

Questions for the Heart

1. As we enter into the last section of the book, name three concepts, thoughts or themes you have discovered so far on your journey?
2. What story/stories have stuck out to you? What have you discovered about your own story?
3. What has God taught you about your relationship with him, others and yourself?
4. The last section is called, "Living on the Other Side: Embracing Love," what do you think is the reason the author names it this title?
5. As you have read this introduction, what intrigues your heart about the last section of this book?



CHAPTER 14

Becoming an Emotionally Mature Person

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. — James 1:4-5, NIV

In chapter four, we looked at seven dysfunctional roles which theme was protecting ourselves from being loved and loving others. In this chapter, I desire to flesh out seven principles that are marks of an emotionally healthy person. These principles enable a person to grow beyond these dysfunctional roles. So as you read, you may be thinking, *I am not even close to any of these descriptions*. My response, *it is ok because we are all in process*. At the end of each principle, there are five tips to help you on the journey. So take these descriptions as a guide to follow. Mediate, think, and pray as you begin to live on the other side of disconnection toward emotional and spiritual maturity.

1. Emotionally Mature People Make Others a Priority.

They humbly relate to others in a way that communicates it is a privilege to be in a person's presence instead of the other way around. They engage with others not for what they can get out of them but for what they can give to them. They are considerate and stable. They look for opportunities to know other people, and in the process they are known as well. They create an atmosphere of emotional safety by being loyal, being an initiator, and by thinking about other's needs more than their own. They live a life of sacrifice. They live the motto that in order to know God and others they must "deny themselves and take up the cross" and follow him (Matthew 16:24, NIV).

Emotionally mature people are people who continually want to know others not because it fills an emotional need, but because they are genuinely interested in their welfare. They love gracefully and authentically. They are willing to go above and beyond their own worlds and put the interests of others above themselves (Philippians 2:4). Many times, they make uncomfortable decisions because they are willing to feel uneasy for the sake of others. They love others more than they love their reputation, power, control, or agenda. When the going gets tough, they get in the trenches and work through relational problems. They are not afraid of being introspective. In doing so, those around them experience the power and love of God.

Tips on becoming a person who engages in making others a priority:

- Think about the way your actions will affect others.
- Form a relationship where you are the giver and you do not expect to receive anything back.
- Force yourself to be vulnerable with your needs and struggles.
- Become involved with people where interests and activities are not yours.
- Take time to get in the trenches with people.

2. Emotionally Mature People Invite Feedback and Accountability

Emotionally mature people know that "two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). So they give others permission to enter into their lives. They know this world is tough and cannot be faced with just their own strengths or ingenuity. They don't go it alone. They invite feedback to make sure they have the correct perspective on issues in life. They know without people investing into them, their hearts will become hardened and cold. They also believe others are important enough to contribute to their lives in a significant way. As a result, they invite people to enter their souls in order to give constructive insights without taking offense, being defensive or dismissive. These insights are the conduit for growth so they can become who they were created to be.

They also have wisdom in what they share because not everyone has the privilege to be involved in their messiness. They are patient in their relational pursuits. They allow space for relationships to grow without being overwhelming or needy. However, they welcome other people's perspectives because they are aware they don't understand everything. They listen to correction so they won't become stupid in their decision-making (Proverbs 12:1, NIV). In summary, emotionally mature people surround themselves with several trusted confidants to share in their messiness in order to take care of their soul so they have healthy energy to take care of others.

Tips on becoming a person of accountability:

- Discern those two or three close confidants in your life. Ask them for insight.
- Allow yourself to be vulnerable with an area of struggle.
- Accept feedback by thinking and processing information received.
- Study and grow in awareness in relationships.
- Pray and have alone times with God to bear your heart.

3. Emotionally Mature People Invest in Relationships.

They invest in others and are fully devoted to the relationship. They enjoy laughing and camaraderie but also have in-depth conversations for growth. They understand the importance of investing into people because it brings life. They will invest time, energy, and sacrifice in order for the relationship to have the opportunity to be taken to a different level. They love fiercely, with loyalty, and desire the best for themselves as well as others. They are constantly seeking maturity and realize the payoff is worth the price for their hard work. This results in walking alongside others because people's tears and smiles are precious treasures. They understand the power of silence and the privilege of being inside people's stories. Furthermore, they know what it means to sit with others in their joys and their pains. They don't try to change others into themselves. Presence with people is better than trying to rescue them from their pain. In fact, they are aware a person's pain is the pathway to healing. So they honor them by not fixing the issue but joining with them on the journey. They enjoy loving others because it brings a glimpse of heaven's sun into a broken world.

