Anonymous Confessions of an Emotional Cripple

*Mt Albert Baptist Church*

*27th November 2016*

The big focus for Mt Albert Baptist during 2016 has been emotions.

Emotionally healthy spirituality – that phrase shouldn’t come as a surprise.

There have been an awful lot of sermons

about emotionally healthy spirituality here this year, haven’t there!

Now, I know, people’s reactions to this emotional focus can vary.

On the one hand, there are people who say

thank goodness we’re talking about emotions,

we should be talking about this stuff in church way more than we do.

And to be honest,

the majority of reactions we’ve heard have been along these lines

But there are others, and I probably lean much more towards this end of the spectrum,

Where, if I had a choice, I’d be much happier not talking about emotions,

Maybe that’s why I haven’t preached any of the emotions sermons.

You may not realise (you may not care either, but you may not realise)

That of all the sermons on emotions this year, I only did one.

I did the sermon on anger, something I know a lot about!

But virtually every other sermon on emotions has come from Steve.

So rather than being a preacher through this series, I’ve been a listener,

But as a listener,

I’ve deliberately tried to interact as much as I can with it,

Tried to intentionally take on board what we’ve been talking about

and journey with it and really engage deeply with it.

And so, as the year comes towards an end, this year of focusing on emotions

Steve asked me today simply to come and reflect a bit,

Reflect on what we’ve been through this year,

Both what we’ve been talking about as a community,

But also about how I’ve personally responded to it.

And as I’m talking, I’d encourage you to think about your response

What difference do you think this focus has made on us as a community? And what difference has it made to you personally?

We’ve even given you a card so that as you’re listening

think back through the series, remind yourself what we talked about

and make some notes about the difference it has made in your life

So basically, what we’re going to do today is to recall the 3 series

that we’ve done on emotions.

Now obviously there’s just not sufficient time to talk in detail about them all,

And so what I’ll do is I’ll pick out just some highlights and mention them,

Now as I speak,

please don’t get the impression that I’m an expert on this.

In fact, the truth is quite the opposite.

I was telling my supervisor, a guy I meet every 6 weeks or so,

About this, and my attempt this year to go deep into this emotional stuff,

And his response to me was this.

He said, Greg, that’s great, I’m really glad you’re doing that.

Because, he said, you might be an intellectual giant,

But you’re a bit of an emotional cripple.

That’s where the title of the sermon comes from.

Anonymous confessions of an emotional cripple.

I guess they’re not anonymous any more,

But these are the thoughts of someone who is still

very much in the middle of processing all this stuff

Inside Out

Now the first series we looked at was based around the movie Inside Out.

And the basic idea that was behind this series

was the simple reality that our emotions matter.

And because they matter,

we need to look after them and care about them.

This is how Steve explained it.

*Emotions affect us*

*And there are two things that people often do with them:*

1. *We stuff them – ignore them, deny them or avoid them. It works for a time. But it’s like stuffing things into a wheelie bin. If you keep stuffing then after a while they leak out…*
2. *Be ruled by them – so if I feel angry I’ll just be angry; if I don’t feel like doing people, I’ll look like I don’t feel like doing people; as if we have no control at all over our emotions. If I fall for someone I’ll just follow my heart, because my heart rules, so it must be right*

*There is a third way. And this is what this sermon is all about:*

1. *Care for your own emotions. Pay attention to them. Understand them. Hear what God is saying to you through them.*

*Does that make sense?*

So the big idea here is that our emotions are not supposed to be under us,

We can’t always control them, and we shouldn’t ignore or repress them

Emotions are not our slaves.

And our emotions are not to be over us,

We are not subservient to our them, they don’t control us

Emotions are not our masters

So rather than picturing our emotions below us as our slaves

And rather than picturing our emotions as above as our masters,

we should see them beside us as our friends.

And in fact, we learned that God can use our emotions to speak to us,

Emotions like fear, or anger, or sadness

Through them God can reveal to us the truth of who we are.

So we looked at the emotion of fear,

And we explored this idea of an unbearable feeling,

The idea that something difficult that’s happened in the past,

you felt something then, and it was terrible

and now, even as an adult,

you avoid feeling that feeling at all costs.

And we talked about how through our emotions,

We can identify that unbearable feeling,

And how God can help us not be controlled by it

And we looked at the emotion of anger,

And we realised that anger is not (always) sinful.

In many cases, our anger is actually a gift from God.

If you want to know who you are, ask what makes you angry.

Anger reveals to us what lies is at the core of our being so that,

together with God, we can identify it and address it.”

And we looked at the emotions of sadness and depression,

And Steve introduced this incredibly helpful concept called the King Lie.

And the idea is that often underneath all of our negative feelings,

Underneath even the anger and the fear are a series of beliefs.

