**Learning to Love Well**

**Part II**

*Growing Into an Emotionally Mature Adult*

*Luke 10:25-37*

**Defining “Neighbor”**

**25**Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?”

**26**He answered, “What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?”

**27**He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.”

**28**“Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you’ll live.”

**29**Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”

**30-32**Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

**33-35**“A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’

**36**“What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”

**37**“The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”

Two folks who knew their bibles well. These men had memorized the first 5 books of the bible – the Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

They preached sermons on loving God and their neighbour. They quoted the Shema many times a day. They knew it. Their whole life was about serving God. But when they see this man lying on the side of the road, their hearts are not moved. No empathy. No compassion. Nothing.

It’s like their spirituality is disconnected from their emotions. They have a disconnected spirituality.

They have somehow separated this idea of loving God, and mature loving. They placed loving God and loving people in two different camps.

Jesus wants them to bring it together.

Where our love for God and for others becomes aligned. Congruent.

It would have been hard for a Jew to love his Samaritan neighbour. Easy for them to justify their lack of love.

Think about the Jew today loving the Palestinian. Lot’s of good reasons they hold resentment towards one another.

Jesus seems to be saying that the true sign that the Kingdom of God has come to someone is that love makes it’s home in their hearts, for the once unlovely.

I recently read this story of what’s happening in pockets throughout Rwanda.

July 2009, an award-winning documentary called As We Forgive (AWF) made its Rwandan debut before an audience of 5,000 people

Beautiful story that illustrates my point this morning, on so many levels.

**Here’s the story of the Rwandan genocide survivor Antoine Rutayisire.**

Rutayisire has experienced a variety of personal tragedies throughout his life, from the murder of his father to multiple experiences of ethnic discrimination, he said. But despite these challenges, he decided to learn from the past, forgive others and move forward.

“We don’t need to be slaves to our past, because it’s up to us to emancipate ourselves in our minds,” Rutayisire said. “You forgive the past and leave it behind you.”

Rutayisire said he grew up a prisoner to his anger, as his father was murdered during a genocide of the Tutsis, Rutayisire’s ethnic group, when he was five. Twenty years ago, another genocide took place against the Tutsis, with about one million Tutsis killed in three months.

With about 3,000 people killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attack in New York City, Rutayisire said the 1990’s Rwandan genocide was equivalent to having the Sept. 11 attack occur three times a day for 90 days.

“The wounds from the past are like landmines planted on the way into the future,” Rutayisire said. “You find that the wounds of the past stay with us, whether we want it or not.”

Oppressors do not have to physically attack someone to hurt them, Rutayisire said, as the Rwandan government also hurt Tutsis by taking away their dreams. After losing his job as a professor due to his ethnicity, Rutayisire said he was sent to work as a school teacher in a remote village. Rather than allow the situation to destroy his dreams, however, he worked hard to become the best teacher at the school.

While he noted that reconciliation is not a popular message, Rutayisire said he found the ability to forgive after reading the Bible – which taught him not only how to live but also gave him a goal for his future.

“God created me for a purpose, and that’s why I refuse to leave my country,” he said. “My purpose is to help the country rebuild.”

But Rwanda is not alone in experiencing problems among its people, as Rutayisire said every community contains potential for tension. The problems often are rooted in the past, where generations of anger can keep people from thinking positively.

**Beautiful.**

**Jesus call to “go and do likewise” is possible for all of us. We can learn to love well.**

I wonder for some of you if this idea of learning to love well; learning to be compassionate is scary.

We perhaps have come from family systems where your role was to care for parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, dogs, cats and buggee.

You were never allowed to say no. That was your role. You were compassionate as a child so it makes sense you were given that role, but maybe now as an adult you resent the fact that you were made to care.

Now it’s the last thing you want to do. You can’t even hear this message at face value; it goes through your broken grid and goes all distorted. No wonder you push back.

Or perhaps your role right up to the present has been the compassionate one; the “saviour”. Rescuer. Like a magnet you were drawn to wounded needy people that needed fixing right from childhood. And now as an adult you have compassion fatigue, and your emotional tank is empty. You got nothing left to give. So perhaps this text just adds to the weight or burden you have always carried, and it doesn’t liberate you, it tires you.

