

Series: THE GOOD LIFE  
Title: *The Essence of Loving Well*  
By: Darrell Bierman  
Date: March 3, 2010

---

[Show Clip] One of my absolute favourite movies is **Jim Carrey's "Bruce Almighty"**. If you haven't seen it, it's about a normal guy – Bruce – who believes he has a crummy life and he blames that crummy life on God. Well, "God" – who turns out to look and sound like Morgan Freeman 😊, gets tired of all Bruce's complaining and decides to give Bruce his job for a little while. Bruce decides to use his almighty power to correct his crummy life and soon discovers that the people who God cares for, the people who he now must care for, will not be ignored. Prayers pile up and Bruce must find a way to love and serve. Well, with normal Jim Carrey hilarity, he tries several things and only makes matters worse. Finally, God levels with him – *"Bruce if you want to see miracles, have proof that I'm for real – BE THE MIRACLE!"* In other words, use me and what I have done for you and what I mean to you, to love others.

People can't see God, they don't hear the voice of Morgan Freeman coming to them regularly 😊, and they certainly can't hook up with him for coffee whenever they need a chat or a pep talk. Other people meet God and know God through you...and me – through believers. We are the ones who can make HIM real to THEM.

While Jim Carrey is a goof and this movie will have you laughing like crazy, the message was bang-on: *It isn't easy but if we want to see miracles – we have to be the miracle!* If we want to experience the presence of God in greater degree, we need to love others and love them well.

Don't want to take Jim Carrey's word for it? Well, the Bible backs it up all over the place – here's a few:

- In 1 Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul tells us that we can do all the good in the world, but if our deeds don't flow from a heart of love – they're useless and don't count for anything (vv.1-3).
- In Romans 13:10 we're told that love is the fulfillment of God's law.
- 1 John 3:11 tells us that really it has been this way from the beginning: *"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."*

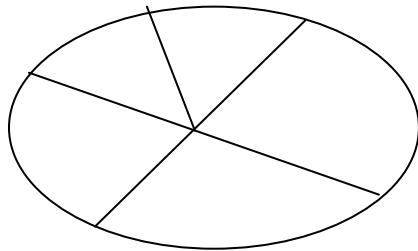
Let's go back to the main theme of this series – spiritual maturity and emotional maturity go hand in hand. We'll hit a ceiling with our spiritual growth if we don't deal with our emotional junk and we won't overcome our emotional junk without giving ourselves over to God and growing in relationship with him.

But lots of us try, don't we? And we've spent a lot of time in this series hearing about those efforts. Some of us spend our whole lives experiencing the same pain over and over because we "go

without God and many of us are frustrated, like Bruce Almighty, and believe that God has abandoned us or doesn't care about it, but we can "miss God" if we ignore the emotional growth messages he gives us.

Love is a big thing to God. Jesus talked more about love in his time on earth than anything else. Loving God, loving others and loving the world replaced the whole big law book of the Old Testament. So we've got the job simplified even. God tells us that if we want to know him better – love better!

Too bad humans don't keep things simple though. We're complex creatures; different components make up who we are – we're like pie:



1. We have a social component;
2. An intellectual component;
3. A physical component;
4. A spiritual component; &
5. An emotional component.

Unfortunately most of us don't give enough attention to that 5<sup>th</sup> piece of the pie; it can be scary to deal with our emotions. Emotions can make us feel out of control. Emotions can be painful, so as a rule we don't make it a point to go there. As a result, we become "out of touch" with our emotions – how can we then:

- Love others well?
- Love God well?
- Love ourselves well?

Really, we can't. We need to remember that God created us with that emotional piece of our pie. And when we ignore this piece it'll negatively affect all of your other pie pieces as well: the social; the intellectual; the physical and yes – the spiritual too.

I want to start this morning by offering you some handles that'll help you get a sense of where you're at right now when it comes to emotional maturity. When I think of chronological maturity I envision 4 main stages: (1) infancy; (2) childhood; (3) adolescence; and (4) adulthood. We can use these same 4 stages to make an inventory on emotional maturity. Ready?

#### **Stage 1: The Emotional Infant:**

When a baby (a person from birth to age one) feels a need, all it does is cry and whine; what choice does it have, I mean it can't talk. Babies must wait for their parents to figure out why they're crying. And if parents don't respond to the right need – like immediately – babies will cry harder and longer! It's a matter of survival for them.

Well, even though you become an adult by age, you can be an emotional infant. Adults stuck in this level of emotional maturity treat others as objects to meet their needs. These adults give the impression that life is very much: “My way or the highway!” These adults really can’t empathize with other people; they’re too wrapped up in themselves. And even though they can communicate with words, they usually don’t use them well.

### **Stage 2: The Emotional Child:**

Chronologically a child is between one and 12 – so let’s picture someone who is 8-years old. 8-year olds are still dependant on their parents for most things. They can communicate with words but they don’t always express themselves (or their anger) clearly. Instead of saying, “I’m really sad because my friend didn’t pick me for the street-hockey team,” the child comes home and starts throwing things, having a tantrum. A child lacks the skills to openly discuss and negotiate getting their needs met. They don’t have the skills yet.