And if you keep pushing down through these beliefs,

at the bottom is one core belief, which is actually untrue.

Steve told us about some of those beliefs like,

I am what I do.

I am what I have

I am what others think of me.

And most of us when we hear that think, well of course I don’t think that,

But actually, beneath everything else, we do.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I found this idea

of using your emotions as a way of hearing God speak to you

a way of God revealing what’s going on inside you

I found that incredibly insightful, and incredibly helpful.

See here’s the thing, this is what I realised in that series,

and maybe you can relate to this way of seeing things.

Some people look at me, they look at the guy who gets up here each Sunday

The Greg who preaches or leads worship or stands at the door and says hello,

And they think, well, I know who Greg is, that’s Greg, right there.

And they’re right, but they’re not right as well.

Because there’s another Greg, there’s a Greg inside that Greg.

And that inside Greg is the guy that people who work with me get to see

And there’s nothing particularly wrong with this inner Greg,

I mean, he can get a bit lonely at times,

and sometimes he gets his foot stuck in his mouth,

but no-one’s perfect, I suppose.

And so the people I work with might think they know who Greg is,

And they do, but they don’t as well,

Because inside that Greg is another Greg,

This is the Greg that my family gets to see,

the ones that see me when I wake up in the morning,

when I come home after work or after church

the ones who deal with me when I’m tired or annoyed or stressed

the ones that I’ve given up trying to pretend with.

And my family might think that they know who I am,

And they do, but they don’t as well

Because inside that Greg is yet another Greg, an inner Greg

This Greg is the Greg that genuinely loves Jesus

and does his best to live like Jesus wants,

But knows the truth that he fails more than he succeeds

This is a Greg who on the one hand can get hurt by the smallest things,

And on the other can be incredibly judgemental and harsh

And realises the ironic stupidity that both of those are simultaneously true.

In fact, let’s be frank, this Greg is dangerous,

dangerous to others but particularly to himself

And so this Greg almost never comes out,

He’s just not safe, so he stays hidden.

No, pretty much the only one who knows this Greg is me. And you know, you’d think that I would know all there is to know about me,

You’d think that I know who I am, and I do, but I don’t as well,

Because inside this Greg is another Greg

And this Greg, well, to be honest he makes absolutely no sense to me,

And I’m not really sure I like him very much

Half the time I wonder why he does what he does.

A lot of the time I’m pretty ashamed of what he does.

In fact, let’s be right up front about it,

This Greg, I’m not sure he’s even a Christian.

I’m not sure he’s even saved at all.

And let me tell you if I could ignore the Greg on the very inside I would.

But here’s the thing. That inmost Greg affects the private Greg,

And that private Greg affects the family Greg

And the family Greg affects the work Greg,

And the work Greg affects the public Greg.

Let me give you an example in my life, just one of many I could choose.

One thing that I genuinely believe is that the church is all about relationships.

God is Trinity, 3 persons in an extraordinarily exciting relationship.

And he sends his Spirit to us so that our relationships in the church

can be a little bit like his.

Now, I have spent a lot of time studying this

and I am completely convinced that’s true,

well, at least the outer layers of me are completely convinced.

But here’s the reality, even though I believe relationships matter,

Even though I believe that relationships are what its all about,

when there is a choice between actually engaging

in a relationship here at church

or going off and being by myself

I will almost always choose the second option.

You see, according to my inner Greg,

Relationships are just too uncomfortable and spiky.

It’s just way too easy to get hurt.

And so in a fight between my outer Greg’s that value and prioritise relationships And my inmost Greg that protects himself and plays it safe,

the inmost Greg wins that battle just about every time.

As one of my friends said to me recently in a rare moment of honesty,

Relationships are really only theoretically important to you, aren’t they, Greg.

Do you see, if I want to live a life that honours God,

If I want to live a life of purity and honesty and compassion,

If I want to live a life that reflects what God has called me to,

And I do, I really do.

Then I don’t have a choice. I’ve got to deal with the inner Greg.

And my emotions are the tool, the God given tool,

They’re God’s way of helping me understand who he’s created me to be.

The Bible says it best, the Bible always says it best. - Proverbs 4:23

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.’

Ante-Emotions

Now, it is great to be able to understand yourself. That’s a wonderful start.

But it’s not enough.

God wants more from us than just for us to understand ourselves,

He wants to transform us.

He wants to renew the very deepest part of us.

He wants to make us more like Jesus,

pure and perfect all the way through.

So the question for this second series is how does he do this?

Or even better, how do we partner with him

to enable him to do this in us

What can we put alongside the insight we get from our emotions,

that enables God to do his work in us?

That’s why the second series was called ante-emotions.

Ante means with, beside, next to.

And it’s about what God uses, together with our emotions,

In order to transform who we are.

