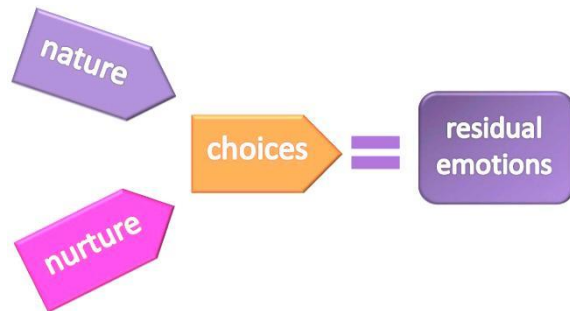


Processing emotions

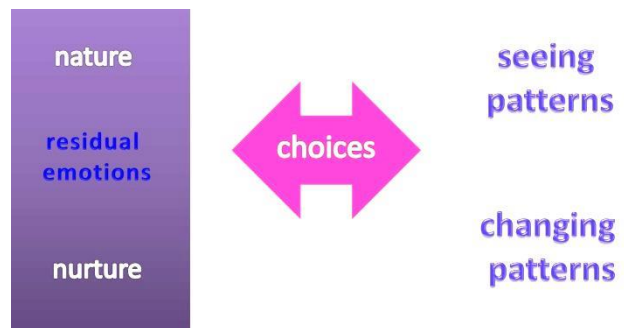
Stopping the 'push from the past'

We all carry 'residual emotions' that will often pour into situations that we meet in the present – and distort the way we feel about those situations and our responses to them. (See [Step Two: Session 2: Clearing the rubbish](#)) Can we really do anything about the way we feel? This session will show that changes can be made that will leave us free to respond positively to each new situation.



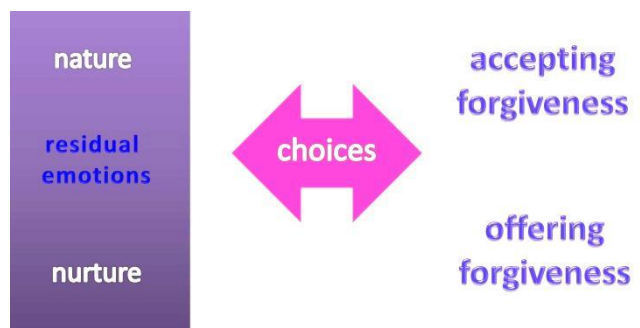
Processing past emotions

Now we must look at the role of choices in the way that Nurture and Nature have worked together to leave us feeling what we do today. How much did the choices that we made shape who we are now? In our first year of life choice is not an issue. It is in that year that we learn that we belong – we are unconditionally accepted. From the end of that year onwards a child is taught right from wrong. Then we are into the issue of how we use the 'raw materials' (Nature) of our temperaments that God has given us and how we respond to the 'impressions' (Nurture) around us. As the years pass we become increasingly shaped by, and responsible for, the choices we make.



If we are to deal with residual emotions then we will need to recognise the choices we have made. For example, a Phlegmatic will need to acknowledge the way in which he closes down his emotions – and the effect this has on others. Each of us with our particular temperaments will need to face who we are and how we use who we are to make choices. Only then can we consciously choose to make different choices in new situations that arise. Clearly this is an ongoing process that best takes place in the context of loving and supportive relationships.

As disciples of Jesus we can afford to look back objectively because we live and function in a context of forgiveness. We can be real about the patterns in our lives because *'if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin'* (1 John 1:7). If we have asked for forgiveness we must accept that we are forgiven. Our 'Nurture' might war against accepting forgiveness but we must be specific and settle issues once and for all. Recognise the power of negativity and sensitivity to make us feel 'unforgiven' but, at the end of the day, we have to learn to accept God's Word over our feelings.



As we look back we may well discover that many of the ‘impressions’ that shaped us were not helpful – and in some cases - were positively damaging. We need to look honestly at that, not protecting, excusing or avoiding the issue. It is right to lay responsibility where it belongs – not least because we damage ourselves if we carry someone else’s responsibility. Once we have looked, because we know we are forgiven, we can offer forgiveness. Forgiveness sets us free – we can accept others because we know we are accepted.

The Four ‘R’s

There is a simple way of remembering the process by which we replace the old negative emotions. We used to live in a 16th century farmhouse. In an attic room at the top of the house the floorboards had become rotten. What we did to remedy the situation provides an illustration of what we can do when the emotional foundations of our lives become rotten.



Recognise something is wrong



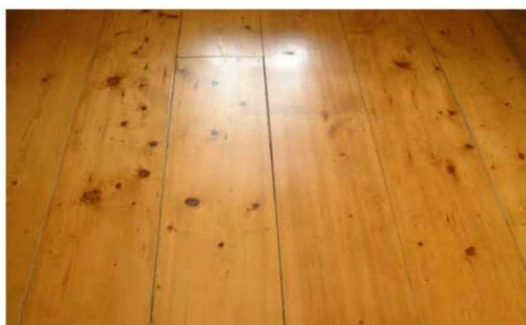
Feeling bad about ourselves is not what God intended yet we grow accustomed to it and live with it. Little surprise that, under pressure, we fall through the floorboards! We will only do something about those negative emotions if we face the fact that something is wrong.

Remove what is wrong



Once we discovered that the floorboards were rotten we stripped them out. That was easier said than done because the attic room was only accessible by a very narrow, twisting staircase. So we threw the boards out of the small attic window. Once we have identified the emotions that are a ‘push from the past’ there is only one thing for it – throw them out. Consciously acknowledge that the negative way we feel about ourselves, with the attendant negative thoughts, is simply not true.

