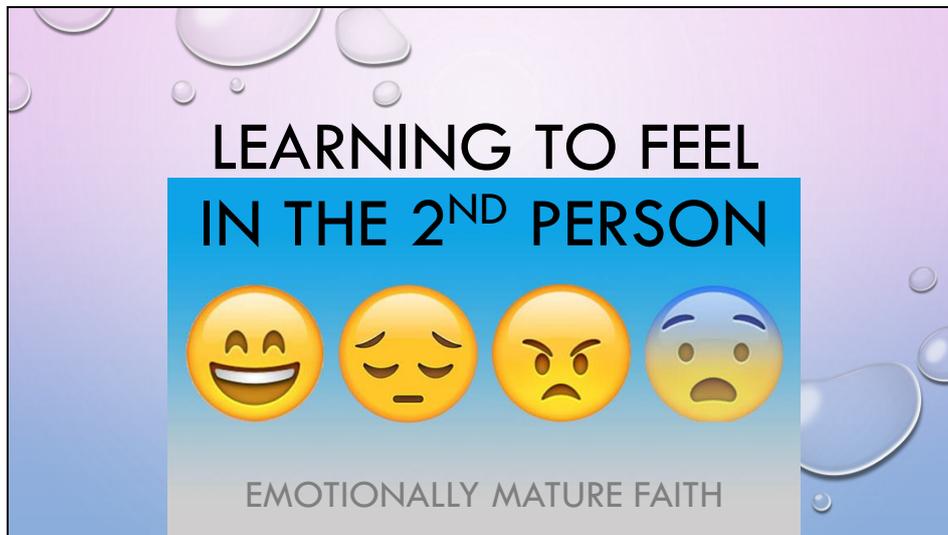


Learning to Feel in the 2nd Person

Rev. Simon McLeay



Have you ever felt up to here! Like you are drowning in work or worry? Maybe you are being overwhelmed by good opportunities or maybe by disasters. I saw in the paper this week that Dave Cull the mayor of Dunedin “lost it” with someone at a council meeting! He apologised shortly afterwards but I wonder do you ever feel like that? Overwhelmed and then you lose it a bit? You yell at the wrong person, or you cry when you weren’t planning to. Your emotions just well over. I want to talk about emotions this week, but not negatively - incredibly positively! Because our emotions and imagination are incredibly powerful to bring change for good, as well as fill our lives.

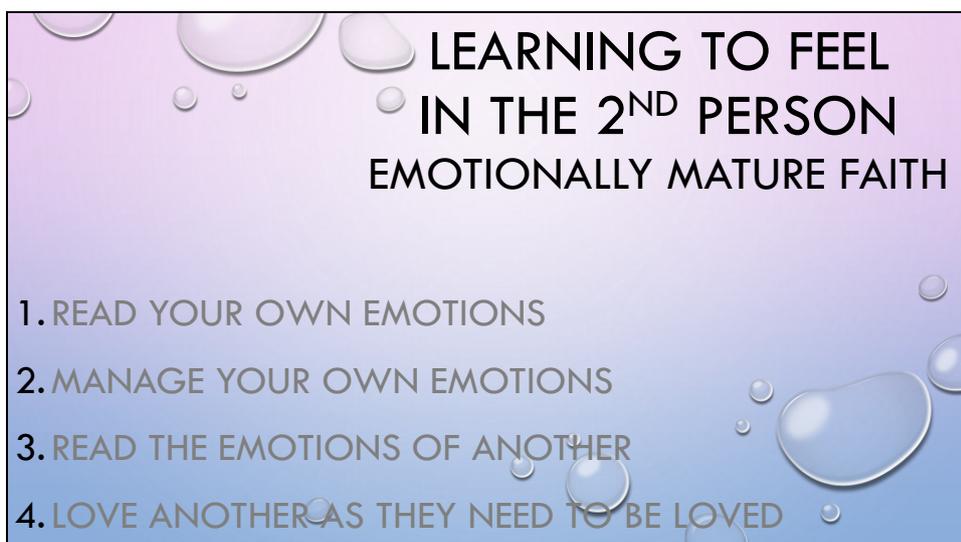
I have a very strong memory of being on Vanuatu just a few days ago, on an off-shore island, and I woke up about 11pm at night, having not slept long. I wanted to go to the loo, but there were enormous spiders there, I had a mossie net over me so I was feeling crowded, the house was all quiet so I couldn’t get up read a book and have a cup of tea. I could start to feel myself just slightly freaking out! So I took a deep breath, went to the loo and read a chapter of my book with my torch – and I prayed. God helped me moderate my feelings when I asked him. He gives us Joy and fear, anger and compassion for a reason, and part of emotional maturity is to learn to read ourselves and ask for God’s help. Thank God I feel back to sleep.

