

## **Strength Training – Overcoming Bad Character**

Welcome back! The last time I was up here was near the end of November! So I thought it might be a good idea to just recap quickly what we talked about. We talked about the power of stories and how stories were a crucial part of the Bible and were actually Jesus' primary tool for teaching.

We also looked at some of the scientific evidence for the power of story through Paul Zak's research. He said that if we: Kept the attention of the listener, we were likely to engage the emotions of the listener, if we engaged the emotions of the listener it was likely that the listener would be able to do what the storyteller said.

-this is NOT manipulation. People still have a choice to do what they want. What it means is that you now have a NEW possibility the next time you feel the same way the story made you feel.

-For example: anger. You may have always responded by throwing something or yelling. In the moment it actually feels like this is the only option. It's reactive. Through engaging stories, we can learn new options, so that the next time we feel angry, we have two options: 1) throw stuff and yell; 2) disengage, calm down, reconnect to Jesus and respond in love.

-Still an OPTION, so there is a choice. If you remember, I shared my story of running late for swimming lessons and lecturing my boys in the car after. Well since then it did happen again and I was able to get us out the door without the lecture and with a better handle on my emotions. I was able to remember like I wanted to that my boys are more important than being a bit late.

### **To summarize, a good character story:**

- Keeps our ATTENTION
- Engages our EMOTION
- Teaches us an appropriate RESPONSE

We looked at the key points for writing character stories and for sharing character stories and I included them in your notes.

### **Discuss: do one of these two.**

1. Journal: Am I a good story teller? Do I keep people's attention or do I use too much detail and talk too long? What kind of stories am I sharing – gossiping? Venting? Harping? Stories that leave me and others with only bad action and reaction options? If so, spend time in confession. Share in 3's.

2. What kind of stories am I filling my mind with and my kids' minds with? (Videos, movies, books, video games) Ask Jesus to show you if there is anything you need to change or get rid of? Share in 3's.

### **A. Recognizing Overwhelm in Ourselves and Others**

Remember, most of our bad actions and reactions happen when we are overwhelmed. **The first step to overcoming bad character is growing in self-awareness.** Learning to recognize WHEN we are overwhelmed is a very important first step to overcoming the bad actions/reactions that result from being that way. We want to learn to recognize the signs that we are overwhelmed and recognize when others are overwhelmed.

Did you know that we actually share empathetic states of emotional being with each other? We laugh when others laugh and we cry with others who are crying. And if you are approaching someone in fear, that will often trigger them into fear as well and you end up with a self-fulfilling prophecy and get the fight you were afraid of having in the first place. Because we were created to bond together, to relate to each other, to empathize with each other, we have to be careful when others are overwhelmed that we don't join them in their misery!!! And Misery loves company!

If we do not recognize when others are overwhelmed, chances are we will join them in their anxiety, etc. and now we will both be at risk for losing our love and responding poorly. What we need to be is a life preserver for people, we need to recognize overwhelm and be that safe place. If you don't recognize what is happening in others as overwhelm we will tend to react out of anger rather than being tender and gentle. For example, your child is having a meltdown about something. They are crying or yelling. You pick. But they are losing it and you THINK you know why but they can't tell you right now because they are freaking out. Normally as parents, how do we respond? Honestly? In frustration, annoyance and anger, right? We fail to see that they are in overwhelm about something, something happened that they don't have the capacity to handle properly so they are in overwhelm which is leading to their bad actions and reactions. So rather than joining them in their overwhelm, we need realize that they are in overwhelm and respond gently.

**INTERACTIVE PRACTICUM: (Teacher write the answers on a whiteboard, moms write them down in their notes.)**

1. Have everyone share different signs of overwhelm they see in others.
2. Have everyone share different signs of overwhelm they see in themselves.

### **B. Dealing with Bad Character in the Moment**

Once we have identified that the emotions we are feeling are making us feel overwhelmed we need to practice using S.T.A.R.

**Stop – don't fix the problem or respond hastily**

**Take a breather and calm down**

**Appreciate the Connect to Jesus**

**Respond in Love**

It is always best when we can deal with something the right way on the first try and not have to go back and fix our bad actions and reactions later. If you learn to recognize when you or the people you are dealing with are getting overwhelmed early on, it is much easier to calm down and make sure you respond in a loving manner. Once we are overwhelmed, we usually feel completely justified in our unloving responses. Don't we see this in our kids all the time? Well, he wouldn't leave my room when I asked him nicely so I had to shove him really hard to get him to leave. Or this one, my kids wouldn't listen to me the first few times I asked them so I had to yell at them to get their attention!

Remember, as Christians, regardless of what is happening, we are NEVER justified in respond in an unloving manner. No matter what is happening!

### **C. Dealing with Consistently Bad Character**

We all have times when in the moment we act out of character and respond badly. In those times, we just work on quick recovery. Apologize quickly and make things right.

