

UNPACKING EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE
GFC - Pastor Deb - 1/19/20

About 15 years ago I took a mission trip to Africa with a team of women. Now I don't know about you, but when I travel I don't travel light. It took me 3 weeks to pack for that trip!

I packed very carefully to stay within the 50-pound weight limit. The problem was that when we got to the airport and had our luggage weighed - some people's bags were over the limit. So, the person leading the trip decided we all had to open our luggage and put some of their clothes in our bags while the attendants weighed each bag until we all met the requirements.

Here we are in the airport with clothes flying all over the place. We were holding up the line and people were angry. The attendants weren't happy either. Plus, we we're in danger of missing our flight.

Eventually we all met the requirements, but our excess baggage almost caused us to miss our flight, it made others angry at us and it was embarrassing. But you know what? That's just how it is when Christians carry around excess emotional baggage like selfishness, pride, rejection, and unforgiveness.

This excess emotional baggage weighs us down, causes us to miss out in life, causes others to get angry and leaves us feeling embarrassed and humiliated. To start the year off right - we need to unpack our emotional baggage!

We are in a sermon series called "Starting The Year Off Right."
 Today I'm speaking on "Unpacking Emotional Baggage."

God's greatest commands to us are found in Matthew 22:37-40

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Jesus said that the most important thing is life is love. If we succeed at every other area of life, but we fail to love, we've missed the meaning of life. But many of us do not love God or others like we know we should because we are weighed down with excess emotional baggage.

It's like this:

We're praying "God I need a breakthrough." Then we're perplexed when breakthrough doesn't come.

But God is saying "I'm trying to give you a breakthrough but your excess baggage is in the way."

First, you must get rid some of your baggage...then you will experience breakthrough. Actually, getting rid of excess baggage in itself is a breakthrough!

And many things can cause excess emotional baggage: things like being abused, neglected or rejected as a child. Or being hurt or betrayed by someone we trusted.

As a result we're fearful of trusting anyone or being vulnerable. Maybe we try to control others or we have out-of-control anger issues. Maybe we have unforgiveness or we're easily offended.

All of these negative emotions can destroy our ability to love. That's why we need to unpack our bags so we can truly love!

Love is one of the most powerful forces on earth. Love has the power to change evil to good, sadness to joy, hopelessness to hopefulness. Without love we feel empty and useless. When we are loved, we feel full and alive.

1 John 4:16 says: *God is love.* Not that He loves or He has love, but He is love. And when we accept His love we will love others. 1 John 4:19-21 says:

We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We won't be able to fully love others until we first experience God's love.

Do you believe that God loves you just the way you are?

He loves us despite our immaturity

He loves us even with our bad attitude

He loves us regardless of our failures

Even with all our quirky ways we are permanently and irrevocably loved by God.

Jeremiah 31:3 says: *... the Lord appeared to His people and said, "I love you people with a love that will last forever."*

When we understand this it will impact every aspect of our relationships.

When we don't understand this it will hinder every aspect of our relationships.

It will hinder:

Our love for ourselves- If we don't think God loves us how can we love us?

Our love for others- If God doesn't love us how can we love others?

You see, nothing is going to change our heart except love.

Proverbs 19:22 says: *What a man desires is unfailing love.*

Everybody wants to be loved. But as I said earlier, when we have excess baggage we can't receive or give love as God intended. That's why to start the year off right we need a breakthrough.

So, how we can unpack our emotional baggage so we can love?

1. The first bag to unpack is SELFISHNESS:

SELFISHNESS will destroy love.

As a matter of fact, selfishness seems to be the number 1 enemy of love. It is the number 1 cause of conflict, the number 1 cause of arguments, the number 1 cause of broken relationships and one of the biggest hindrances to breakthrough. James 4:1-2 says:

What causes fights and quarrels, don't they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but you don't get it.

You see, it's human nature to think about ourselves and not others. I naturally think about my needs, my interests, my hurts. However, if we want to love others, we must also consider their needs. Philippians 2:4 says:

Look out for one another's interest, not just your own.

That's selflessness...and selflessness is the antidote for selfishness. Listen, selflessness can transform others. When you're selfless, it causes the other person to change because you're changed, and they have to relate to you differently. When you selflessly give others what they need, not what they deserve, even the most unlovable person can be transformed.

When Joe and I married I had a lot of issues. I came from a very dysfunctional family. I was verbally, emotionally and sexually abused. As a result, I was very immature.

There were so many times that I behaved badly towards Joe. I would yell and say mean things to him. I would pick a fight and then give him the silent treatment. I would be totally selfish, and Joe would just love me selflessly. He would ask forgiveness even though I was the one who was wrong.

I remember one time I was so mad that I got out of the car at a stop light, slammed the door and started to walk home. He parked the car and walked with me until we resolved the problem.

No matter how mean I was Joe always loved me selflessly. And I can tell you that love transformed me. The Message version of Galatians 6:7-8 says:

The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others and ignoring God, harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for it in his life is weeds. But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life and eternal life.

This verse is talking about sowing and reaping.

Whatever you sow in life, you're going to reap.
 If you sow criticism, people are going to be critical of you.
 If you sow love, people are going to love you.
 If you want to plant good seeds, the above verse says, "Plant in response to God."

In relationships, we need to respond to God, not to what others do. That means when somebody is offensive, I don't react to the offense. Instead I respond the way God would. I respond in the opposite spirit.

If they're hateful, I'm loving.

If they're mean, I'm kind.

If they're rude, I'm polite.

And that is selflessness.

If you don't get anything else I say today, get this: The greatest lesson in life is learning to be unselfish... and learning to be unselfish is a life long lesson.

2. The second bag to unpack is PRIDE:

If you are critical, judgmental or you tend to look down on people...