Again, there’s such a thing as an adult who’s an emotional child. These adults still act out resentment through distancing and pouting and whining and clinging and lying and withholding and appeasing. Physically they’re grown up, but emotionally they haven’t matured to the point of being able to openly, honestly and effectively express their needs.

### **Stage 3: The Emotional Adolescent:**

Let’s look at an adolescent (picture someone in their teen years; say 15). Adolescents generally rebel against parental authority and they define themselves in reaction to others. They fear being treated as

a child and think, “Don’t tell me what to do!” Adolescents love you one day and hate you the next. Everything’s extremes: hot or cold; black or white; in or out.

Many physical adults are emotional adolescents. They can’t give without feeling controlled or resentful: “I’ll do this favor for you – but then you’ll owe me – because I’m keeping score.” Their capacity for mutual concern is still missing. It’s still basically one way: “What’s in it for me?” Emotional adolescents are defensive and feel threatened by criticism.

### **Stage 4: The Emotional Adult:**

Here’s the place we strive to get to in life – to be a physical and emotional adult. Here are some of the characteristics of an emotional adult: (1) An emotional adult is able to ask for what they need, what they want and what they prefer. They can do it clearly and directly and yet respectfully and honestly; what the Bible refers to as “speaking the truth in love” (cf., Eph. 4:15). (2) With an emotional adult—it’s not a win – lose: “I win, you lose” or “you win, I lose.” Emotional Adults want both to win (they want the relationship to win). (3) Emotional adults listen with empathy. They consider how the world and the situation looks from another’s point of view. (4) An emotional adult can risk saying what’s needed without attacking the other person. (5) They can respect other people without having to change them. (6) They’re able to resolve conflict and negotiate solutions. (7) And they can give other people (and themselves) room to make mistakes and not be perfect. That’s an emotional adult.

Look at this **graph** and ask yourself, “*Where do I fit in this graph?*”

If you're anything like me, then no one box will fit you completely. You're probably a mix between two – or even three. Nevertheless, identify the box that best describes where you're at right now. Then, determine where you want to be. The main thing is to be honest with yourself.

If we're being honest with ourselves, some of us have to identify ourselves as adults who are emotional infants. There's no judgment in this. In fact, most often when I meet people who fit in that first box it has very little to do with them. Think about it: no-one grows up saying, "When I grow up, I want to be an emotional baby"!

Almost without exception it's more like this: in life each of us is like an actor who's handed a script – a life script. Some of us play the part we've been handed to us – without ever stopping to ask, "*Is this the script I **should** be living?*" Or, "*Is this even the script I **want** to be living?*"

I'll give you an example: one woman, Cynthia, was 8-years-old when her mother was killed in a car accident. Up to this point, she had a very secure attachment to her mom. But her mom dies and her father becomes completely overwhelmed; he goes into depression and grows increasingly isolated from Cynthia – as well as her other siblings. So now her older siblings have to raise her, even though they don't want to (they never signed up for that job). So Cynthia ends up being ignored for the rest of her childhood. She has no memory of receiving comfort during a stressful time. When asked how she felt, she said that no one even noticed her and, as a little girl, she just naturally began to withdraw from people. Eventually she shut herself down emotionally (she had to – to survive). But now she's adult. She gets married. She's got a couple

of kids and now she has a tremendous difficulty tolerating her children's needs or dependence. She had to take care of herself and be independent. She doesn't know how to let her children be dependent upon her. She's still a child herself – at least emotionally.

I share this to illustrate the fact that what happens to us during various stages of our own chronology will leave marks and naturally affect the way we connect and relate to people. Acceptance of this fact, awareness of how our previous experiences affect us, is the first step toward emotional maturity.

Now, just as a chronological infant has a long way to go before becoming a physical adult, so too, adults who are emotional children have a long way to go before being able to love others well. This being said, with God, all things are possible; I believe that (Matt. 19:26). I've seen people, in partnership with God, grow from being adults who are emotional children – to adults who are emotionally mature.

Well we have had a lot of reason to cheer this week with our Canadian athletes kicking butt in so many events at the Olympics! And when those medals go around their necks, we should be celebrating. These men and women have devoted, at minimum, 4 years of their lives toward this singular goal. They've trained hard and made sacrifices. If you ask me though, there are men and women in this church, who when I first met them were emotional children, but over the years have given their lives to God and made it their goal to grow and mature. They've worked hard. And slowly but surely (over the years) they've made huge progress. It would dishonor these people if I mentioned them by name (they're not

looking for public recognition). However, they truly deserve our admiration as well (they already have mine).

When we recognize the link between our emotional maturity level and our ability to love others well, to love God well, and to love ourselves well – we realize how important it is to put in the hard work to grow in this area. Really, we can't afford to not make emotional growth a priority in our lives (especially now that we've seen it so clearly laid out for us)!

