

EMOTIONAL HEALING

In the 13-plus years I have been counseling professionally, I have learned that there are no two cases exactly alike. Depression in one individual is different than depression in another. Marriage struggles for one couple will be different than any other. We are each dynamic and unique in our gifts and our struggles in life. However, I have also learned that emotional healing involves a common journey or process that requires we pass through, reconcile and deal with, certain stages/places before our emotional journey is completed. We cannot evade these. Some people get blocked by one or more of these stages. Others continue to cycle back through them. Regardless, we must each experience these. I have identified eight such states to emotional/spiritual healing that are common to all. They are 1. Pain and suffering, 2. A genuine desire to get well, 3. Hope, 4. Instruction, 5. Motivation, 6. Obedience, 7. Discipline, and 8. Perseverance. I will define these in subsequent newsletters. In this edition, I would like to talk in detail about the first stage, which must be reconciled before moving on to the next.

1. Pain and Suffering.

In many ways this is the most critical of the stages. Pain and suffering are different concepts. Pain is what brings people in. They desperately want the hurt to stop. The crucial question posed to them here is "Do they hurt bad enough yet?" This sounds a little masochistic, but the fact is that until the pain is greater than the fear of making what could be radical life changes, they will remain where they are in life. In many cases, the pain must be very great to outweigh the fear of change. In cases where people are clearly not in enough pain to bring about the hard work of healing, Reality Therapy must be used to help the individual see how bad things are or could get, should they stay on their present course (i.e. loss of job, family, health, finances, freedom, etc.). This is why it is not uncommon that people feel worse in the early stages of counseling.

They are brought out of their denial and ignorance to face a pretty scary picture sometimes. If we are unsuccessful at raising their level of pain, through awareness, above that of their fear of change and the risks that go along with it, we will be unsuccessful in therapy.

The second part of stage one involves suffering. Suffering is different than pain in that it is what we do cognitively and behaviorally as a result of the pain. Many of us mistakenly learn that suffering is to be avoided at all costs. The reality is that suffering is an absolutely mandatory partner to living. Some have learned to suffer "well" and many suffer very poorly. Suffering must be embraced as a great and wise teacher. If so, it will lead us out of our emotional and spiritual pain. If suffering is done poorly, the journey will be one which will lead us deeper into our pain. An example would be the lonely, depressed individual. To suffer poorly would be that this individual would turn to booze and pot to alleviate the loneliness and fear. It works temporarily and then the pain returns with an even more powerful grip on the emotions of the person. The sufferer will then need more of the substance (or any other vice) to bury the agony and hence, the cycle continues and worsens. The person who has determined to embrace the suffering does not try to evade it. Although the pain may be great, the loneliness is felt and experienced deeply. This takes courage and we find wisdom along this type of suffering. Through perseverance the pain will begin to subside. Much like the athlete who endures the pain of physical and mental training, yet embraces the inherent suffering as necessary and even healthy, so must those suffering with emotional and spiritual pain. The outcome will be similar. We will get stronger and stronger as we *press on toward the goal to win the prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.* (Phil 3:14).

Once this concept is understood and accepted we are prepared to deal with a very pertinent question which may seem silly but is quite profound: Stage 2, Do you want to get well? More on this later.