But then there is this other category of struggles we have. These are systemic. They are areas of our lives when our character is consistently bad. What we want, our goal is to be predictable in our behaviour and to usually be loving in our responses. Good character means that most of the time we are loving in our responses to people. On the flipside, we can also be predictable in our bad character. It could be an addiction, anxiety, anger problem, relational problem with our spouse or kids. We often refer to these issues as sinful bondage. Areas where we feel trapped in our bad actions and reactions. When we identify these areas of bad character in our lives, we usually aren't able to deal with them "in the moment" so STAR is not that helpful. So we have to learn to deal with these after the fact. STAR is the proactive response, deal with your overwhelm and prevent the bad reaction. But what if you can't, then we deal with it after the fact. Isn't that encouraging that there is something we can do to change, especially when you feel like something will never change! So now I want to show you what we can do to deal with our bad actions after the fact.

Remember that our bad actions and reactions come from overwhelm? If we are to learn to change our actions and reactions, we have to deal with the

underlying emotional overwhelm that is fueling the fire of the bad responses. Once we identify that, we usually find there are lies circulating in our minds that we have to deal with and then deal with forgiving and releasing the people we feel are responsible for the overwhelm.

**For example: Mom snapping on her kids:** You have a mom that is consistently have problems with blowing up on her kids when they make mistakes. When we look at the underlying emotions and thoughts or lies ties with them, we find:

-when the kids don't respond well, mom feels shame, which leads to feeling like a failure, which leads to feelings of hopelessness because she never gets is right, which leads to anger at her kids for making her feel this way!

-this leads to her blowing up on her kids when they make mistakes, instead of being patient with them and shepherding them through their own overwhelm and lack of experience in life.

-she is going to have to deal with her bad action/reaction, bad character, she will have to deal with the underlying emotional overwhelm, the lie based thinking and forgive her kids in order for her to be able to start changing her responses.

**For example: Man with a porn problem:** let me just share this in light of what our church is going through and also because it will show you what I mean by forgiving...

You have a husband who consistently is looking at porn. He tells himself and his wife he won't do it anymore, but then ends up doing it again. When we begin to identify the overwhelming emotions he feels before he looks, we find:

-He feels his wife isn't giving him enough sex (may or may not be true-regardless it is NOT AN EXCUSE) or not noticing him or respecting him so he feels rejected, lonely and misunderstood.

-This leads to thoughts of him being unworthy, unlovable, a failure, less than a man...

-Since in him mind, his wife is responsible for how he feels, he gets angry and bitter toward her and looks for ways to make himself feel better...in the moment he feels justified, afterward he feels shame.

So in order to deal with his porn problem, we have to:

a. deal with the overwhelming emotions: loneliness, rejection, hopelessness (can't go to his wife), shame and anger.

b. Deal with the lies he feels about himself: unworthy, unlovable, less than...

c. Deal with forgiving his wife: NOTE: his wife actually hasn't done anything wrong. She didn't force him to view pornography, nor did she even necessarily do anything to MAKE HIM FEEL unworthy.

-Forgiveness isn't just about forgiving someone when they have actually done us wrong. Forgiveness means: we will no longer hold the other person responsible. Sometimes this means forgiving actions, where people have truly wronged us.

But the vast majority of the forgiveness we need to do is forgiving others for how they made us FEEL, whether they did anything wrong or not. This does NOT have to be done with the other person's knowledge. It can be done between us and God. So the husband would be forgiving his wife for making him feel unloved, unimportant, lonely...And the mom would forgive her kids for making her feel hopeless, like a failure and so on.

#### **D. A Plan for Dealing with Consistently Bad Character**

1. Identify the problem.
2. Identify the emotional overwhelm at the root of the problem.
3. Identify any lie based thinking that has resulted from the overwhelming emotions.
4. Forgive the people involved for how they MADE YOU FEEL, not just focusing on the actions committed against you.

-Appreciate the people who made you feel overwhelmed.

5. Listen to Jesus for how he sees the situation and what he wants you to know about the lies you've believed, as well as how you should be responding in the future.

6. Practice using the Character Stories to better learn how to respond to the specific emotions at the root of the bad character.

-If shame is at the root, practice lots of shame stories.

Then the next time the situation comes up:

-deal with it using S.T.A.R.

-because you have worked through the issue, the emotional intensity should be lowered and you can begin practicing a new way of responding in Love

-REMEMBER: Loving people like this cannot be done alone! We will only be able to change through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Prayer is necessary for any real and lasting change to take place.

**Share my practicum story and then lead them through the practicum.**

**Take Home:**

1. Get out a piece of paper and leave it somewhere you will see it regularly. On the paper write down signs you see of overwhelm in your kids and in your husband.
2. Fill out the character story sheet dealing with one of the emotions you identified in the practicum today. For example, if the underlying overwhelming emotion was fear then write out a story on fear.