Have you felt strong emotions recently? Have you experienced Fear or Joy?

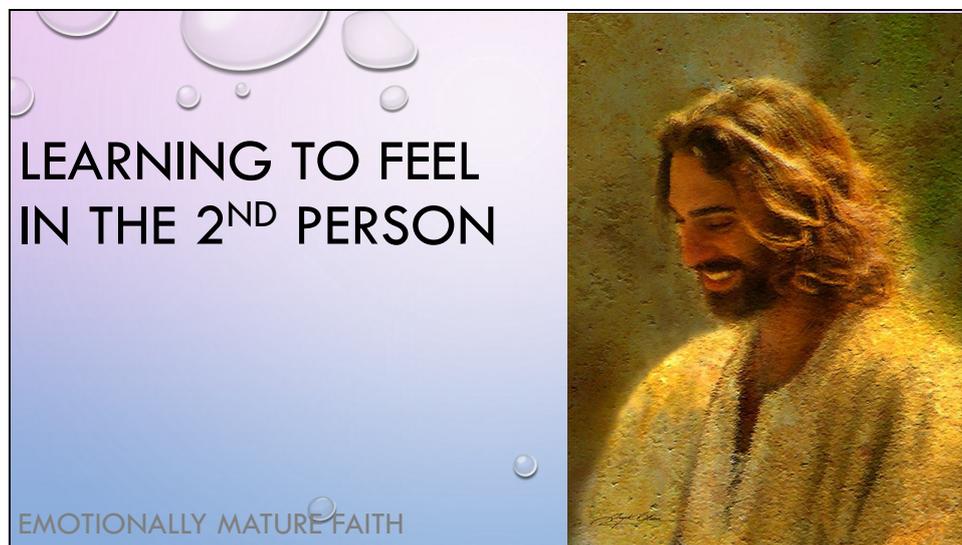


Cate was speaking last week about loving God with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength. I want to pick up her theme and talk about loving God with all our Emotions, all our Intellect and all our Will. I was talking with David about the way that our mind works, in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy we find that if we change the way that we think about a situation, sometimes that will change the way that we feel, and therefore may change the way that we behave; these three parts of us work in sync, our feelings affect our thoughts, and our thoughts affect our feelings and our behaviours also affect our thoughts and feelings also.

Over the next 3 weeks I want to talk about our emotions, about accepting ourselves and our emotions, about embracing our emotions but also learning to moderate our emotions. I want to encourage us to realise that **we must take responsibility for managing our own emotions**. This is part of Christian Maturity. Too often in the past Evangelical Christians have been wary of our emotions, distrusting them, instead of seeing them as a gift from God, which can tell us a lot about what is going on inside.

