. The role of emotion in spiritual formation was affirmed. Over all, we discovered both *recognition* and *recreation* of the emotions as crucial for the spiritual development of Christians in our brief journey with several current Christian thinkers and practitioners in the arena of discipleship.

Chapter four investigated the world of emotional intelligence as a contemporary application of biblical teaching on emotion. We surveyed the major contributors in this field of intrapersonal and interpersonal psychology. We looked at both the general theories and the practical outcomes argued for by the emotional intelligence community. We showed that the teachings of Jesus and Paul, while far more than emotional intelligence, argued for an understanding of human beings that in many ways are now reflected by contemporary emotional intelligence perspectives. Like the New Testament, emotional intelligence argues for the *recognition* and *recreation* of emotions for the productive and healthy functioning of human beings. Our argument is that reflection and application of emotional intelligence tools can help us achieve discipleship growth. We will explore this more specifically later in this chapter.

Chapter five explored Jesus' *venue of choice* for the development of discipleship community: the table. We saw the significance of mealtime environments to Jesus and

how they differed from those of both Jewish and Roman culture. We saw the results (benefits) of eating like Jesus: diverse community, relational maturity, and overall discipleship growth. Next we saw how table-centered living matters today, why this kind of living is threatened, and what can be done about it. Finally, we showed the rich potential for a liberal invitation list and high-frequency gatherings around a table (with both Christians and non-Christians). The table becomes both a training ground for our interpersonal and intrapersonal development *and* a primary place for relational ministry and relational evangelism. In large part, it is *the place* where we *recognize* and *recreate* both our emotions and those of others.

### **The Way Forward**

We shall now explore some ways church leaders—pastors, teachers, and church members—can think about, introduce, and implement a more thoughtful discipleship program, which gives the emotions their due. We believe the result of such will be healthier congregations, stronger fellowship, more successful mission, and greater discovery of the joys of Christian discipleship.

### **Bringing Church Leaders Up To Speed**

The first step in consideration of how emotion might be more intentionally included in the discipleship strategy of a local church congregation is investigation and exploration (self-education) on the part of church leaders. Three experiences are in order:

## READING

There are several useful works (many are listed in the bibliography of this project) that will give a church leader an appreciation for both biblical perspectives and contemporary realities in the emotional realm. Here are seven top resources with a brief summary. Each is also included in the bibliography.

*Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* by Matthew A. Elliott. I heartily recommend this book for anyone wanting a scholarly (yet readable) explanation of emotions: history, perspectives, and biblical arguments. This would be a highly useful resource for a sermon series or education course on the subject of Christian emotion.

*Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart* by Matthew A. Elliott. This book is targeted for a popular audience. Elliott is an unabashed cheerleader for emotion's role in life and Christian experience. The upside of the book is readability and relevance and it has some nice ways to respond (journaling) in the book. It is a bit long (even at 266 pages) because his central point is made sufficiently in the first few chapters.

*Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman. While this popular work has been around awhile (1995), there is a reason it is *the notable publication* on emotional intelligence theory: it is readable and story-driven. Goleman's approach is more performance-based than health-based (well-being). However, it will give the reader a good understanding of core arguments emanating from the emotional intelligence community.

*Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* by Daniel Goleman. While *Emotional Intelligence* deals more specifically with intrapersonal

qualities (though not entirely), this work delves into our interpersonal world. This book not only gives further insight into emotional intelligence but also shows how affective strength or weakness impacts the groups we work with and serve.

*Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* by Robert C. Roberts. The author, an ethics professor at Baylor University, has written a thought-provoking book on the substance of emotions and how we should consider them as Christian people. His connection between character development and our feelings is squarely germane to a focus on discipleship growth and emotions.

*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Authentic Life in Christ* by Peter Scazzero. This work is helpful in describing what emotionally unhealthy spiritually looks like—and what it is like when it is well. Scazzero also offers many practical tools (spiritual disciplines) that help develop our feelings in the direction of spiritual maturity.

*Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* by Henri Nouwen. This is my favorite vision of spirituality and an emotionally well-lived life. The author's short essays serve as surgical tools, cutting deeply into the human soul in all of its dysfunction. While this work serves as an excellent devotional/worship resource, its themes speak powerfully to the feelings we have—both the ones we like and those we'd be happy to lose.

## **TRAINING**

There are many places offering various types of emotional intelligence seminar training.<sup>1</sup> Among them is Multi-Health Systems, Inc., which has a network of trained

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.eiconsortium.org/>



instructors in the BarOn emotional intelligence model.<sup>2</sup> Exploration for this project included my own certification in the *BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory*. I attended a two-day seminar (cost: about \$1600.00) unpacking the history, various philosophies, current publications, and available tools designed to integrate emotional intelligence into organizational life. I have used this instrument in coaching/counseling sessions (primarily pre-marriage training) and found it to be a powerful lens in helping people see their own emotional strengths and weaknesses. The assessment tool is simple to take (available online), takes about an hour (with 133 questions), and deals with five areas: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood.

There are two important advantages of the specialized training (over and above simply reading from the wide array of emotional intelligence literature). First, discovery and use of a specific tool gives a direct, practical method to *apply* the theory of emotional intelligence and a general appreciation of human emotion. Second, interaction with a trained instructor and other leadership and psychology-related professionals opens the possibilities for emotional intelligence theory in the real world.

### ***DISCOVERY AMONG THE COMMUNITY OF LEADERS***

While both of the above suggestions (the reading list and formal training) would be useful for all elders, boards, and pastoral teams, there are, at least, a couple shared experiences worth consideration. (I took a church leadership team through each of these exercises.)

First, we had the group read *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* by Patrick Lencioni. The book explores five aspects of team performance: trust,

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.mhs.com/mhs/>

conflict, commitment, accountability, and results. Trust, or “absence of trust,” is the foundational principle in well-built or badly-broken teams. Lencioni argues that trust begets a healthy climate for conflict. This atmosphere, in turn, breeds commitment from those who participate in a free, open exchange. This dynamic fosters accountability, because everyone who is committed will more naturally accept personal responsibility for the *shared* goals. In the end, this collaboration produces results—or desired outcomes. Progression along these lines is contingent upon emotional maturity, both intrapersonal and interpersonal strength.<sup>3</sup>

The book, on its own merits, engendered rigorous, revealing, and often painful discussions on our team. Revelations about specific damaged relationships among the team members and more general recognition of bad group chemistry became apparent. We utilized simple evaluations in the book for prompts toward these conversations.<sup>4</sup>

A second exercise that grew out of the Lencioni’s book was individual participation in the 16PF® assessment tool.<sup>5</sup> Each leader took the assessment, was interviewed by a trained administrator, and then we engaged in a group process of exploring one another’s results. Personality traits, emotional strengths and weaknesses, interpersonal styles, and group compatibility issues were all part of this conversation. This experience raised the level of emotional awareness, prompted each member to work toward greater maturity in weaker sectors, and created a (delicate) sense of collective knowing previously absent on the team. Overall, it helped those in spiritual leadership appreciate the importance of personal feelings and relational intelligence in the upward

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<sup>3</sup> Lencioni, 187-190.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 191-194.

<sup>5</sup> For a description of this instrument see [http://pearsonassessments.com/tests/sixtpf\\_5.htm](http://pearsonassessments.com/tests/sixtpf_5.htm) (accessed 13 August 2008).

progression of church life. The “agenda” no longer simply explored programs, plans, theology, and spreadsheets but kept an ear to the ground for the purpose of hearing emotional melodies, harmonies, dissonance and beautiful notes in the congregation.