Maybe you grew up in an environment where there were no boundaries. No setting limits. So when people cared for one another, it went over-board. It was never done in moderation. It was all or nothing. So perhaps for you, the idea of loving and caring for the needy, the extra grace required means basically selling your soul.

**None of these are healthy examples of love.**

In Jesus’ parable, how did the Samaritan love? Was his love unhealthy?

Like I said, there is dysfunctional mercy which is when you are trying to rescue and save the whole world. For all the wrong reasons.

Here the Samaritan loves maturely.

He has boundaries and limits.

He does get involved in this person’s plight but he continues on in his journey.

He brings him into an inn; he doesn’t take him home to meet the family.

He doesn’t give him a job.

He brings him into an inn, and pays the innkeeper some money and says he will come back in a couple of days.

He doesn’t obligate himself financially for the rest of his life.

He doesn’t try to be everything for this person.

It’s interesting how Jesus paints the picture of what healthy love looks like.

This is supposed to stir something in us. Create longing. A desire to learn how to love well.

So how do we learn healthy mature mercy? How do we see our love for God and for others to be more congruent? Not separated but together.

1. **Awareness.**

It requires becoming aware of our family of origin’s capacity for emotional connection.

Many of our families and the cultures we grew up in made significant investment into our lives educationally, vocationally, athletically, spiritually, but very few made any kind of investment into us in the area of emotional maturity.

Our ability to love well as an adult is directly connected to how emotionally secure the environment was when we grew up.

Some of you are feeling uncomfortable with this b/c it’s foreign territory. Its like that emotional muscle is under-developed. It’s in atrophy. This will cause pain if that’s you. But that’s OK. It will hurt for a while, but the more you begin to exercise this emotional muscle the stronger it will get.

Don’t back off. Jesus is in this.

This is the question that can help you get a sense of your own emotional maturity.

**Q “How emotionally secure and healthy was your environment?”**

Can you recall being comforted as a child after a time of emotional distress?

I’m not talking about getting the flu; I’m talking about things like…

* getting cut from the basketball team
* a pet dying suddenly and unrepentantly
* a parent dying or leaving
* divorce or parents separating
* feeling betrayed by a close friend
* your best friend moving away and you’re left alone again

Think about something pretty serious that you went through as a child.

**You name it.**

I grew up in the throes of the John Wayne, Arnold Swarzaneggar and Rambo era.

This tough macho image of what it meant to be a man.

I idolized these guys. The bulging biceps. The ripped abs. The stoic man. The tough image of being a man.

We loved it because it gave us a false sense of safety and security. No one can hurt me if I look like that.

So if our fathers bought into the lie that that was true emotional health, they wouldn’t have experienced anything else.

No wonder we weren’t given a healthy model of emotion.

So can you remember being comforted as a child after a time of emotional distress?

Can you think of a time when your parents or caregivers, or guardians, comforted you when you were really upset or sad?

I said this last week. The goal is not to find fault in our parents. Most parents did the best they could. Many of our parents didn’t have healthy or mature love modeled well to them.

That was the era. They did the best they could with what they were given.

The key here is facing what was, actually looking at it. Because those first years as a child were critical. Especially the first 2-5 years shaped us dramatically.

Those first years shaped our ability to love and connect emotionally with one another.

The key is to look honestly at what life was like in those early years so we can journey towards healthy change and growth.

Fact is I can’t experience growth and healthy change if I’m not aware of where I’m starting.

I’ve got to look back so I can move forward.

So here’s an example.

Cynthia was 8 years old when her mother was killed in a car accident. Up to this point she had a very secure attachment with her mother, but when her mother dies, her father is now completely overwhelmed, and goes into a depression and becomes more and more isolated from Cynthia as well as the other kids.

So now her older siblings have to raise her, but they really don’t want to raise her. So she’s ignored for the remainder of her childhood.

She has no memory of being comforted in times of stress and loss.

She doesn’t even know how she felt. She shut down. All she knows is that no one noticed her. She felt all alone, so naturally withdrew from people.