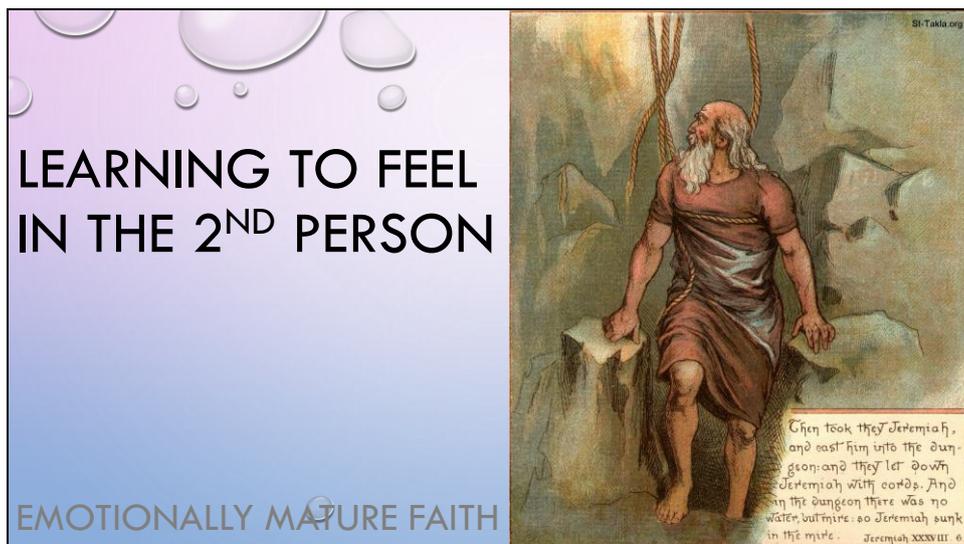


Ok it's a simple message this week. Jesus grew up in stature and mind and in favour with God and man. The goal of Christian discipleship, is to get people into a relationship with Jesus, to get people saved and then to grow into Christian maturity. And that means emotional maturity as well as physical and intellectual maturity. I read a wonderful book early this year called *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero, and one of the key points for me is that God wants us to grow up emotionally. Here is my reading of what emotional maturity looks like. An emotionally mature person is aware of their emotional state – whether they are happy or sad, feeling strong or anxious. Maturity is not being happy all the time, it is self-knowledge. 2. It is cultivating the ability to manage our own emotional state, to withdraw if that is what we need. To go and watch a movie, to go for a run, to eat something that comforts without eating too much, to find friends that support. My mother used to send us to the wood pile to cut wood. 3. To be able to read the emotions of other people around us – despite our own emotional state. To recognise that when I come home from a week in Vanuatu my family will also be tired because I haven't been there. 4. Here's the big one to provide love for others as they need it, not just as I want it. It's like the love languages – to love another as they need to be loved, not just how I like to love. And that fourth stage is really where we want that channel to God to be open, because we need his love to flow through us. Here's a final challenge, not to need those around us to be happy for us to be content and at peace. We don't want to be obnoxious, but we cannot leverage our emotional health on how others around us feel. To love is to allow our neighbour to feel what they feel without pressure from us to feel happy, that then allows us to give and receive love.

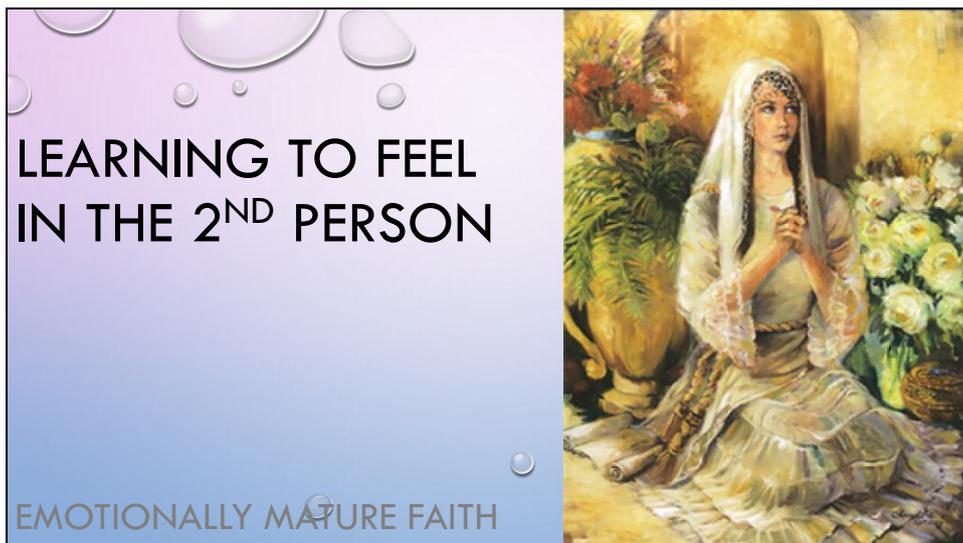


Let me give you an example, and it's an example I spoke about at Elaine Chancellor's wedding recently. In the week that he was going to die, Jesus experienced a range of emotions, he must have been anxious, we know he was afraid, I wonder whether he also felt angry? Now Jesus managed his emotions, he went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray, he took friends along, he made some space even in the middle of the night. So we know how he was feeling that week. Let's see him at his best, John 14 just a little before he could see that his friends were anxious and he gives them his peace. I would have been emitting

anxiety all over the place, I would have been yelling at my nearest and dearest, “don’t you know what I’ve got to face, stop your worrying you’ve got nothing to worry about, you’re not about to die”. Quite the contrary, Jesus is concerned about them and gives them a supernatural peace from God. OK back at the garden he gets a little sharper, couldn’t you stay awake for just one hour? Being annoyed at your mates for letting you down is not sin. He’s particularly annoyed at Peter, because I believe that he’s trying to tell Peter, “be ready for the test”. The test Peter will fail. Stage 4 the love that Peter needed that night was actually a bit of sharpness. Jn 14.27 my peace I give to you. Let’s go through those 4 stages in some more detail.