### **Bringing the Congregation Up To Speed**

Jim Palmer’s *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by Number Christianity* is a wonderful place to start in helping a larger audience (the churchwide fellowship) test and taste the world of human emotions. I have recommended it to PhD’s and GRE’s and found both the highly and minimally educated able to embrace its simple yet poignant themes. The second chapter, “Humankind Is from Mars, God Is from Venus: Can What We’re Feeling Inside Be God?” is a compelling personal memoir of emotion’s role, rejection, and, finally, embrace. I have found in numerous conversations that many Christians assume (a) emotions are essentially the dark side of human beings or (b) emotions are too complicated and unpredictable to even think about. Palmer’s book, in my judgment, demystifies and acts as a kind of signpost, pointing the way forward.

In addition to recommending *Wide Open Spaces* for small groups, classes, and individual reading, I have preached several sermons (including one series) on the subject of emotion and its relation to Christian discipleship. Pulpit proclamation has unique influence in its ability to create (or recreate) biblical values in a congregation. The topic of human feelings as designed by God and in need of continual healing by Christ is no exception. One (long) progression of teaching topics might go as follows:

1. The Emotions of God
2. The Emotions of Jesus
3. The Emotions of Spirit
4. The Pre-Fall Emotions of Human Beings

5. The Post-Fall Emotions of Human Beings
6. The Role of Emotions in Christian Discipleship
7. Reclamation of Emotion
8. Emotional Intelligence
9. Emotional Intelligence (intrapersonal)
10. Emotional Intelligence (interpersonal)
11. Emotions and Money
12. Emotions and Marriage
13. Emotions and Evangelism
14. Emotions and The Body of Christ

The overall impact of this kind of teaching includes an understanding that (a) the biblical view of human beings is far larger than left-brain cognition; (b) feelings are not *dirty* by nature; (c) the affective state can be a tremendous asset or liability toward growth in Christ; and (d) the corporate state of being and mission of the church can be aided by an appreciation of the power of human emotions. This can be realized through presentation of (rhetorical) questions like these:

1. What would best release our evangelistic limitations? Beefing up our church members' thin biblical know-how and sharpening their apologetic arguments? Or might it be better to facilitate their personal growth in empathy, listening, tender action, truthfulness, and conversational beauty?
2. How can we best help people get out of financial debt, save for the future, and give generously to the church? Do we need more math classes? Do people need to understand what 10% of \$52,000 is? Do we need more information on the benefits/liabilities of compounded interest? Or might it be better to talk about self-worth, impulse control, stress tolerance, and happiness? How about a vision for empathy-in-action for the poorest people in our world?

3. Is it more important for people to correctly identify the three members of the Trinity or learn to live in the communal image of God as part of a caring, mature family?
4. Do we need better *placement* of people by spiritual gifts testing? Or do we, as First Corinthians 13 argues, need people who are great lovers (emotionally intelligent/generous) no matter where they serve? Does the technical team need a new soundboard or do they need to be better *sounding boards* for one another?<sup>6</sup>

### **Putting Emotional Learning to Practice**

The application and advance of emotion's role in Christian discipleship, as we noted in chapter five, requires a laboratory, or better yet, a breeding ground. This fertile soil is made rich by the mealtime environment, where people are brought face-to-face with those they know well and not at all. While current *online* communion tends to draw those of similar interests, being *online* with Jesus meant flesh-to-flesh fellowship with saints, sinners, the classy, and the class clowns. The table is the place where relationships are forged, conversation is experience and learned (as an art form), and a place where intrapersonal reservoirs are put to the test and interpersonal relations are most fully lived.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. A congregation should now think in terms of "22 worship services" each week. Our word worship (preaching and music) on Sunday mornings and the 21 (give or take) breakfasts, lunches, and dinners each week. The congregation is encouraged to reflect upon who they ate with, where, the nature of the conversation, and what could enhance their daily meal

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<sup>6</sup> *Summoned to Lead* certainly influenced this metaphor.

“ministry.” The objective is to fill each meal with meaning: for family, friendships, work colleagues, church community, and the forging of new friendships. “Who did you eat with this week?” is a probing and purposeful discipleship question.