Lastly, they are motivated to forgive other because they have been forgiven (Colossians 3:13, NIV), and they seek reconciliation because they have tasted the fruits of reconciliation (2nd Corinthians 5:17, NIV). They also have sensitive hearts to their own weaknesses, sins, and failures. With this knowledge, they don't wait for others to come to them but are the first to confess their wrongs. They learn how to forgive, rebuild trust, and reconcile with others. They pour energy into the process because relationships are important to them.

Tips to becoming someone who invests in others:

- Find one person whom you dare to invest in and allow them to invest into you.
- Take time to hear people's stories.
- Ask forgiveness quickly and be available for reconciliation quickly.

- Listen with intent to other people's needs.
- Ask: What stops you from loving fiercely and being loyal?

4. Emotionally Mature People are Consistent in Their Actions and Words.

They are emotionally connected to their words. They model what they say in public and in private. If they say it then they do it. They take on the challenge of putting into practice what they have learned. They don't give facts about life but are a real, live book of hope for others to read. If they are teachers or leaders, they practice what they teach. Even though they are imperfect, they strive to be as consistent as possible. And if they fail, they do not make excuses or blame-shift but ask forgiveness. As a result, they learn from their mistakes, grow from their experiences and grow in love and maturity.

Secondly, they are a guide for others to follow. They give testimony to God's faithfulness and display this story in humility and grace. They understand their behavior will be more transforming than any of their spoken words. If others need to know what it means to have grace, then they show them by living in grace. If someone needs to know what it means to be genuine, then they become a person of authenticity. If someone is confused, then they can ask them to follow their example by saying without words, "Follow me. I will show you what to do or and lead you to where you need to go" (Philippians 4:9, NIV).

In summary, consistency allows another person to know what to expect without wondering what may happen in the future. In fact, consistency is part of God's loving character. He consistently follows his covenants, consistently gives grace, and consistently loves without change. When we are consistent, then we are comfortable with our choices, with our stories, and we love as He loves.

Tips on becoming consistent:

- Learn areas in your life of inconsistency.
- Discover the motivation behind your struggle.

- Work on one area that needs consistency.
- Confess when you fail but discover ways to improve.
- Allow others to give you feedback on progress.

5. Emotionally Mature People are Learners by Investigating Life.

Emotionally mature people become learners. They enjoy discovering new thoughts and understanding. They seek out God's wisdom in his word, through experiences, and through growing in grace. They study and investigate issues with a diligence. This allows them to gain perspective on their own heart. They are grounded in something bigger than themselves because life is not just about them. As they gain knowledge, they use it to not only help themselves but others around them. Life become about an adventure in giving and loving others.

Furthermore, they do not claim to know everything about every subject. They investigate other people's thoughts and understanding differing opinions. They thoughtfully give their positions on issues without taking it personally if the other party disagrees. They do not criticize differences without investigating the subject. Learners view life as an opportunity to gain wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1, NIV). They believe each person can contribute to their overall quality of life. In their view, it is a privilege to gain expertise from other people. They become students of another person's experience by giving them a stage to perform in which they gain much treasured enjoyment. All of these experiences point them to the awesomeness of God. In essence, they love life for all the intricacies it can give them and grow because of these experiences. They are always learning, always growing and find life to be an adventure in learning (Philippians 3:13-15, NIV).

Tips to becoming learners:

- Listen and learn. Learn and listen.
- Become humble and allow others to be your teacher.

- Find your worth in humility rather than in your ability.
- Experience a relationship where you are the learner
- Allow others to contribute to your life.

6. Emotionally Mature People Cheer Success Beyond Their Own Accomplishments.

They delegate responsibility in order for others to feel the triumph of their accomplishments. They enable people to use their gifts, talents, and abilities. They cheer successes and walk with others in failure. They live in the background without seeking the glory. They are not jealous. They are secret admirers of others' success and promote it beyond themselves. They feel it is better to give than to receive. They lead by raising people up to a higher standard because of their own work ethic. Their confidence is not in their abilities but in the power of loving others more than themselves. They seek the best for people and delay their own gratitude.

Furthermore, they have wisdom in knowing when to give and when to allow others to learn on their own. They desire people to experience the fruits of their labor by giving space so they can grow in confidence in their gifts and abilities. They work alongside people until their competency is achieved. In fact, they will often put others in situations to succeed even at the expense of gaining notoriety or applause. They are leaders not by words but through actions. Their joy is to watch others succeed in life knowing that they had a small part in helping them on their journey.