To know yourself and to be able to read your emotions. What better example is there in the scripture than Jeremiah the Prophet. Jeremiah 4.19, “my bowels, my bowels I am pained at my very heart, my heart maketh a noise in me, I cannot hold my peace, because thou has heard O my soul, the sound of the trumpet the alarm of war”. Jeremiah had learned to read his emotion, he had seen the sights of trouble coming for God’s people, and he was reading his bodily reaction. I’m in great distress, I can feel trouble coming. I think God gives us emotions to tell us about what is going on under the surface and it’s important to learn to read ourselves. If I’m feeling really sad there may be a good reason. If I’m feeling joy, what a blessing. If I’m feeling this is right, then that’s an indicator. If I’m feeling uneasy. I remember in supervision training John McAlpine talking about naming what you feel sometimes. I’m feeling that we’re a bit stuck here. I’m feeling that there’s something that you’re not telling me. Learning to read our feelings is part of emotional Christian maturity. I’m feeling unhappy in my job. I’m feeling overwhelmed. That occasional outburst means something.



Then 2nd to learn how to manage our own emotional health, I don't mean suppress feelings, but to learn how to care for ourselves. To love ourselves as we love our neighbour. That might be as simple as going for a walk and having an ice cream. It might be finding a friend to have a good talk to. It might be finding a spot to read a book, or taking a day to go skiing. I did that once years ago, I just took a day and went skiing and I felt so much better for about 6 weeks after that. Esther was a queen with a huge challenge ahead of her. She decided to risk going before the king without being summoned, to plead for the lives of her people, even though the risk was that she would be executed for impertinence. She could read her emotions, she was afraid, nervous and unsure of herself. And she gets full points for part 2. *Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.*" Esther 4.16. She decides to fast and pray, she enlists the help of others, and she sets herself a dead line (no more worrying about when), then she accepts the worst – If I die, I die. Great bravery for a young woman. Esther is an example of managing her anxiety in a very positive way. If you have a great challenge facing you – will you follow Esther's model?



The 3rd skill to learn is to read the emotion of those around you, detached from your own need. It's very easy to go looking for what you want, love and support. But to read another's emotion – or at least to explore for it. In the little book of Ruth, Naomi is a woman of grace who does this. She followed her husband off on a mad business plan, they took their children and settled in a far land where the boys married and then the males started to die. First husband Elimelek, then sons Mahlon and Kilion, all the men died and Naomi is in bitter distress, she is lost and she starts to head home. Her daughters in law are loyal to her, but here's the act of grace. Naomi lifts herself out of her bitter grief to read or consider the feelings and live of her daughters in law. Naomi send the girls back to Moab and at least in Orpah's place she reads it right, after many tears Orpah heads home, but Ruth clings to her – and again her Naomi reads her right. Maybe she doesn't even want to the girl with her, but she can tell that Ruth feels this fierce loyalty to her and so she allows Ruth to stay. Naomi is an example to all of us, that even when we can be overwhelmed with our own emotion it is possible to read the emotion of others. And it can be the other way around, I might be incredibly full of joy, but be sensitive to know that what is bringing me joy might bring some other emotion to others around me. I was so proud when my lad got head boy, but I was aware that others had missed out. Emotional maturity doesn't mean supressing our own joy or grief, just moderating how we express it in certain contexts.



The final skill that goes with emotional maturity is to be able to know ourselves, manage ourselves, be able to read others and respond as the other person needs. Naomi actually managed skill 4 as well as 3. The premier example I can think of was Jesus on the cross, dying for the sin of the world yet still managing to look out for his mother. He knows that she is distressed, and he speaks to her not just in a practical sense but in an emotional sense also. He doesn't say to John, "hey mate can you look out for my mother". No he addresses a deeper need, "woman here is your son". He is giving Mary someone else to care for and to be cared for by. He knows that his other brothers and sisters are conflicted and that John is a son of thunder, but also a sensitive soul. John will care for mum.

My friends, God wants to give us life in all its fullness, that will mean the full range of emotions over time. Let us learn how to read these emotions God has placed within us, fear can be a very healthy emotion. But also to learn how to care for ourselves and manage our own emotions, and not expect someone else to manage our emotions for us, yes a child has its mother and father to help manage its emotions – but as adults we need to take responsibility for managing our own emotions. Then as we mature learning how to read the emotions of others without being sucked into them and finally being able to respond to the emotions of others from God's resources not our own. How awesome and wonderfully we are made, and how much our heavenly father loves us.