

Another way of looking

How we feel about ourselves

It is impossible to overstate the importance of how we feel about ourselves. Paul says, *'think of yourself with sober judgment'* (Romans 12:3). In other words, be accurate in the way you think about yourself.

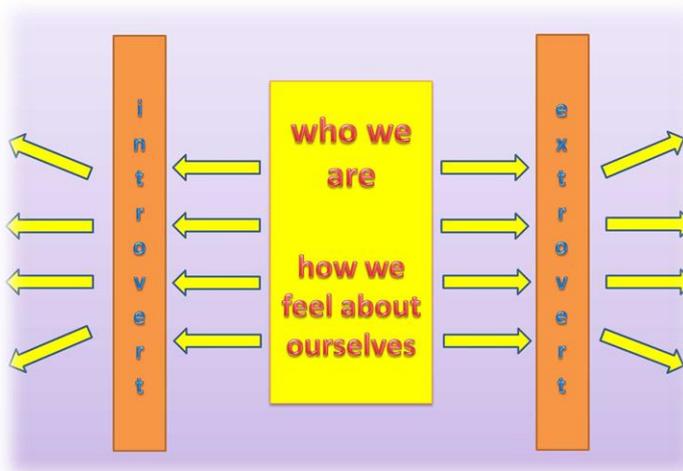
How we feel about ourselves is, next to God himself, the biggest single influence in our lives

If we want what God wants then we know he will show us the truth. Writing about a specific matter to the Philippian Christians, Paul says, *'All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you'* (Philippians 3:15). As we walk with God we experience an ongoing change in our perspective. We don't see everything clearly straight away but if our hearts are open then God will keep clearing our vision. He wants us to see things accurately – and it starts with seeing ourselves as he sees us.

Putting it in context

If we are going to understand the importance of what we feel about ourselves we will find it helpful to see the relationship between who we really are and our particular temperaments.

Using terminology rather loosely here, we are going to talk about our 'spirit' or 'soul' as the essence of who we really are. We include character, mind, will and emotions and that part of us that we can call 'spirit' because of its ability to communicate with God. All this together forms the 'essence' of who we really are – and sitting right in the centre of it all is how we feel about ourselves.



Think of this 'essence' as the lamp that emits its white light out to the prisms of our particular temperaments. The light hits each of our temperaments and displays a wonderful array of colours that combine to radiate the wonder of who we are. At least, that is how it is meant to be – and can be. The question here is: what is the quality of the light that we emit from the heart of who we are? If it is a consistent, pure white light then our temperaments will refract beautiful colours into our world. If the light is dimmed or darkened by negative feelings about ourselves then the ingredients that make up our temperaments will show themselves negatively.

Another way of looking

How well do you know yourself? Do you know what you really feel about yourself? We can be good at seeing certain things clearly in other people's situations but what happens when the spotlight is

on us? Do we suddenly lose our objectivity? What comes out when we are under pressure, or we feel we are being criticised?

What happens if deep down you don't like yourself? Whatever you feel about yourself at this point in time - there is another way of looking. We know that two people can look at the same scene or object and see two completely different things: 'two men look out the same prison bars; one sees mud and the other stars.'

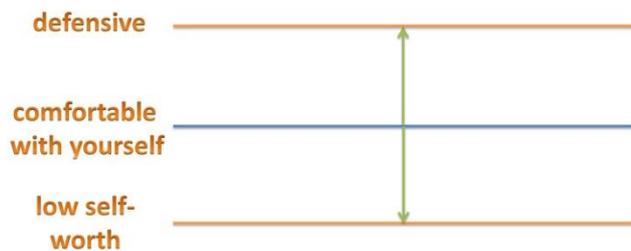
Most people have a poor view of themselves

God sees us all quite differently to the way we see ourselves. Other people see us differently to the way we feel about ourselves. In other words, most of us feel far worse about ourselves than we need to. When God finished making everything, he looked at it and saw that it was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). Human beings are the pinnacle of God's craftsmanship. We are amazing! Wrong choices don't detract from the fact that we are made in the image of God.

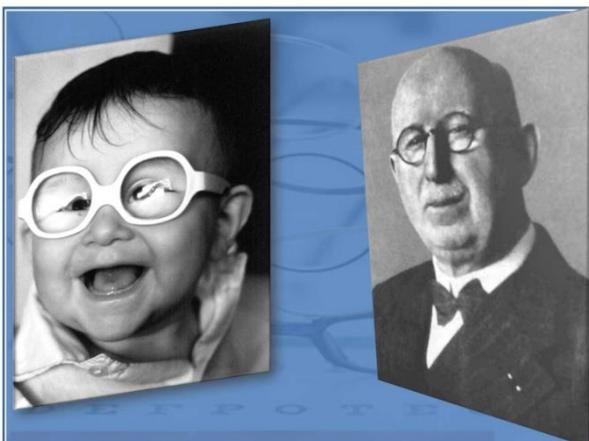


Affects everything

What we feel about ourselves dramatically affects how we behave and our attitudes. The way we treat other people, our levels of defensiveness – and even our energy levels – are all linked to how we feel about ourselves. Even our view of God can be strongly influenced by the way we feel about ourselves. We may possess considerable knowledge about ourselves in our heads but what we believe and feel to be true in our hearts might be entirely different. Do we know ourselves as well as we think?