Makes sense she shut herself down emotionally.

That was her coping mechanism. Without it she wouldn’t have made it.

But now she’s an adult and the very thing that kept her from being wounded is now keeping her from being loved and giving love.

She is married and has children and has a tremendous difficulty tolerating her children when they are needing care and comfort. She knows it’s not right, but when they are needy, she feels herself automatically pulling away.

What goes through her mind is that “I made it as a kid without being cared for. I was independent, why can’t you be?”

She wants to, but doesn’t know how to let her children be dependant upon her.

**TS:** The point I am making is that what happens to us growing up in our childhood leaves an imprint on us in a core way of how we connect on an emotional level.

Looking at this stuff can be quite painful initially, but necessary in order for us to experience freedom and wholeness.

This is the right path to loving well.

When you grew up, were you taught to identify and express what was happening inside of you? Were you even asked?

Some of the most powerful times since we adopted has been these kind of honest family chats, where we give our kids the permission to be honest. To express what is happening inside.

I am so proud of our kids the way they have often modeled for me how to unlock that emotional stuff in healthy ways.

This behaviour, no matter how old you are, is the key to our ability to knowing yourself and growing.

You know where we get to practice this kind of honesty? With God in prayer.

This is where I get to talk about my experiences, my fears, my doubts, and my painful memories. I unlock the memory, the issue, and in so doing I let God in.

This is where I learn self-awareness and what it means to be self-reflective.

Prayer helps me not allow this to become unhealthy introspection; where I get lost in myself.

I so need God in this process.

If you never received this as a child you likely find that being present to your own emotions and be aware of how you are truly feeling difficult.

Likely why many in Canada and America are grade 5 emotionally. When asked how they feel, the primary emotion identified is anger.

I’m angry.

When really anger is a byproduct of deeper emotion of hurt, fear and guilt.

If our parents or caregivers never gave us the permission to talk about this stuff, unlock it, let it out, we will find it difficult to know how we feel.

So here’s some more questions to ask yourself, and help you identify your own family of origin’s capacity for emotional connection.

* Did you learn to trust?
* Did you learn to respect other people?
* Did you learn to honour other people’s boundaries?
* Did you learn to take turns?
* Did your parents or caregivers understand you? Truly get you?
* If you had a temper tantrum, did they bother to ask you why? What’s going on? Why are you crying?
* Or was it all about the right behaviour?

Were your feelings allowed growing up?

Were you allowed to be a child or were you expected to be older than your age?

Or were you expected to be a caregiver or counselor to your parent’s feelings?

So as a result, now you’re an adult and there’s no room space for you.

God wants to care for you; be the God of all comfort for you and you won’t let Him.

Or did you learn the fine balance between dependence and independence? Did your parents teach you the fine blend of both?

I guess the key here is that depending on where we are at with these things, we can end up hiding parts of ourselves and in so doing avoid vulnerability. And it unbeknownst to us, keep us from experiencing a deeper closeness with God and with others.

**So we can be walking around with all these invisible barriers to loving well, and not even know it.**

You see, emotional maturity begins as children, and depending on how that went, we all have core patterns we live with as a result. Core patterns that either help us or hinder us from loving well. That effect how we relate to all those around us.

Discipleship is all about growing and maturing into the likeness of Jesus. That we bit by bit take on more of his character and likeness. In order to do that we are called to mature and grow up.

Grow Up. That can be heard as a negative statement. But it’s not bad. We all have areas in our lives that are young, under-developed.

In my weight lifting days us guys in the gym all had areas of strength and areas that were weak. Well-proportioned arms and legs but calves that stubbornly seemed to resist growth and development.

I think we have these areas in our lives. Stubborn to grow. Seem to resist our every effort. I think often it is the case because these are deeper things going on that cause growth to be hard. It often takes a deeper look.

And for all these things there is grace. Patience.

These things were your coping mechanisms, your key to survival. You and I needed them. But now as an adult we get to the place eventually where these things that once helped us survive now hinder us. Actually imprison us. Hold us back.

And God desires freedom for us in all areas.

