

## Strength Training - Dealing With Overwhelming Emotions

**Journal and then Discuss:**

**Pick one of these three options.**

- a. **Over the past two weeks did you notice overwhelm in yourself?**
- b. **Did you get a chance to practice STAR...share what happened.**
- c. **Two weeks ago we worked through a problem and identified the emotions and lies that made it intense and hard for you to respond in love. Did that situation come up again? Did you notice a change in how you handled it?**

**Write out in point form the “story” so you can share it.**

**-Briefly write out what happened**

**-Share how you felt, including feeling words for emotion and body**

**-Share how you responded to what happened. If you had a loving response, where how you responded. If your response was not loving, include how you responded followed by how you wish you had responded in love.**

\*\*\*God created stories to be used as a powerful tool for teaching and learning, but also for bonding!

Two weeks ago we talked about overcoming bad character. It started by recognizing when we are overwhelmed so hopefully we can stop ourselves before we do bad things. And I told you the underlying cause of much of our bad character is overwhelming emotions. And in those overwhelming emotions there are often lies that we have bought into without even realizing it. So self-awareness is very important. Taking time to think about what we are feeling and what thoughts keep scrolling through our brains. This is something that we don't have to do by ourselves thankfully. Because honestly, most of us don't even know what's all going on in our brains. So I showed you how we can do this with Jesus and let Him show us what's going on in our heads and help us deal with the roots of our bad character.

And then we looked at the forgiveness piece and how we need to forgive others not only for their actions and words that have hurt us but for how they have made us FEEL! And some of you have mentioned to me how mind blowing it was to realize you did have to forgive your kids. How you had been harbouring offense toward them for making your life hard, tiring and so on.

Today we want to circle back to unpack the underlying cause of much of our bad character, overwhelming emotions.

Let's pray.

### **A. The Message Our Emotions Are Sending**

There are 6 key different overwhelming emotions that are often at the root

of our bad actions and reactions. If you've watched the movie Inside Out you can probably identify almost all of them. Sadness, disgust, fear, hopeless despair, shame and anger. What we want to look at first is the message each of these emotions give us. Just like our nerve endings in our fingers tell us when we have touched something that is too hot, our emotions each have a specific message for us too.

### 1. The message of sadness is: Loss.

-When we lose something, or someone, or miss out on something we were looking forward to doing or experiencing, we feel loss. That is what sadness is telling us.

-There are lots of different levels and measures in which we can feel sadness. Death of a loved one is a deep level, but having your evening out cancelled can also bring sadness. Or losing a favourite toy.

### 2. The message of disgust is: That's not life giving.

-When we encounter something that is disgusting it can be something gross like poop, puke or sour milk.

-It can also be someone's behaviour that is disgusting. Like talking dirty or being vulgar in their behaviour. It can even be things like nails on a chalkboard, or chewing with your mouth open.

-When we feel disgust, we want to pull away. We think "YUCK!" Sometimes that can be a good thing. When dealing with spoiled milk it's good because it prevents us from drinking something that would make us sick. The message of disgust then protects us from doing things or consuming things that are not life giving and could harm us.

-When dealing with people however, the most common thing that happens is we SHAME the person causing us disgust. Because shame causes us to pull away, this can easily trigger SHAME in the person causing us disgust.

-This is why we need to be really careful with disgust, we need to separate the action or circumstance causing the disgust from the people that may be behind it. So when our kid poops in their pants during potty training we need to separate the grossness of the poop in their pants with the child who has pooped. The poop in the pants is disgusting. Our child is not disgusting!

### 3. The message of fear is: I need to get away.

-When we encounter something really overwhelming or something that we think is dangerous we feel fear and want to get away.

-This can be perceived fear such as being afraid of the dark - what is lurking in my closet?

-Or fear of rejection - will they still love me if...?

-Or fear of the unknown - what is going to happen to us?

-We can also be fearfully of people's behaviour. People yelling at you, or fear of your children throwing a temper tantrum when you ask them to clean up.

-We can also be fearful of things that can actually harm us like poisonous snakes, bears, tornadoes and so on

-When we feel fear we want to get away! When we stay in fear for extended periods of time or when the intensity of the fear is too high, we become non-relational and end up in our flight, fight or freeze reactions. This can be a good thing if we encounter something that could hurt us. It makes us react and grab our kids out of the way when a car is zooming past.

-But it can be damaging when we are dealing with people and the fears are perceived. Such as the fear of someone's response to us, (when you don't want to discipline your child because you are afraid of their response) or the fear of rejection (so you avoid or get mad and fight someone for a perceived wrong).

#### 4. The message of hopeless despair is: I lack the time and resources - I can't do this!

-Whenever we encounter a situation, or people or circumstances or feelings that seem impossible to manage we begin slipping into hopeless despair. This is one of those feelings that best drives us to Jesus because it's when we realize that we can't do anything about what's going on that we look around for someone who can do something about it. And that's when we go to Jesus. Because He can do something! When we get to the end of ourselves, we are in the best position possible to release control and turn to God who is our hope!

-In this way, it's actually good for us to feel hopeless. When we feel like we can do things on our own - we do! When we feel that we can't do it anymore - we reach out to God for help! In fact, if you look at Biblical history you will find hopeless despair at the beginning of basically every big event of Scripture. People would get to the end of themselves, humble themselves and pray and God would powerfully deliver them.

#### 5. The message of shame is: You're not happy to be with me.

-When we do something that makes others unhappy to be around us, we feel shame. This could be sin, mistakes, or perceived things where we just THINK that if I do this, people won't like me.

-Shame is one of the hardest emotions to learn to respond to in a positive way. Which is why we are going to look at it this morning a bit deeper after we've gone through all the emotions.

