

Sermon: "Becoming An Emotionally Mature Disciple"
Text: Philippians 2:1-4; 3:12-16. Pew Bible, pp. 1162-63.
Sermon Outline.

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Introduction ~ **Peter Scazzero** is the founder and senior pastor of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens New York. Scazzero has written an insightful book on discipleship with an intriguing title, ***The Emotionally Healthy Church***. Scazzero observes something basic many believers miss completely: **Real discipleship to Jesus includes emotional maturity.**

Scazzero says, "The link between emotional health and spiritual maturity is a large, unexplored area of discipleship." "... Emotional health and spiritual health are inseparable. ...It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature." Scazzero, pp. 18, 50. **In other words, emotional immaturity can place a lid, or limit, on your growth as a disciple of Jesus.**

To those who belong to Jesus Christ, God provides abundant resources to move you, the disciple, along the path to becoming a spiritually mature person. But not everyone keeps moving along the upward path of becoming a mature disciple. Is there such a thing as "arrested spiritual development?" Why does it happen? **This morning, we're going to talk about this issue of emotional and spiritual maturity.**

Consider the human growth and development of a new-born baby. It is literally true that a baby is born to grow. It's not a pollywog; it isn't born without legs and arms only to get them later. When a baby is born, it has all the equipment it will ever have. In fact, the older we get, the more stuff we lose!

Each human being is born with a gland to cause and regulate growth: the pituitary gland. This gland produces something absolutely essential to your growth and development: HGH, human growth hormone. But you will not grow if you do not get proper nutrition and rest. You will not grow if you are

not loved and cared for by your parent or parents. **Human growth is anything but a simple process.**

When you became a believer in Jesus Christ, God placed His Holy Spirit within you to cause you to grow. But just like human growth and development, more is needed for you to grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Our text today is from Paul's Letter to the Church in Philippi up in Macedonia. Philippi was located on the Egnatian Way, the great northern East-West Roman Interstate. Paul and his team founded this church in 50 AD (just twenty years after Jesus' resurrection) on their Second Missionary Journey. Paul writes this letter from house-arrest in Rome. He's awaiting the next phase of his trial in the Imperial Courts in Rome.

This marvelous church sent their pastor, Epaphroditus, with a financial gift to provide for Paul when he landed in jail. While in Rome, Epaphroditus got deathly ill and almost died. Paul alerts the Philippians that their pastor, now recovered, will soon be coming back home to them. **This committed church cared for Paul when other churches looked to their own needs and simply forgot about him.**

But this congregation, for all their strengths, faced some challenges, a set of attitudes connected with spiritual and emotional immaturity. There were problems with division, self-centeredness, self-satisfaction and complacency, unresolved interpersonal conflict, and short-term thinking.

Paul the apostle writes this letter to encourage their growth upward and forward into full maturity. The key idea in the whole discussion is this:

? God wants you to become an emotionally mature disciple of Jesus. Jesus wants you to

become emotionally and spiritually mature. What is real maturity for the disciple of Jesus Christ? We can become mature persons in Christ, providing we know what real maturity is.

? In our text, Paul sketches out for us two essential elements that added together make up real maturity in the disciple of Jesus.

This morning, we're resuming our ongoing conversation about real discipleship and becoming what I call, "a dangerous disciple of Jesus." Throughout these past seven months, we've been working off a concept called, "**The Three Priorities of a Disciple-making Church.**" The Three Priorities accurately summarize the Bible's teaching on what becoming a real disciple of Jesus actually involves. Jesus calls us to become His disciples, and Jesus calls us to then make disciples. **When you, the believer, look at the Three Priorities, I hope you recognize them as the self-evident truths about committed discipleship to Jesus Christ.**

The disciple of Jesus lives out three biblical priorities in his or her life:

I. Your first priority is a growing commitment to, or relationship with, Jesus Christ. You are called to grow... and keep on growing... in your relationship with Jesus. As a disciple, you are responsible to grow this relationship.

II. Your second priority is a growing commitment to the Body of Christ, your face-to-face group of other disciples. You are called to grow in your relationship with other disciples of Jesus.

III. Your third priority is a growing commitment to the work of Christ in your world. Simply stated, Jesus calls you, His disciple, to go and make disciples... to make an impact for Jesus in your world and your relationships with other people.

As we'll see, Paul has a deeper understanding of this growing-as-a-disciple process than most of us recognize.

? In our text, Paul sketches out for us two essential elements that added together make up real maturity in the disciple of Jesus.

I. The first element in becoming a mature disciple of Jesus is emotional maturity.

A. Paul has a simple framework he uses to describe how individuals grow in Christ. Paul uses some labels; but, for our purposes, the diagram up there catches the meaning.

- **A brand new believer is not able to sustain their relationship with Jesus Christ on their own.** Because that is true, they must depend on others to help them grow and watch over them. For a new Christian, that a good thing. But it's not appropriate that anyone stay at this level their entire life... God wants you to move up to the next level.
- **As the new disciple grows, a major turning point is reached when he or she IS able to maintain their relationship with Jesus on their own** – They know how to pray effectively; and they do. They know God's Word; they read and study it regularly and with enthusiasm. They're part of a face-to-face group of believers each week. With each new faith experience, comes muscle, personal judgment and balance. And yet, God still wants you to move on up to that next level...
- **After that kind of good becoming, the next major turning in the life of a disciple is that third phase of spiritual maturity. You, the disciple, are now willing and able to care for other people spiritually so that they move upward and become effective disciples of Jesus.** In the life of discipleship, this is like the Old West and crossing the Rocky Mountains in a wagon train.