If you are stubborn, or if you find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry."

If you choke on your apologies, and you hardly ever admit you're wrong, you may have a pride problem.

This kind of an attitude can ultimately lead to prideful arguments.

Proverbs 13:10 says, *Pride leads to arguments.*

One of the first signs of pride is an argumentative spirit. A prideful person is always in an argument with someone and they just can't figure out why.

"Why doesn't everyone see it my way? What's wrong with all these people?"

If you find yourself arguing all the time you may have pride problem. Now I know this may be hard for you to accept because one of the problems with pride is we're too prideful to admit we're prideful. And the outcome is usually devastating to our relationships.

Proverbs 16:18 says: *Pride will destroy a person. A proud attitude leads to ruin.*

So, what's the antidote to pride? Pride destroys love but HUMILITY encourages love.

Listen to these five things that promote loving relationships in I Peter 3:8:

Live in harmony. Be sympathetic. Love each other. Have compassion, and be humble.

No one is more humble than Jesus, coming from heaven to earth, becoming a man, giving His life for us, and being resurrected for us.

Philippians 2:3 & 5-6 says:

Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not demand and cling to His rights as God.

As we spend time with Him, we become more like Him – which means we will be more humble and that enables us to love others.

3. The third bag to unpack is UNFORGIVENESS

Everybody makes mistakes. We all sin. No one is perfect. As a result, we're going to hurt others and they're going to hurt us. The question is what do we do with that hurt? Are we going to harbor unforgiveness or are we going to forgive?

The antidote for unforgiveness is forgiveness. And if you're going to have a long-term, lasting relationships or marriages you're going to need massive doses of forgiveness. Colossians 3:13 says:

You must make allowances for each others' faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Sometimes we think, "I can't do it. I cannot forgive that person." I felt that way about my step-father who abused me. My unforgiveness did not bother him, but it held me in a prison. It kept me bound up for years. I knew I should forgive him, but I could not do it in my own strength. I wanted to do right, but in myself I had no power to love him.

So I prayed and prayed for God to give me the power to forgive and love. One thing God did was remind me of how much He had forgiven me. Titus 3:3-6 says:

Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But, when God our Savior revealed His kindness and love, He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior.

I'll never forget the joy and freedom that came into my life when I obeyed God and traveled to Michigan before my step father died to tell him I forgave him. He was very apologetic and I had a major breakthrough after this. Sometimes we can only forgive by the power of God.

One thing that helps is getting an understanding of what forgiveness is. You see forgiveness is not making excuses for the person who hurt you. It's not minimizing the hurt. It's not saying it wasn't wrong.

Forgiveness is letting go of my right to get even.

Why? Because holding on only makes me miserable.

Some of you are still allowing situations from your past to hurt you. You have a grudge and you can't let go. Forgiveness is the only way to let it go and move on with your life.

4. The fourth bag to unpack is REJECTION:

My childhood was a blueprint for rejection. I was raised by an angry abusive stepfather who said things to me like: You don't have a brain in your head or you'll never amount to anything. On top of that, I can't remember a single time my mother ever hugged me or said, "I love you."

As a result, I grew up feeling worthless, ashamed, fearful, and rejected. I am telling you this is because I want you to know that I am not speaking to you today about something I learned in a book. I am speaking to you about my life. I know what it is like to live with rejection. I also know what it is like to have a breakthrough.

Rejection is something that affects everyone at some point in their life. Paul talks about feeling rejection in 2 Cor. 12:15-16.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. But be that as it may.

The word spent means to give completely or exhaust. Paul knew there is a price to pay to love others. What will it cost us? EVERYTHING! Sometimes the cost is loving without being loved in return. Paul said, *the more abundantly I love you, the less you love me.*"

Have you ever felt this way? I have. We express this feeling with statements like:

"Why am I always the one having to do all the giving."

"I'm always the one that has to initiate."

Without exception everyone has felt rejection. Rejection is an experience so universal that it almost requires no definition. But I'm going to define it anyways. The word rejection literally means "to throw back." It means "to discard as worthless, useless or substandard."

That's how rejected people feel – worthless - useless - less than - not good enough.

Many great men and women in the Bible experienced rejection.

- Moses was rejected by the Egyptians.
- Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery.
- Naomi wanted to go with Ruth, but she told her no.
- David's father overlooked him when Samuel came to choose a King.
- Even Jesus the son of God was rejected.

Isaiah 53:3 says:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

When Jesus went to His hometown they rejected Him and even tried to throw Him off a cliff. John 1:11 says:

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

The fact that Jesus was rejected illustrates a basic truth – even if you’re perfect, people will still reject you.

But you don’t have to live with rejection. The antidote to rejection is acceptance. We must accept God’s love for us. God loves and accepts us no matter what we do. God says....

You’ve made a mess – I still love and accept and accept you!

You’ve failed, let me down, denied me – I still love and accept you!

You aren’t sure you love me? I STILL LOVE YOU!

And that will never change!

You see God loves and accepts us no matter what we do and until we believe this, we won’t be able to love ourselves or love others.

Maybe you’re struggling with selfishness or pride.

Maybe someone has hurt you and you’re struggling to forgive them.

Maybe you’ve been rejected by a husband, a child, or a friend.

Maybe you have a hard time believing that God really loves you.

Maybe you have a hard time loving certain people.

Maybe you have some baggage I didn’t mention today like anger or fear.

God wants to set you free today from whatever is hindering your ability to love Him and others.

The antidote for all of this emotional baggage is the CROSS.

Before we can truly love others – we need to go to the foot of the cross and cry out for God to change our hearts.

God wants to give us breakthrough today by helping us unpack our bags. As I said earlier, God loves us just as we are. But He loves us too much to leave us like we are. Let’s ask God to begin the breakthrough in our hearts right now.