-We are created to be connected to God and others through relationships. This was God's plan for us all along. Shame is the message we feel when we lose that connection to others.

-This can be good, as it teaches us to change our behaviour so we can reconnect. If we sin, we feel shame, which tells us we need to make right what we did and then change our behaviour. If we do this right away, this is healthy.

-The problem comes when we don't know how to handle shame and instead of dealing with our actions, we instead internalize and dwell on our mistakes.

-Some of the toxic shame we feel is when we have made a mistake, or failed at something, bondage to sin or extended periods of time, areas where we have had little or no control over, but then feel shame. These can be the hardest to deal with! Maybe some of you feel this toxic shame over how you treat your

kids over and over...I have felt that. This is where we need a really strong connection to Jesus, where we can receive his forgiveness and mercy and grace.

-But sometimes our shame and our kids' shame comes not because we did anything wrong. Like when they trip and fall in front of others, or say something super cute and everyone laughs but they perceive it as laughing AT them. For kids it is important that they have safe people that they can trust to work through their feelings. As adults, we need people to AND we have Jesus.

#### **6. The message of anger is: I need to protect myself (or others!)**

-When we encounter an injustice, either personally or against someone else, we feel that something isn't fair, we get angry and feel the need to protect ourselves and others! This could be seeing sin like abuse or sex crimes. We don't have to experience them personally to get angry when we hear of others going through that.

-We get angry when something isn't fair like they get a promotion, or as a kid your sibling gets three more marshmallows than you! So you get angry to protect your rights and be treated equally. People who struggle with the shame message also often struggle with anger. So you make a mistake and someone points it out, you feel shame, but don't know how to recover, so you start feeling, "this is not fair!" and you get angry. So instead of owning your mistake and making it right, you end up snapping on the person who confronted you.

-Anger is often viewed by many as all together a bad emotion. Something we don't want to feel! We even tell others not to get mad about this or that. But the Bible tells us something different. Ephesians 4:26 says "in your anger, do not sin, don't let the sun go down while you are still angry." So anger in an of itself is NOT sin. How we respond to anger can be sinful.

-Anger in an of itself is a very strong emotion, a high energy emotion that takes lots of practice to handle in a life-giving manner. Usually when we get angry we lose sight of people and relationships and are only able to focus on the perceived cause of our anger. This is where anger becomes dangerous and is why we are admonished in Scripture to be SLOW to anger. SLOW to speak.

So that's the 6 big emotions. They were created by God to tell us something. We were made to feel them. Jesus felt all of them.

### **B. Common Bad Actions and Reactions to the Big 6**

Now how do we deal with them without constantly going into overwhelm? First let's look at some of the common bad actions and reactions we have when we experience these emotions.

Common to all 6:

**Retreat and isolate** - avoid the person or circumstance that makes you feel

that way (quit, run away, freeze, go to sleep)

**Dismiss feelings in yourself and others** - ignore that the feeling is valid “you shouldn’t be afraid of the dark...you’re a big girl”

**Addictions and BEEPS** (behaviours, events, entertainment, people and substances)

**Anger** (blame others, attack others, blow up)

A few more specific ones:

**Bottle it up and get bitter (anger)**

**Overreact and shame the person responsible (disgust)**

**Panic (fear)**

**Anxiety and worry (fear)** - fear is the feeling but anxiety has the added thoughts. The thoughts that accompany anxiety can be based in truth or lies.

**Self-deprecate** - woe is me, I am a worthless person.. (sadness)

**Discuss/journal: Which emotion do you have the hardest time dealing with in yourself? When your kids feel one of the big 6, which one do you handle the worst? Which of the common bad actions and reactions do you use to handle it?**

Remember that our emotions are a good thing. They tell us something. But often we haven’t been taught to handle them well and that’s what we need to grow in. When we learn better ways of dealing with emotional overwhelm, then learning to act and react differently becomes possible!

### **C. How to Overcome Our Strong Emotions**

As with any type of overwhelm, **the real issue is the relationship.** As relational beings, **restoring the connection with God and others is the key to processing all emotional overwhelm in a healthy way.** **The best thing to do then is first to S.T.A.R.**

So before you react, take a breather and calm down so that you can properly respond in a way that is still loving to that person.

-When you are dealing with high energy emotions like fear and anger you have to be really careful because we very, very quickly lose our ability to think rationally and stay relational. So remove yourself quickly! Then S.T.A.R.

-When you are dealing with draining emotions like hopeless despair and sadness we tend to disengage if we don’t find an answer or relief quickly. And we turn to things that will make us feel better. The key here is to turn to Jesus through prayer, worship and getting His perspective.

-When dealing with sadness we also need to allow ourselves to grieve over what we lost. Acknowledge the loss.

-When dealing with shame from actions where we hurt others, the best way to start is by taking responsibility for your actions and apologizing! That’s the

beauty of being a Christian, no matter how many times we fail there is forgiveness! When you are dealing with shame from mistakes or things outside our control, the best way to deal with it is to come to terms quickly with what happened, remember that everyone makes mistakes and that your actions and what happens to you does NOT define who you are. Learning to laugh at yourself is so important, and learning to give yourself and others the room to make mistakes!

**-do prayer sheet and character story on one of the emotions you tend to handle the worst.**

**Take Home:**

1. Take some time in your devotions and review a negative parenting moment. What big emotion or emotions did you feel and how did you handle it? If you responded in love, thank God for that and if you didn't then confess that to God and listen for a way to respond differently next time.
2. Take some extra time to quiet yourself throughout the day. Listen to a good song and take deep breaths. Try the Knock and Rub while listening to a song. Or lie down, tense all your muscles while you hold your breath and then release them while listening to a good slow song.