Now, one of the things that I think becomes clear to everyone

As God uses their emotions to help them see who they are

Is that to a large degree who you are, this inner person

has been very much shaped by the society around us.

Who I am, this inner Greg, has been strongly shaped by my family,

he’s been shaped by my school and my friends,

He’s been shaped by the culture I’ve grown up in.

And there was one key principle that Steve talked about in these sermons.

If society has shaped us,

then the way we can be reshaped is to

practice the spiritual disciplines that take us away from society

the society that molds us and shapes us.

Have a listen to this.

*The fact is…*

*… you’ve actually got to come away from society now and again*

*… to see how much effect she is having on you*

*You’ve actually got to get away from her voices that teach you her values so constantly*

*You’ve got to get away to a place where her voice is so distant and quiet that finally you can hear God*

*Christians actually started leaving society…*

*… in the third century*

*… to get away from its clutches*

*… to get some sanity*

*To find out what right and true was again without society’s noise all around them*

*… They went out into the desert*

*… And in time communities formed there*

*And you might say…*

*… well we don’t have a desert to go out to today*

*So do you know what the answer to that is?*

*… Create your own desert*

So during this series, Steve talked about some of the ways

that we can create our own desert,

ways that we can build spiritual disciplines into our lives,

that allow us to retreat from society that conforms us into its image,

and we can allow God to reshape us into his image.

Here are some of the ideas he talked about.

So, first, he talked about prayer.

Try having three prayer times a day, like Daniel did.

Next, consider the pattern of the Sabbath,

Taking one day a week to rest and relax and focus on God,

To rest and replenish and enjoy

And the last two were about your body.

Cause often we forget that our emotions and our bodies are very closely related,

Often that stink feeling, the feeling of sadness or depression,

Isn’t because there is some deep revelation you need to realise

But it’s just because you’re not eating right.

So, listen to your body, treat it well,

And give up your quest for the perfect body,

Because there is no such thing.

Now, all of those are really good ideas,

good ways of getting away from society and the way that it shapes you.

But the one that I really chose to engage with was the third one, the Sabbath.

I used to be incredibly vigilant about keeping the Sabbath,

I remember telling one of my bosses when I was a management consultant

That I wouldn’t work on a Sunday,

And him looking at me, and he was a nice guy, but he said,

Greg, I just don’t think that’s going to work in this company

But I made it work somehow.

Even though I was kind of hard headed,

God was very gracious to me there.

But over the last several years, my commitment to Sabbath has kind of waned,

And I worried about that, not just for myself, but for my kids too.

I wondered about what sort of example I was setting for them.

And so, our family has instituted a new Sabbath policy for the last 6 months or so.

We have to make sure that all of our work,

All of my work for Laidlaw and for Church,

All of Di’s work for church and the other stuff she does

All of the kid’s homework and music practices and everything,

All of that has to be finished by Saturday evening,

And Sunday is a day where we just hang out together.

And so each of us has a turn. One week it’s James’ turn,

and he gets to say whatever we do on Sunday after church.

The only rules are, it has to be fun, and we have to do it together.

The next week it’s Emily’s turn, and the week after it’s Mum’s turn,

And then it’s mine.

So, we might watch a movie together, or cook a meal, or play a board game,

We might go out to dinner together, or do something else.

Whatever the person who’s on that week decides.

Now, for the most part, I think this has worked really well for us.

We’ve had to learn how to walk a middle road with it.

So once we put in a rule like this, I tend to be quite rigid about it,

No exceptions, period.

On the other hand, Di tends to be quite loose,

But there’s this thing that needs to happen.

But if you’re too loose about it, then it never actually happens,

And if you’re too rigid about it, then it sucks all the fun out of it.

But what we’ve found overall is that Sundays

are now something that we look forward to.

We look forward to being with each other,

We look forward to spending time together,

And we look forward to enjoying each other’s company.

And I think, overall, that has been a really good thing.

Now, has adopting the Sabbath changed my life

and turned me from an emotional cripple into an emotional giant,

Well, no, but it is a little step in the right direction.

It’s a step towards emotional health for my family,

And for me it’s been a step towards intentionally valuing

the very relationships that my inner self naturally shies away from.

The Bible says it best, the Bible always says it best. Rom 12:2

Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world,

But rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is for you,

His good, perfect and pleasing will.

The Wall

So the first series was about our emotions

and how God can speak to us through them,

The second series was about how the insight God gives us through our emotions,

Needs to be matched up, partnered with the spiritual disciplines,

Spiritual disciplines where we pull back from society

So that God can transform the core of who we are.

And the third series,

Was about one of the ways,

Probably the key way that God actually goes about

Transforming the the core of who we are.

And that is through us encountering the wall.

Now, I’m not going to spend much time on this,

Because we’ve been talking about it over the last couple of weeks

So hopefully it is fresh in your brains

But, let’s just briefly remind ourselves about the wall,

Steve defined the wall as being a life defining event that breaks you.