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Spiritually, many people stay back east where it's comfortable.

In our Scripture passages, where would you place Paul in this scheme of things? Where would you place the disciples to whom he writes? What is Paul trying to accomplish? Answer: to call these disciples to move upward to the next level of discipleship!

B. The fact is, it takes emotional maturity to become an effective, even "dangerous disciple of Jesus." The counselors, therapists and helping professionals all have their favorite definitions of emotional maturity. Besides all the books, there are entire internet libraries on the topic.

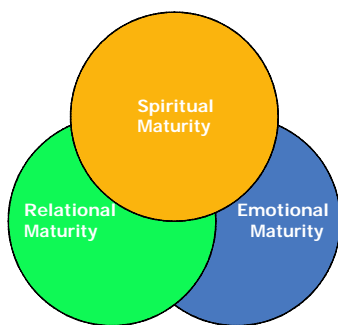
1. Emotional maturity means that I am in touch with and aware of what I am feeling inside me. It's easy for me to identify what I am feeling inside.
2. Emotional maturity means I am intentional about working through the most significant "earthquake" events that shaped my present, such as the death of a family member, an unexpected pregnancy, divorce, addiction, or a major financial disaster.
3. Emotional maturity means that I am able to thank God for all my past experiences, seeing how He has used them uniquely to shape me into who I am in Christ.
4. Emotional maturity means I don't need the approval of other to feel good about myself.
5. Emotional maturity means that because of the grace of God, I can let go of past sins and mistakes.
6. Emotional maturity means that I admit when I'm wrong, readily asking forgiveness.
7. Emotional maturity means I have an accurate concept, an accurate estimate of who I am and who I am not; what I'm good at, what I'm not good at, and what I stink at. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures and mistakes.

8. Emotional maturity means that I recognize my need for God's grace, especially in my broken places, each and every day. Emotional maturity means I move beyond maintaining a carefully managed image of always having it all together. Emotional maturity means that I recognize my daily need for the grace of God.
9. Emotional maturity means that I take responsibility for my own behavior and my growth as a person, not blaming other for my mistakes or my own lack of personal growth.
10. Emotional maturity means that I love to worship God by myself as well as with other believers in Jesus.

What I am saying is this. Emotional maturity is a major element across all of those Three Priorities. You and I cannot grow in all Three Priorities without emotional maturity. God places you in a group of disciples to enable you to grow emotionally.

II. There is a second element in becoming a mature disciple of Jesus: relational maturity.

A. The diagram up on the screen for you points out the basic reality we're dealing with: **emotional maturity,**



relational maturity and spiritual maturity are interrelated.

Growing in your relational skills and abilities is a necessity for you to grow as a disciple. For example,

- How can you experience a growing commitment to the Body of Christ, your face-to-face group of other believers? It takes relationships and friendships and trust relationships.
- And how can you make an impact for Christ in the lives of your neighbors, the people down the hallway, or your co-

workers? It takes growing skills in your relationships, doesn't it? **For you to grow and keep on growing in each of the Three Priorities, you need to grow in your relational skills... in each decade of your life.**

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, where are you in your relational kills and abilities?

- I. Are you able to see a person's life from their perspective and see life from their point of view?
- II. Do you keep your word to other people and follow through on your commitments?
- III. In a problem situation, do you suspend judgment to discover the other sides of the story? Are you slow to jump to a conclusion about another person?
- IV. In your relationships, are you a person of honesty and integrity? The Psalmist declares, "You desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place." Psalm 51:6.
- V. Are you able to love other people with no expectation of pay-back or reward in return?
- VI. Are you able to form a solid friendship with a person from a different background, culture, race or economic class?
- VII. In any given relationship, do you build trust with that other person; or do you end up undermining the trust between you?
- VIII. When you confront someone who has wronged you, do you speak in the first person about what happened without blaming tones or words? And listen to their response accurately?
- IX. Do other people sense it is your intention to do them good, and not pursue your own agenda at their expense?
- X. Would others say that you are slow to speak, quick to listen, and good at seeing things from their perspective? James 1:19-20.

? God wants you to become an emotionally mature disciple of Jesus. Relational maturity is essential to your becoming an effective disciple of Jesus.

Conclusion ~ As a disciple of Jesus, you are called to make disciples one person at a time.

Comedienne Carol Burnett tells a story about a time when she was a college actor and a man came up after a performance and asked what she wanted to do with her life. She said that she wanted to go to New York and be in musical theater.

He asked, "Why aren't you there?"

She replied that she was saving up enough money to go. The man volunteered to give her enough money to go under two conditions: first, that she would never reveal his identity; and second, that if she made it big, she would take opportunities to help others. Burnett has kept both of those promises. Along with the gift of laughter, she has had the joy of enabling other people...

Across the intervening years, I wonder which of those two individuals has had the most satisfaction...

Friend, it is a wonderful thing to be a real disciple of Jesus; but becoming a disciple-maker is better... better still.

Those Three Priorities of a Disciple-making Church – repeat them with me just one more time... As a disciple of Jesus Christ...

I. My First Priority is a growing commitment to Jesus Christ.

II. My second priority is a growing commitment to the Body of Christ, my face-to-face group of believers.

III. My third priority is a growing commitment to the work of Christ in my world.

Amen.