Tips to becoming a cheerleader

- Delegate tasks to others that you might do well.
- Be careful of your impulses. Allow others to give you feedback.
- Enjoy watching others use their gifts and applaud them as they succeed.

- Become comfortable with the anxiety that your plan does not need to come to fruition for God to fulfill his purposes.
- Become wise with your actions and understand how they affect others.

7. Emotionally Mature People Live with a View Toward Eternity.

They live with a sense that all history and all things are moving toward a day of redemption through the Son (Revelation 21:1-5, NIV). So they participate in this redemption through worship of God, speaking the word of truth, and being involved in mercy. As a result, they live beyond their own importance. They know the Father's kingdom is eternal and will never end but all other kingdoms will eventually end (Matthew 6:32, NIV). So they don't invest in their own kingdom because life is fleeting and fragile. They live in a bigger storyline than just their own successes. They invest in something bigger than promoting themselves. They know every action and every word can have a transforming impact. They speak with wisdom and act with an excellence that can only be measured by heaven's eternal reward.

Secondly, they pursue deeper meaning in life events. They reframe life situations that allow them to see that God working in the details of their story. They look for meaning and good wherever they can find it, even in their own pain. Although, they may suffer, they also know others have pain worse than their own. As such, they monitor their complaints and critical spirit. Furthermore, they have a confident and positive attitude toward life in general. They see successes as blessings and failures as opportunities to mature. They live life with a view toward tomorrow because they don't have time to dwell in the past of yesterday. Life to them is an adventure that need not be hindered but pursued with vigor and passion. Overall, emotionally mature people know that God is seated on the throne, their lives are written in a greater story, and that they are writing chapters for all eternity to read.

Tips to become a pursuer of eternity:

- Reframe life by asking questions: What I can learn? Change or grow?
- Ask others to hold you accountable for your critical spirit.
- Where have you sabotaged your successes? What are your blessings?
- Redirect your energy toward others whose needs are greater than your own.
- Ask the Lord to reveal your critical heart and praise him for suffering.

Maturity is More Caught Than Taught

Although you can teach, preach, and even write (or read this chapter) about emotional maturity, it is more caught than taught. Someone can teach intellectual knowledge of emotional and spiritual maturity, give theological understanding and even practical application without ever really tasting the delight of maturity. In reality, the evidence of emotional and spiritual maturity shows itself in how one's conduct is displayed in their relationships outside of the classroom. It is modeled. Emotional maturity is not an instantaneous act but is a process never completed until we reach heaven. It doesn't end by reading this book or just gaining knowledge. It is practical oriented progression that entails changing on a real, concentrated level. When we catch this transformational experience, it changes our perspective and the way we live life. This journey doesn't come naturally but involves an abundance of patience hard work, responsibility, and endurance.

Ultimately, everything we do is being a model of the grace of God. From professions such as pastor or professors to artist and janitor, from being in intimate friendships or by waving hello to strangers, from our conduct in the line at supermarkets to the executive boardroom meetings, from times of peace to engaging in conflict, each situation will show our true character. Live each day as

models of grace. May we not only teach character and coach others to grow in character, but may we also pursue character maturity and be living, breathing representations of God's character in everything that we do (Colossians 3:17), May we discover the wonders of love through serving others as people to be treasured, honored, and loved as we are loved!

Conclusion: When Abandoned Love Finds Hope and Purpose

Simon and Suzie pulled into the driveway of their new house at 10:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. It had been a long trip, spanned many days and over one thousand miles of driving. It also had been a long year. Suzie lost her child through a miscarriage and Simon lost his job in the beginning of the year. This move represented a new start with a promised new job. They were broken, weak, and fragile but had a little bit of hope.

They were supposed to have been there a week ago but their twenty-six foot U-Haul truck broke down in the parking lot of their last hotel. Furthering the crisis, they had to wait a few days until another one was available. When it arrived, they removed and repacked all their belongings into the new truck. The cold pierced their tired bodies as each box, lamp, piece of furniture and mattresses were unloaded and repacked into the new truck. As they packed the last mattress, Suzie was finally able to communicate with their realtor about the unexpected delay. Suzie asked her to put the keys under a front mat, leave a few lights and turn up the heat so it wasn't freezing cold when they arrive. Frustration, tiredness, and the unexpected had dulled and even numbed their sense of any celebration of the Christmas season.