And he said that the key point of it is

that there is nothing you can do about it.

The Wall is not something you can go around

You can’t climb it, you can’t break, you can’t go under

So, some examples of the wall for people were

Childlessness, like Hannah in the Bible.

There’s nothing you can do to fix that.

Or the uncovering of a major sin or addiction, like David.

Or an emotional breakdown, like Elijah.

These are situations that there is nothing you can do about them.

So what happens when you face the wall?

Well this is what Pastor Steve said.

*What then are the challenges we face at The Wall?*

*Firstly it’s to recognise that you are there*

*And stop slamming up against it and ask: Why am I here*

*You see, just because you get to The Wall, doesn’t mean you’ll make it through*

*Are you prepared to let go of power and control?*

*Are you prepared to do the time – however long it is?*

*Can you cope with the fact that so many people around you won’t understand your situation?*

*Are you prepared to reinvent?*

*Can you allow God to pull you to pieces, and slowly remake you again?*

*Or instead, will you build up layers of protection around you?*

*And blame others or control others or push people away*

*The Wall is a decisive point that demands more of us than we ever had to give*

*And we have to choose whether we’ll stay or move on*

*And the reason I really wanted to do this sermon is this:*

*As a church, we have to allow people to come up against The Wall*

Now, I have to admit that when Steve talked about the wall

It wasn’t the first time I had heard of it.

I read about it a year ago, when Steve gave me the Scazzero book

And when I first read about it,

although I hadn’t heard that language before,

I immediately could see which event in my life was the wall,

And what difference it had made.

But unfortunately (or probably fortunately)

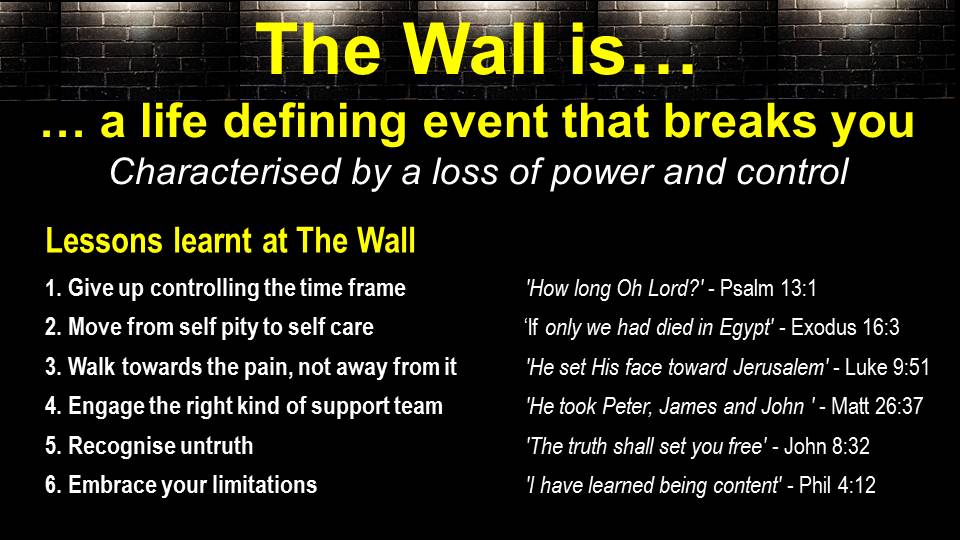
that’s not something I have time to talk about today.

I do want to remind you of the ideas that Steve talked about last week

about what to do when you find yourself at the wall.

We won’t go through them again now,

but they’re up on the powerpoint there.



And what I do want to do just before I close

Is to also tell you what you probably already know,

that it’s not just at the wall that you can grow and develop

Certainly God transforms you at the wall, but not just at the wall.

The reality is for those of you who look at your lives and say,

I don’t think I’ve actually hit the wall yet.

You can prepare. You can get ready.

Every setback, every challenge, every difficulty you face,

No matter how small you can use as training.

You can learn to say to yourself, who is really in control here.

How can I trust God in this situation?

How can I learn to give my life to God here and now?

And for those of you who look back at the wall in your lives,

You can ask yourself, not just how have I grown,

But how can I continue to grow?

Where are the parts of my life where am I clinging onto control?

How can I learn to trust God with all of those parts of me as well?

See, the reality is this, that all suffering, all pain,

all emptiness, all disappointment is seed,

Sow it in God, he will, finally, bring a crop of joy from it.

Nothing will be wasted. Nothing is ever wasted.

The Bible says it best, the Bible always says it best. John 12:24

Very truly I tell you, Jesus said,

unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,

it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Anyone who clings onto their own life will lose their life,

while anyone who loses their life for my sake,

will find that their life is saved.