To be an emotionally healthy adult who loves and extends mercy well. And who extends and receives comfort well. Especially in our closest relationships.

It’s not for the sake of naval gazing. That’s unhealthy introspection.

**First application to love well is awareness. The 2nd Application is...**

1. **Walk it Out.**

God gives us a road map so we can learn to walk this out, not in fits and starts but in an integrated healthy way.

This is discipleship. Where loving God and others are more closely connected.

We can’t separate the two. Maturity sees these things as a whole package.

The thing about the Priest and the Teacher of the Law who passed the man by on the road to Jericho, they lacked empathy. And it seemed like they didn’t even notice. They weren’t even aware of how disconnected their love for God and for others had become.

How is your self-awareness gauge? Is it working? Can you read it? What’s it read? Is it strong? Or is this area of self-awareness not even registering on the gauge?

If you have areas that are undeveloped in this area you can guarantee God is trying to grow this area in you. Likely has put people in your lives who are modeling health for you. Or providing people who are Extra Grace Required and it I forcing you to feel stuff that maybe you haven’t felt before. To look at it.

Or God has given you loving spiritual friends who love you enough to speak the truth in love to you, so you can learn how you come across. So you can grow.

**Maybe you grew up in Christ believing the myth** that when you receive Christ, put your trust in Him, you will automatically become an emotionally mature adult. Years later you have realized this is a myth. An untruth.

It’s true, It’s not automatic. But here’s the truth, God does give you the grace and courage and power to break out of the prison and learn to love well. Love people well and love God well.

But it takes a leaving. We have to leave what is comfortable.

God called **Abraham in Genesis 12** and asked him to *“leave your country, your family, your culture and go to the land I will show you.”*

In the same way we are all called to leave our pasts, our families in a sense, our cultures – the negative broken unhealthy things tied to our families and cultures; embrace the beautiful, but reject the unhealthy.

We love our families and honour our families and cultures in healthy appropriate ways, but we are called to do life now God’s way – we are in His family and part of His Kingdom.

I wonder if this is part of what Jesus was getting at when he said, “If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison – your father, your mother, wife and children, your brothers and sisters – yes even your own life.”

**Peter alludes to this in 1 Peter 1:18**. “For you know that God paid a ransom to save you or set you free from the empty way of your fore-fathers.”

There is a leaving. A letting go. Leaving this for something so much better.

Now you might be hearing some negative self-talk right now.

“I just can’t do it.”

“There’s no way, it’s too messy. Too big.”

“I’m scared. It’s too big. Impossible.”

But in Jesus you can.

You don’t do this on your own.

Jesus said, “With man it’s impossible but not with God. “All things are possible with God.”

With God’s help you can begin to change the core patterns of believing. Begin to exchange the lie for the truth of God. Bit by bit.

This kind of healing is what God brings about. He surfaces one thing at a time. All of a sudden we see a symptom, and we go to the walk in clinic for help and healing. It’s a walk in clinic, not a life-long treatment centre always working on something. That can be unhealthy.

He surfaces the issue, one issue at a time. He surfaces it. He exposes it. He heals it. He does it.

**Question.** How do you begin to follow Christ? How do you take the first step? By grace alone. You received a gift. You didn’t make it happen. You simply received his forgiveness and hope of life both here and now and forever.

It’s all grace.

**Eph. 2:8-9** says it is by grace we have been saved, not by works so that no one can boast.

It’s all grace.

The fact that you are here is evidence of God’s grace in your life.

What are you doing here? You didn’t come here on your own. God is extending His grace to you. You are already on the move; leaving something, for the best that God has for you.

**Romans 11:6** says, “it is through God’s kindness and not by good works. God’s grace is free and undeserved.”

It’s all grace. You are hear, hungry all because of God’s grace.

It’s the same thing in growing into an emotionally mature adult. It’s repenting, saying, “I reject these core lies I have been listening to. The unhealthy things I have learned. They have taught me how to behave my whole life and I am opening my heart and mind up to Jesus for what He has in mind for me.”

It’s Jesus then who does the work.