Runs throughout our lives



What we feel about ourselves now is what we have probably felt all our lives. Our view of ourselves is formed in the first five years of life. Once we form that view it becomes like a pair of spectacles through which we view the whole of life. Unless what we feel about ourselves is fundamentally changed at some point then we will always see things that way.

It is a self-perpetuating problem because those spectacles filter out what contradicts how we feel about ourselves and emphasises those negative aspects of life that confirm what we already feel. So, it is vital that we realise there is another way

of looking. How we feel about ourselves has a dramatic impact on all our perspectives in life.

The aim of understanding ourselves is to help us to discover what we feel about ourselves – and then bring it into line with how God views us. And this is not changing the way we feel simply by positive thinking or by cutting out part of who we are – it is by gaining a different perspective on who we are.

How did our sense of value form?

Our sense of identity is formed in our early years and affirmation is an important part of that. To explore this further go to [Step One: Session 4: Who am I?](#) We need to know that we are ‘alright’. From the time we entered this world (and while still in the womb) we were picking up impressions. We would know whether we were loved or neglected, when someone was angry with us or disappointed – or simply couldn’t be bothered.



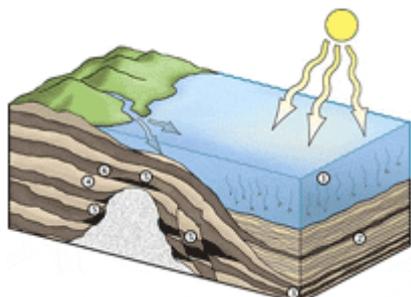
Dr Emese Nagy, from Dundee University conducted research in which she studied 90 newborns aged between 3 hours and 96 hours old. She spent 3 minutes smiling, looking, talking to and touching the children, just as a mother would do. She then froze her face and stopped responding and noticed that the babies looked away, became visibly distressed and many started crying.



When communication was restarted, the babies took some time to rebuild their trust, by turning their heads and slowly re-establishing eye contact. The crying eventually stopped as the babies became engaged again.

Dr Nagy said, ‘This study showed that even newborn infants come to this world with a powerful sensitivity to the other person’. She believes that such results may have implications for infant mental health by showing that newborns, from their first hours of life, are sensitive to disturbed communication.

In those early years we felt deep emotions – but had no means of processing them. So what happened to them?



The way in which oil, gas and coal formed in the depths of the ocean many years ago provides us with an illustration. The impressions that we have picked up from babyhood onwards are like the sea creatures that fall to the ocean floor and become buried under the sediment as time and life move on. Those creatures do not cease to exist, they change as they come under enormous pressure and heat as more layers are deposited on top of one another. In the case of fuel, the end result is something of value. In the case of our emotions, if good impressions were deposited in our lives then we will have valuable deposits – but if the impressions were negative then we will have formed a negative view of ourselves at the deepest level.

We will see in a later session how readily we can feel negatively about ourselves because of temperament weaknesses. Negative impressions from key people in our lives simply serve to reinforce our worst fears about ourselves – so we push the negatives down even further.



By pushing the negatives down we create a kind of underground cavern into which all the negatives around us run. If there is conflict or pain in our environment we can so quickly make it our fault and therefore our responsibility.

We are all capable of sending ‘devaluing messages’ out unless we stop and recognise what is going on and do something about it. Parents can devalue children and, in turn, be devalued by their children. Friend can devalue friend.



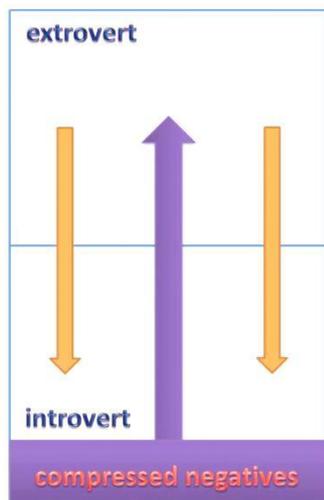
Because we cannot cope with feeling this way about ourselves we will present a different image to people around us – and in the process bury what we really feel even deeper. In the end the pressure can get too much and eventually breaks through the surface, sometimes resulting in a breakdown, often resulting in the flooding out of emotions that seem bewildering and confusing. It is often the buried emotions within the introvert that burst through into the extrovert, creating pressures that are hard to handle. For the Phlegmatic this can take the form of the sudden emergence of extreme anxiety that floods over the person in relentless waves. For a Melancholic it

is the getting in touch with deep emotions that have remained largely unprocessed. For both temperaments this surging through of emotions can mean that the person needs strong support and understanding to help them through this time of disorientation.