2. Each member of the congregation is encouraged to identify and regularly frequent a “third place.” The coffee shop, café, bistro, or restaurant becomes a place for community (and Spirit-prompted evangelism) to grow.<sup>7</sup>
3. Sunday morning gathering is now reviewed and improved as a “third place.” Upgrading the quality of coffee, which is available to all members and guests, before and after the worship service. Providing a small continental breakfast for all paid and unpaid ministers (musicians, kids staff, technicians, etc.) who serve very early Sunday morning. Increasing the frequency of on-site, post-service (even potluck!) lunches. Encouraging members, in conjunction with worship services, to gather in groups—both in homes or restaurants.
4. Using food to connect with the community beyond the Christian circle. Discovering the phrase “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” is also true of people in our cities. Taking lunches to nearby *Home Depot* employees, area bicycle shop mechanics, and firemen and policemen who work the district where the church resides. Taking donuts and coffee to

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<sup>7</sup> Mars Hill Bible Church, home church of author and teacher Rob Bell, has a strong culture of church *in the community* rather than *on the church property*. My two visits to seminars there have convinced me churches should not lament an “empty” church building all week, but rather push the congregation to fill local places where people are. The more the church is empty the better.

businesses and schools in the mornings. Using food, as Jesus did, to build relationships, to ease emotional dis-ease, to promote interpersonal abundance beyond the perimeter of the church.

5. Enhancing the diversity and creativity of communion services. The presentation and approach to each communion service should be uniquely planned for that particular day: display of the table, texture of bread, liturgy surrounding the meal. “Defamiliarizing the familiar,” as Leonard Sweet often says, is essential in keeping the table alive.
6. Encouraging members to re-claim the family dining room—for the health of family and for the purpose of inviting guests. Challenging the congregation to host multi-generational and multi-ethnic meals. Envisioning the home’s primary purpose—not to provide shelter but to promote the Kingdom of God.
7. Finally, the time has come to challenge a local church budget heavily weighted toward the production of preaching and music—both for adults and children. To make a resolution toward a movement of resources toward *food* and *dining-related* ministry. What would we see with an equal investment for “pulpit and pews” *and* “table and chair” ministry?

## Conclusion

Let us finish our investigation with an *ugly-but-could-be-beautiful* term:

### POWER LUNCH

Normally, power lunch implies a gathering of well-suited and well suit-ed men and women. The *chosen* sit around a table, not so much to enjoy a meal, not so much to savor camaraderie, but to taste power. Food is merely a prop in the service of a business deal, a political alliance, a financial brokerage. Power lunches are about the acquisition or accumulation of power. They are about exclusion. They are about exclusivity. They are about who you know, who you are, and who you can leave behind.

Christians, too, can have their own power lunches: assemblies of the holy, gatherings of the pure, assemblages of the insiders. The Pharisees teach us how to hold such appointments. These socio-spiritual encounters leave religious people cold and irreligious people out in the cold.

What if power lunches were radically different? What if power lunches took on a new meaning?

Jesus often became both host and guest at the most powerful meals ever envisioned. He saw their unique and explosive potential to bring together genders, generations, and gentiles. He demonstrated their power to bring healing, hope, forgiveness, challenge, and discipleship instruction. Jesus insisted that his disciples—those apostles and others who would provide the first wave of Christian leadership—be apt and adept at mealtime ministry. He called for a new era of breakfasts, lunches, and



dinners. He called for an open table of fellowship—a banquet for the beaten and bruised, the brash and brilliant—the universal beloved of God.

And the table became a place for *whole brain*—left and right, cognitive and emotional—*human beings* to love the Lord and one another with all their mind, all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength.

And the table became a seat of salvation.

And the table became a Most Holy Place.

And the table became more powerful than ever before.

Recognition and recreation of human emotions is essential in confronting the challenges of contemporary Christian discipleship. We live in a world (and certainly a country) filled with people who are plagued by affective pathologies. We live in a church where people are struggling to find the meaning and movement promised in a commitment to Christian discipleship. There are many kinds of problems and an array of remedies which are needed. Emotional well-being is one such problem, and remedy.

May *power lunches* fill our calendars.

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