**It’s like running a marathon.** The same thing goes for running a marathon. You don’t start out running the full. You begin by running a 10 km race. You train for that, once that is conquered you do a half marathon. You train.

It might even begin by walking. But the key is that if you want to run a marathon, you start out slowly. You slowly build up to the full.

The same thing goes for emotional health.

You might think you are so far away. It feels like a full marathon, and all you’re doing is walking.

The key is you start out slowly and you begin by doing the little things. You know the way you are doing life is not working; so now you want to do life differently. This is a whole new way of doing life and it takes time.

God is patient. Full of grace.

**It’s like a caterpillar** turning into a butterfly, it doesn’t happen over-night.

You don’t all of a sudden emerge into an emotionally mature adult overnight. It takes days, weeks, years, seemingly without any noticeable change. But change and transformation is happening. You can be sure of it.

Discipleship is hard work. Learning new habits takes discipline. No longer being lazy with your thoughts takes self discipline.

Its hard, but it’s where the rubber hits the road.

How does the parable end? Jesus speaking these words. “Go and do likewise.”

There is hope. Jesus wouldn’t give us those words without there being hope.

**What does hope look like?**

Let’s look again at the story of Rutayisire.

He says, “while there are no easy solutions to finding forgiveness, Rutayisire encouraged communities to explore the wounds of their past, note the consequences these wounds have upon the community and develop answers from these evaluations.

“There is hope,” Rutayisire said. “No matter what you have suffered, there is always tomorrow. And it’s up to us to define. Because where we come from is not where we end. It’s all in our hands to define what tomorrow is.”

**Hope. The call to embrace a new tomorrow.**

**To taste a new reality filled with joy and freedom and purpose.**

**What kind of change can we hope for as we too embrace a fresh call to define a new tomorrow?**

~ Having a spirituality that actually impacts the deep iceberg parts of who you are. Actually seeing change come to those areas.

~ Growing into an emotionally healthy adult who loves well, that knows how to practice healthy mercy not dysfunctional mercy.

~ A life of fruit growing in your life; real joy and true pleasure, and contentment not based on circumstances or things.

~ a greater sense of security and safety in your relationship with Jesus. Where you are able to receive His love that surpasses knowledge.

~ experience more times where you begin to act spontaneously; with new creativity and boldness flowing out of your life.

~ more able to enjoy the moments in your life.

~ find yourself losing interest in judging others. In gossiping.

~ losing interest in power plays and conflict.

~ where you no longer worry about as much because some things don’t matter so much anymore.

~ more frequent overwhelming episodes of appreciation for people and for life itself.

~ a new sense of connectedness to people rather than to things.

~ more able to let go of things rather than try to control.

The only other option we have is to not really live life to the full like Jesus promised; and continue being a prisoner to our past.

God called Abraham to leave the land he knew for the promise land.

It was a promise with an incredible blessing on the other side.

There is life on the other side that Jesus did promise us. That the world desperately needs from us.

The world is broken and lying shattered on the floor. We don’t want to add to the brokenness; we want to be agents of healing and grace.

To be wounded healers to a broken world.

I do believe that we are to be the people on earth that actually love the best because we have been loved the best, by God and one another.

**Close with this exercise.**

1. **Appreciations**

Think about something in the last week that you are appreciative for. What’s one thing you appreciate about yourself, about life, about something going on in your life?

Some of you came from families where nothing was appreciated. Where you didn’t feel appreciated.

List a few things you appreciate.

So let’s create a pattern where we learn how to be grateful.

1. **Wishes, Hopes and Dreams**

Our wishes hopes and dreams are vital to who we are. How God made you. Reflect on what you want for yourself. For your relationships. For yourself.

When we begin to share these things with one another we have a greater chance of seeing them become realized.

For example you might say…

I really hope I get an hour just by myself this afternoon.

I really hope I get some time to read that book this afternoon.

I really hope that one day I will be able to take my family on a big vacation. Back-pack the Holy Land. Sip a good coffee in a Café in Paris. Snorkel the Great Barrier Reef.

I really hope one day I could go back to school and get my masters.

Take time to write these down, and be determined to share them with 2-3 people. Right now, or in your simple church this week.

**Pray**