













GET REAL

TOOLBOX

-  THINK
-  OBSERVE
-  CLOSE-UP
-  WRITE
-  DISCUSS
-  FEELINGS
-  BRAINSTORM
-  REFERENCE
-  PASSAGE
-  ARTICLE
-  BIG IDEA
-  CROSSROAD



DEBATE

All of our feelings are legitimate—we don't need to feel guilty about our emotions.



FREE ASSOCIATION

Madonna	Marriage	Commitment
Democrats	Church	Seeing a scary movie
Afternoon nap	Family	The dentist
Rape	A+	Money
America	A dark alley	Blind date
Chocolate chip cookie dough		A letter from home



TELL IT LIKE IT IS

"Dear God, ... Did you really mean to do unto others as they do unto you? If you did then I'm going to fix my brother."

"Dear God, ... Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy."

"Dear God, ... It rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about you that people are not supposed to say, but I hope you will not hurt him anyway."

"Dear God, ... If we come back as something, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her."

"Dear God, ... My brother is a rat. You should give him a tail. Ha ha."

—Hample and Marshall, *Children's Letters to God*, (New York: Workman Publishing, 1991).



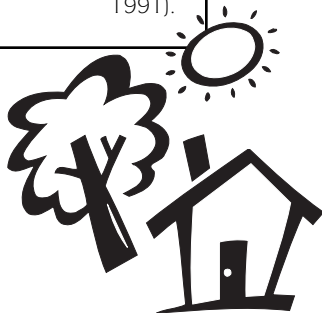
In the light of [a friend's] honesty and love, and through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, I began to be honest with myself and with God. The tough exterior I had developed started cracking, and I began to experience the pain I had neither wanted nor allowed myself to feel. This was hardly pleasant, but acknowledging the presence of hurt in my life was my first step toward finding comfort.... Why can't we see the reality of our lives? Why are we afraid to turn on the lights?

—Robert McGee, *The Search for Significance*, (Houston: Rapha Publishing, 1990), p.4.



DISCUSS

Why are children so honest about their feelings? What happens to us in that regard as we grow older?





IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

When Vince and Sarah heard that U2 was coming in concert to Collegeville, they determined that two tickets were worth a month of dollar movies and dinners in the Union. Finally, the night arrived, and they headed for the arena with *Zooropa* blasting on the radio inside Vince's *Escort*. Forty-five minutes before the concert they would meet Lee, Sarah's brother, at Gate 12 with their third-row tickets . . . they could hardly wait. An hour and a half later, they were still waiting. Lee never showed.

As they walked away from the arena, Sarah tried to make things better by cracking a joke about the great acoustics in the *Escort*. This was the last straw for Vince, whose anger had been building from the moment the concert was set to begin. He erupted in full force, demanding to know why Sarah hadn't called her brother just before they left—"You're always so irresponsible! I was looking forward to this for weeks, and you don't even care that we couldn't get in!" It was a long ride home. Vince stared at the road with his jaw clenched thinking of ways to get even with Sarah's brother. Sarah put the seatback down and tried to ignore her splitting headache.



DEFINITION

STUFF: act of burying emotions to avoid pain

SYMPTOMS OF STUFFING EMOTIONS:

- Isolation from others
- Depression
- Headaches and colds
- Excessive sleeping, eating or exercising



What emotions or feelings do you think they had in common?



What emotions or feelings might have been unique to each of them?

Why did they respond differently in this situation?

Would you tend to respond more like Vince or Sarah?

What do you think is the right way for Christians to respond?



DEFINITION

VENT: act of over-expressing emotions in harmful or inappropriate ways.

SYMPTOMS OF VENTING EMOTIONS:

- Outbursts of anger, grief, etc.
- Inappropriate vulnerability with others
- Loss of intimacy with others (they may avoid you)
- Depression



THE REAL DIAGNOSIS:

It's difficult to understand our emotions, whether they rule us with an iron grip or are a complete mystery to us! Underneath both extremes lies a common central issue: **our refusal to entrust our emotions to God.** The unfortunate result of "stuffing" or "venting" is that we don't experience God's grace meeting us in the middle of the storms of life.



REFLECT

As Christians, can we maintain both intimacy with God and honest (real) emotion at the same time?



