

Message: Sow by faith, not by feelings

Are you sowing seeds of faith?

I don't know if you remember, but several months ago I invited you to sow seeds of faith through acts of kindness. We handed out little cards. Those cards asked you to do 100 acts of kindness in a year. Each act of kindness is a way of sharing God's love. And, when we share God's love freely and willingly, asking nothing in return, people notice. That's one way we can be a blessing and pass our blessing on.

There's one more important thing I need to tell you:

You need to sow by faith, not by your feelings.

As an example, “do you think a farmer wakes up every day excited to go work on the farm? No. It's hard work. But if farmers only worked their crops when they felt like it, not much would get done. They may not want to get up early. They may not want to go harvest and plant and weed. But they do it anyway.

Let me make a confession: I don't always feel like being nice to people. I admit it! Sometimes, I want to be cranky. Sometimes I just want to say, ‘leave me alone!’ I don't always feel like being kind. I don't always feel like being generous. I don't always feel like giving hope. I don't always feel like praying. Please forgive me when I act this way.

But I don't live by my feelings. I live by faith. Sometimes I sow seeds of faith when I'm tired. Sometimes I sow when I'm distracted.

Sometimes I sow when I'm stressed out. Sometimes I sow when I'm anxious. And I move ahead in faith in spite of my feelings, expecting God to act.”¹

We can claim Psalm 126:5-6 as a promise, “*GOD, do it again - bring rains to our drought-stricken lives, so those who planted their crops in despair will shout hurrahs at the harvest, so those who went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing*” (The Message).

¹ <http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/move-forward-in-faith-not-by-feelings>

God wants our faith. God is more concerned with our faith than with our feelings. Feelings can lead us to put an emphasis on our material selves. When we put our feelings first, we’re putting ourselves first, ahead of God and ahead of others. We weren’t made to be that way, but it’s what we’ve learned since infancy. We’ve learned to rely on our feelings. We seek out the emotional “highs” in life.

The only problem: our feelings mislead us. Human emotions are good. After all, God gave them to us. But if we’re focusing on emotions, we need to listen more closely to Jesus, who said, *“These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit - but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built a house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards”* (Matthew 7:25-27, The Message).

We’ve seen the devastation of hurricane Harvey and now Irma. We pray for all those who are affected, our hearts go out to them and some of us are sending gifts to help. Now imagine the impact of a hurricane of unchecked emotions on your life and family. If you don’t have a firm foundation of faith, it’s easy to lose hope and to feel unloved, unwanted, isolated and afraid, blown by the winds of doubt.

Our feelings frighten us. “John Power wrote a book Why Am I afraid To Tell You Who I Am? The answer is: ‘I’m afraid to tell you who I am because what I am is all I’ve got. And if I tell you what I’m really like and you don’t like it, I’m dead!’ We have two selves. We have the public self we show to everybody that says, ‘I’m cool. I’ve got it all together. Everything’s going fine.’ Then we have the private self that has fears, apprehensions, doubts, hang-ups, and is scared of feelings.”² It’s hard to bridge the gap between our public and private selves. It

² Rick Warren, *Building Your Marriage*: 2 of 6,

requires trust. We have to know that the person we're taking to won't use what we share against us.

I have good news: you can always trust Jesus.

Faith is not feelings. Faith is trusting Jesus, no matter what.

Our feelings frighten us, but God's love calms us. The Spirit teaches us that “*God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them*” and “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment*” (1 John 4:16b, 18a). Love heals. By God's grace, we're learning how to love more completely, openly and freely. That's how grace works in our lives. It's what being perfected in Christ means. As we grow and mature spiritually, we become more like Jesus in the way we love and live, without fear by faith.

Here are three ways feelings frighten us:

“Hurt feelings frighten us. We don't like to admit we're vulnerable. We don't like to admit we've been hurt. The problem is, hiding a hurt always intensifies it. It makes it worse. When you hide a hurt it becomes this big thing you don't want anybody to know about. But if you get it out in the open it's not that big a deal. Others can help. Share it and be free.

Negative feelings frighten us. Have you noticed we have a tendency to deny when we're angry? ‘I'm not angry! I'm not raising my voice!’ We don't like to admit we're upset. The truth is everyone has good days and bad days. Every marriage has ups and downs. We all go through cycles. Some days you feel very close to others. Some days you feel very far from them. Some days you feel loving, kind and helpful. Some days you want to wring someone's neck! We need to admit our fears and be free.

Pastor Rick Warren tells this story: “I once asked my mother, ‘Have you ever considered divorcing Dad? Has it ever been an option?’ She said, ‘Divorce, no. Murder, yes!’”

Sexual feelings frighten us. We don't know how to talk to one another about sex. This goes back to Adam and Eve's initial reaction after they

ate the apple. In Genesis 3:7 we read, ‘*Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*’ Notice: when fear entered their relationship, they immediately and instinctively covered up. They put on clothes. One of the first places fear shows up is in the bedroom. Compare Genesis 3:7 with Genesis 2:25 when things were going great, ