

Open Windows III – Window of Emotion (Temptations Series – Part IV)

8/23/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. While we tend to use the terms interchangeably, “feelings” and “emotions” are somewhat different. Starting from comments made early in the sermon, how would you define each to show those differences?

Feelings tend to be related to temporary events. We touch something and talk about feeling it. Thus, a person might be feeling good or feeling angry, but that’s a temporary state.

Emotions tend to reflect a constant status or condition of our hearts (souls?). We are postured in a certain way because of something inside of us. Thus, a person might be perceived as being an angry person because that describes their personality, rather than a response to a fleeting situation. Note the difference between being known as an angry person and a person who happens to be angry at a given moment.

2. Pastor Steve commented that small things that happen to us can be more difficult to handle than big things. Does that make any sense to you?

The big things that happen to us often are predictable and others will have experience going through the same thing, so they can empathize and share solutions. Losing a job has a predictable set of ramifications and a set of solutions that are pretty well understood.

On the other hand, the little things that bug us as we go about our daily life often are barely perceptible, even by us. In and of themselves, they are not worth worrying about, but as they accumulate over the days and weeks, they can become a massive force (either good or bad).

3. Pastor Steve described two responses we tend to have at a moment when something happens to us. What were they and how are they different from each other?

a) an initial impulsive response – instincts are in high gear, especially if what is happening is new or unusual. “Fight or Flight” would be an example of this kind of response.

b) a more reasoned response that can be put into action if we take a moment to think about what is triggering our response and whether or not our initial impulsive response

really makes any sense or is driven by things like selfish ambition or bitter envy. (see James 1:19-21 – be quick to listen and slow to speak; slow to become angry)

4. So what are the options for this window that tends to let feelings and emotions fly in and out? Pastor Steve talked about two, but there is an obvious third option too.

a) leave the window open - let the feelings fly; talk about our feelings, assign authority to our feelings.

b) leave the window open, but pull down the shade – we are still having the same feelings, but we don't let others look into our lives. This can lead to all sorts of problems because we are not being open with those around us.

c) close the window – not mentioned, but one “solution”. If we try to suppress any feelings or emotions, we become “dead” to what is happening around us. We can't react properly, because we are trying so hard not to react at all.

Note that the first one can be either bad or good. Letting emotions and feelings fly freely out in the open lets everyone know exactly how we are reacting to a situation, but it may be pretty overwhelming for those around us who get caught in the tidal wave.

5. Read James 3:13 and reflect on how the wise person is described.

A connection is made between a wise person and a humble or gentle person. It is as if the person's wisdom and understanding of life as a whole, and the situation at hand in particular, reflects a knowledge that God can take any situation and make something good out of it, so it's not worth getting too worked up about it either (whether by responding in euphoria or in anger).

6. Read James 3:14 – 16 and note the contrast.

These verses describe a person with faulty motivations, which lead to boasting, denying the truth, and the sowing of disorder. Given that we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7-8), this person is in for a tough life.

7. Finally, read James 3:17 – 18 and list all the good attributes that describe a person who has the kind of wisdom that comes only from God.

This person is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, bears good fruit, impartial, sincere, and a peacemaker.

8) When you compare the attributes described in verses 17 & 18 (the upper part of the window) with those described as the lower part of the window (anger, fear, stress, impatience, bitterness, hatred, sadness, depression, despair, guilt, shame, and boredom) the choice seems so obvious, yet many people make the wrong choice. Why is that?

The path of selfish ambition and envy is the easier path to take. Worrying only about ourselves seems to come naturally to us. We want to be in control, rather than giving over control to God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, the two greatest commandments according to Jesus.

9) So what are some better steps to take that will protect us from letting our feelings and emotions rule our lives?

a) constrain ourselves – take a deep breath before reacting; consider what all is happening and the circumstances surrounding what is going on. It may be that the context will provide us with insights that will allow us to react more appropriately.

b) create and enforce boundaries between us and the situations that annoy us. This doesn't mean building walls that isolate us, but rather that we only let things go so far before we take appropriate action. For example, if our children are not behaving, we could let them know what they are doing wrong and then tell them we are going to count to three. This gives them an opportunity to correct the situation, but also sets down a boundary beyond which we will take action.

c) talk to people – don't become a warehouse of emotions and feelings accumulating over time waiting for the door to burst open and release it all at once. Find someone who can help put things in proper proportion and place.