Suzie opened the door to the darkened house and said, "I can't believe we made it!" And then she collapsed, "It's Christmas, and I don't feel like Christmas. I'm tired. I'm cold, and I'm done."

Simon opened the truck. He got out the mattress, blankets, and pillows. Simon even found a little space heater to make sure they

would be warm. He set up a little area in one of the bedrooms for the both of them to finally rest their aching hearts and bodies.

With tears down her face, Suzie sobbed, "Simmie, this is the first Christmas in our eleven years of marriage that we won't have a tree. I love our tradition and now it is gone."

Simon looked at her misty eyes, wiped her tears, and then tucked her under four blankets as she shivered in the night. He held her as she fell asleep in his arms.

After she was in a deep sleep, Simon got up, took the keys to their car and set out to find a tree. Simon did not know any place to go, didn't even know the main streets or stores. However, he was bound and determined to keep the tradition alive. Street after street, store after store was black and closed. Nothing was open. No people, no lights, not even a police officer could be found. All the evening services were done and the church doors were locked. It was cold, dark with a few flurries starting to come down through the clouds. Simon got lost several times and even asked one of the few opened gas station attendants for directions to find his way back home. Simon beyond exhausted resigned himself to the fact that this would be the first Christmas not to have their tree of love.

As he passed by a church, he saw out of the corner of his eye what looked like a tree trunk hanging over the side of some large container. Simon immediately stopped, put his car in reverse, and drove into the dimly-lit parking lot. He got out of his car, walked over to the container, and peeked into the bin. He lifted out the heavy object. And to his amazement, it was a used five foot smashed Christmas tree with many broken branches, some old tinsel wrapped around it and a few broken bulbs still attached. He had found their tree. Simon's exhaustion turned to exhilaration; hopelessness turned into joy. Love was being realized and experienced. He found some pieces of rope, tied the tree to the top of the car, and then turned around to find the gas station. The station just turned off the lights when Simon pulled up. He knocked on the door hoping someone would answer. The attendant, recognizing Simon, came to the door and opened it. Simon told him of his adventures. He then gathered all the candy

canes he could find, some tinsel and a few string of lights. He pulled out his wallet but the attendant waived him on with a smile.

Simon arrived home. He delicately placed the candy canes lights and tinsel on it so as not to make a sound. He even left the broken bulbs and the ragged tinsel he had found on the tree. Simon then crawled into bed with Suzie. It was 4:00 a.m. on Christmas day. Suzie woke up the next morning. She staggered out of bed, with her long hair, strangled and messy, and her wrinkly clothes hanging off her body. She awoke with a sad and tired countenance. Suzie walked down the long hallway into the living room. She stopped and stood in awe. There leaning against the back windowed wall was a beautifully lit, half-broken Christmas tree. Suzie glared at the tree, walked toward it like she was first learning how to walk. She touched the branches, felt the candy canes and glared at the lights and broken bulbs in an amazing wonder. Then, she found a note attached. Suzie took the note off the tree and opened it. It read,

To my darling, a tree is just a symbol of love. But it is our symbol of our love. I found this tree in a church dumpster. It was broken, tossed out, and lonely. This love was abandoned. But now, it is beautifully wrapped with lights, tinsel, and candy canes purposely crafted just for you. We have faced many trials of being broken, abandoned and lonely— just like this tree. But now we have new life, a new purpose, and are shining with hope. Our tradition remains alive but even more so God's love and my love for you will remain forever. Merry Christmas, Suzie-pie.

Suzie's wept tears of joy. Simon abandoned himself to love and she was the recipient of that love.

Questions for the Heart

1. The author lists seven principles of a mature person, which one challenged you the most? Which is the hardest for you?
 - Make others a priority
 - Invite feedback and accountability
 - Invest in relationships
 - Consistent in actions and words
 - Learners by investigating life
 - Cheer success and move beyond their own accomplishments
 - Live with a view toward eternity

2. How do these principles enable a person to grow beyond the dysfunctional roles listed in chapter four?
 - Swingers - Controllers
 - Clingers - Pretenders
 - Victims - Teachers
 - Rescuers

3. How do these principles love other people, cause one to mature and enhance their relationship with God?

4. What is the reason maturity is more "caught than taught?" Where do you need to mature in your life?

5. How did Simon show love to Suzie? In what ways did he model the seven principles of maturity? Who do you need to model these principles to in your life?

EMBRACING *Love*

LIVING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF
DISCONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS

STEVE BENSON


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