African proverb: ‘When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you’

An Understanding of Breakdown

Perhaps you know someone who always seemed to have their act together. They were dependable and strong. Then one day you hear that they are off work on long-term sick leave. Later you discover they have had a complete breakdown. What has happened?



This is not a comprehensive analysis of breakdown but specifically with breakdown as a result of repression. We associate the Choleric temperament with repression so the various combinations with this temperament are all capable of experiencing the kind of dynamics we will be describing below. Although a Sanguine – and a double introvert – can experience breakdown, we will use the Choleric to illustrate the principle.

The Choleric is strong and represses his emotions. The introvert represents emotions to the Choleric so he will repress his introvert as well. He can effectively distance himself from his introvert by pushing it deep within. This means that whatever goes on within the introvert remains unprocessed – fears, anxieties, low self-worth, unresolved conflicts and pain. Unresolved emotions create pressure within the

introvert – rather like the pressure within the magma chamber of a volcano – until it eventually erupts and spreads lava over a wide area. The trigger that finally allows the lava to break out varies from person to person. It might be having a child, a house move, a bereavement or redundancy. Some people are aware that pressure has been building for months or years, while for others it appears to come out of the blue.

Before that, the Choleric stood tall and strong – and that is good. This world needs people who are strong and will fight for what is good. However, when the volcano erupts, lava spills out and completely alters the landscape. It is a nightmare of emotions – a force coming up that is unstoppable – and a conviction that life will never be the same again.

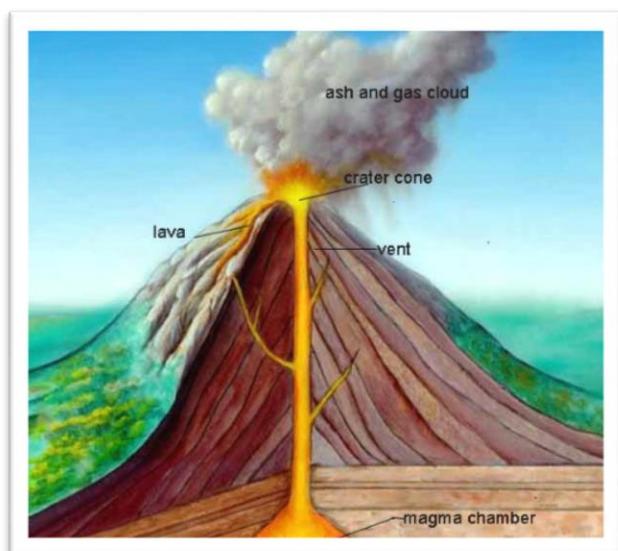
It is this change of landscape that is so unsettling. All the familiar landmarks have gone. Emotions are running riot that you never knew existed – and they seem so out of control.



It is easy to think that medication is the only answer at this point – and sometimes the emotions are so strong that it can be used to ‘buy time.’ However, if the person can stand back and begin to understand what is happening to him then, at least, it gives hope that not everything is completely out of control.

The effects from this volcanic explosion are potentially life changing – for good or ill. Initially confidence is either non-existent or badly dented. Even the Choleric strength seems no longer available or effective. After all, it was unable to prevent the eruption. Worse still, it has now become even more aware that there is something unstable beneath its feet.

Now this is where we part company with the analogy. Volcanoes are necessary in order to reshape and build the landscape – but our basic structure does not need to be changed. What does need to be



changed is which part of who we are do we live in? If we can begin to process emotions within the introvert then we can 'go downstairs' and live comfortably in that part of who we are. If we live in the introvert then the Choleric will also be able to take its place and will have its strength and confidence restored. No longer will it feel the need to act as a substitute or defence for the introvert. Both temperaments can work together to enable you to live to the full.

Don't get crushed



The qualities in our temperaments can lead us to feel responsible for 'making things alright'. If we were brought up in a home in which the adults didn't take proper responsibility it is all too easy to feel responsible for things that were wrong.

That pattern continues into adulthood. We will feel that it is up to us to make things right in whatever situation we find ourselves in - and that if we don't then we have failed. When we see the multiple consequences of our 'failure' we can feel totally crushed.

It is important for us to be able to look back, see our family patterns and recognise who was responsible. We may want to protect parents but we must ask ourselves who we are really protecting. If we are looking to our parents to provide us with security that will prevent us from being objective about them – but we can push through that. It is not about blame but responsibility. We can be set free.