CONTEXT

Psalm 55 and the majority of the psalms were written by David, an historic Jewish leader. David spent his early years in relative obscurity in the wilderness of Judah ... until God sent a prophet to locate the man whom He had chosen to succeed King Saul as the ruler of Israel. That man was David. Over time, the young man served as court musician for Saul, defeated the giant Goliath in battle, and became a general in Saul's army. David was a loyal subject, but jealousy of his popularity consumed the King and Saul determined that he would put David to death. Written while David lived as a fugitive from Saul, this emotion-packed poem records David's experience of unjust persecution, and the betrayal of a friend.



PSALM 55

Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Thyself from my supplication. Give heed to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me. My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me; and horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, "Oh, that I had



PSALM

The word "psalm" comes from the Greek word **psalmos**, meaning "poem to be sung to a stringed instrument." Many psalms are lyrics expressing the emotions of the poet. and intended for accompaniment by the lyre or harp or "stringed instruments." Another Hebrew title is **Tephiloth**, that is, "Prayers."

What specific feelings does David reveal in this psalm? Circle the words that describe those feelings.

Which feelings in the psalm do you most identify with?

How does David demonstrate faith in his prayer to God?

What does David affirm about God in spite of his situation?

Do you feel the same freedom to express emotion to God that David did? Why or why not?

wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. "Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in the wilderness. "I would hasten to my place of refuge from the stormy wind and tempest." ... it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together, walked in the house of God in the throng. ... As for me, I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me. God will hear and answer them—even the one who sits enthroned from of old— with whom there is no change, ... His [my enemy's] speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE TO STUFFING AND VENTING:
Being honest with God about our negative emotions.



Emotional maturity is the result of a process. As you develop in emotional authenticity, look for progress in two areas:



HONESTY WITH GOD

Put yourself in one of the following situations:

- Your parents are getting a divorce
- You failed a class
- Your sweetheart just dumped you
- You don't have enough money to finish school
- Your best friend from home was arrested
- A real life situation of your own...

Write your own Psalm 55. What emotions would you feel? What would you affirm about God in spite of the circumstances?



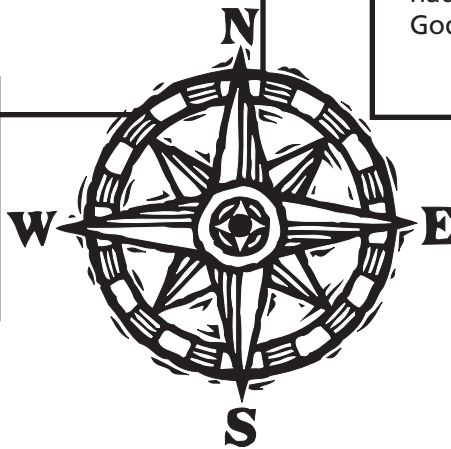
Growing in this area takes time. As we walk with God, He helps us day by day to bring every area of our lives under His loving authority. We become more like Jesus the longer we consistently entrust ourselves to Him.



HONESTY WITH OTHERS

"Sure I felt disappointment and anger. But I covered those unacceptable emotions. ... If I, a follower of God, allowed negative emotions to show, how could people possibly be attracted to Christianity? But the result was the opposite of my intent. My friends thought they'd need to be perfect Christians since that's the way I acted. And they knew they were far from reaching that exalted plateau. So was I. A caring friend helped me change. Jill saw through me. But instead of accusing me, she asked questions that helped me explore myself and my feelings. Then she listened closely and carefully to what I said. Her presence created a safe place where I could be myself. She talked about some of her own failings, and yes, even her emotional needs. The result was life-changing. Because I was able to be honest with Jill, I became more honest with others. I was able to show them my ragged edges, and oddly, though I hadn't intended it, others became more attracted to the gospel. They saw that Christ did not reject people like me who had faults and needs. They saw ... that God was at work even in emotions."

—Phyllis Le Peau, *Caring for Emotional Needs*, (Colorado Springs: InterVarsity Press, 1991).



How would you like to change in the area of emotional authenticity?



Is there someone you know that could help you explore yourself and your feelings?

For Further Exploration:
Study the following passages to see the ways Jesus handled emotions. Matthew 36:36-46; Luke 10:17-21; John 11:1-44, 15:11; Luke 19:41-44

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.