Let's take a look at someone in the Bible who modeled loving others well. You might know this person as the Good Samaritan, and his story is recorded in **Luke chapter 10:25-37**. He was a character in one of Jesus' teaching stories – a parable. Let me set it up for you:

A religious "expert" comes up to Jesus and asks, "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" You need to realize that these religious experts already had answers – they were on a constant mission to trick Jesus and catch him breaking their laws. So, what does Jesus say? He says 'love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...and love your neighbor as yourself.' That's it! Love God, love other people; there's the whole Bible in a nutshell.

This religious expert was pretty sure he was fulfilling the first part, but that second part? So he asks Jesus - 'who's my neighbor?'

That's when Jesus tells the story. The story is the answer. This parable takes place on **the road from Jerusalem to Jericho**. This 28km stretch of road was known for being dangerous. Not only because it was steep and narrow, but because thieves would hide out in the caves alongside it – in order to ambush unsuspecting travelers.

In Jesus' story a man is walking on the road and gets mugged. Thieves beat him up and take all of his valuables, even the clothes off his back! So now he's lying there, naked, robbed and half dead. It's a nasty scene. Two people pass by, a priest and a Levite – religious types. These men knew their Bibles (in fact, they'd memorized the first 5 books of the Old Testament). Their whole life was about serving God. But when they see the man on the side of the road, they avoid eye contact and keep walking without even investigating.

Jesus doesn't tell us what's going on with them, but clearly the priest and the Levite have a disconnected spirituality. They've got the "head knowledge" of knowing God but not the "heart knowledge" of knowing God.

Finally a 3<sup>rd</sup> person walks by. Picking up our reading at verse 33:

*But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

*The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

---

There's so much I could say about this parable Jesus told. But I'm going to keep it brief because we're going to use this parable as the backdrop for our new series which kicks off 2 weeks from today.

For now, simply notice the difference between the Samaritan's response and the response of the other two men – the religious guys. Rather than walk by, the Samaritan "takes pity" on the Samaritan. In other words, his heart went out to him; he was able to empathize with him (which is one of the marks of emotional adulthood).

Moved by compassion the Samaritan stops and cares for the injured man, then and there. Clearly this injured man had nothing to offer the Samaritan; in other words, the Samaritan doesn't give to get; he's able to help without thinking, "What's in this for me?" (another mark of emotional adulthood). In fact, by this very act of helping the injured man, this Samaritan was exposing himself to possible danger from robbers too.

After taking the man to an inn, he gives some money to ensure that the man has a place to recuperate, then he continues his own journey (again, a mark of emotional adulthood. See, he's able to help but with healthy boundaries: he doesn't take the injured man home to his mom; he doesn't obligate himself financially for the rest of his life; he doesn't try to be everything for the guy. He continues his journey – whether it was for work or pleasure). He helps, and then picks up with his life (his script).

The Good Samaritan models what it means to have mercy and a healthy and mature love. He loves well.

Jesus often told stories to answer questions – he was telling the religious expert (and us) that we'll feel incomplete if we disconnect our faith from the expression of that faith. We can't live disconnected lives. Our love for God must necessarily reveal itself in a love for others. The parable of the Good Samaritan reiterates what John writes in **1 John 4:8**: 'Anyone who does not love others' does not really love God'!

At this point, many of you are experiencing some emotion – whether it's new feelings or old feelings re-surfacing – bringing up things from previous experiences, maybe in childhood. Hearing Jesus teach about this will stir this up in us when we are open to him. Here are some questions to ask yourself about your own emotional connection:

-Did I learn to trust?

-Did I learn to respect other people?

Did I learn to wait and take turns?

-Did my parents or caregivers understand your behavior?

-Did my parents ask - what's going on? What happened? Or, why are you crying?

- Were your feelings even allowed growing up?

- Were you allowed to be the child or were you expected to be a caregiver for your parent's feelings?

I trust that every person here wants more out of life – and the goal should be growing into emotional and spiritual maturity.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our world is to be a community of emotionally healthy adults who love well. This will take the power of God and a commitment to learn, grow, and break with unhealthy, destructive patterns that go back generations in our families and cultures – and in some cases, our Christian culture also.

Speaking personally, when I think about how much work this will take – just in my own life – I get a little overwhelmed, and in my weaker moments I wonder, “What hope do I even have?”

Then I remember this: the twelve people Jesus chose to form the leadership of his church were neither spiritually nor emotionally mature. Like you and me they had a great deal to learn. By way of example:

- Peter, the point leader, had a big problem with his mouth and was a bundle of contradictions.
- James and John were given the name “sons of thunder” because they were aggressive, hotheaded, ambitious and intolerant.
- Matthew was the most hated person in Capernaum, working in a profession that abused innocent people.
- Simon the Zealot was a freedom fighter and terrorist in his day. And,
- Judas, the treasurer, was a thief and a loner. He pretended to be loyal to Jesus before finally betraying him.

With the exception of one, however, all of them had one great quality. **They were willing.** That’s all he asks of us.

I’m willing to journey the long hard road of growing into an emotionally mature adult. I recognize God’s call in it. I also see the rewards or benefits: benefits to me personally, benefits to the people I interact with, and benefits to my relationship with God. And that’s why I respond to God call by saying: “Yes Lord, I am willing.”

How about you?