Replace the old with the new



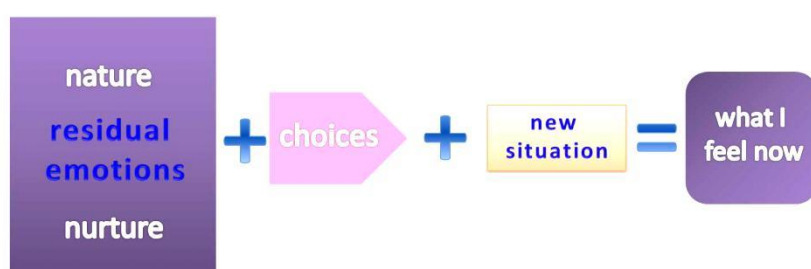
Then we had a problem. How could we get the new boards up into the attic room? There was only one way – rope them up and pull them up through the window. We have to get rid of the negatives but then receive the positives. We may feel negatively about ourselves but how others feel about us – and even more importantly, how God feels about us, will be entirely different. As we get rid of the poor view we have of ourselves we can receive the truth about who we are.

Receive the truth



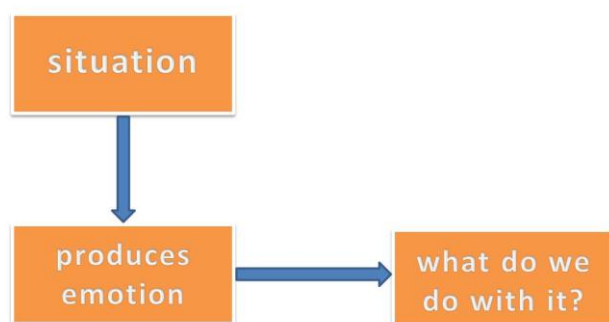
It would have been foolish to simply hammer the new boards onto the old ones – eventually the whole floor would rot. If we don't remove the issues that have led to low self-esteem then however many good things happen to us – or whatever kind things are said to us – we will still feel the same way about ourselves. Get rid of the old and firmly fix the new into position – then we will have a firm emotional foundation from which to live.

Now we can turn to the present



Once we have recognised the influence of those residual emotions and accepted that we have been set free to make good choices because we are followers of Jesus then we can turn our attention to dealing with situations that arise daily.

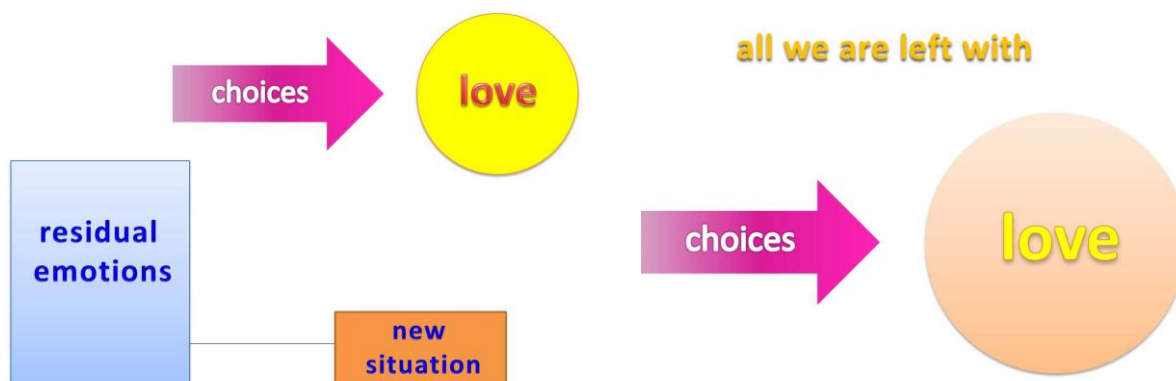
Processing present emotions



It sounds obvious but every situation we face produces emotions. We do not pay enough attention to what we do with those emotions. If we are to avoid them 'falling to the ground' and simply remaining unprocessed then we have to do something with what we feel. The principles that we learnt in Step One become very important here – share and resolve. Find out what that emotion is really saying - tie it down until it can only be used constructively.

'Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity' Col 3:14

If we put into practice what we have learnt about residual emotions then we will find their presence and impact greatly reduced. What about any that do remain? What can we do with them? The answer is 'nothing' – they will take care of themselves! As we choose to reach out into life's present situations – and reach out in love – then we find that any remaining residual emotions 'drain away'. Giving ourselves away to serve another's best interests reshapes our emotional patterns, enables us to process emotions as we go along and minimises the presence of negative emotions. If we focus on residual emotions at this stage then we put the process into reverse. In other words, there is a time to look, resolve and then move on.



Stopping the 'pull from the past'

Even in adulthood, many of us are influenced negatively by our parents – sometimes long after they have died. How can this be?

Imagine that your father, in himself, reached 4 out of 10 on a scale of maturity and security. Mother reached 6 so they had an average score of 5. This is the level that they are capable of giving their children. However, children instinctively look to their parents to give them a score of 10. Consequently, they will keep 'going back' to try and get from their parents what they are not capable of giving. This leaves the 'child' feeling incomplete and unsure of their identity. How can this be remedied?

The first step is to be grateful to your parents for the 1-5 that they did give you. That included so much over many years. Be grateful for it but then recognise that they are not now going to be able to give you 6 through to 10. Settle it in your heart. You are going to have to look elsewhere.

Ultimately we find our identity and security in God alone. In a relationship with him, we find a rock beneath our feet from which we can reach back to our parents with love and honour.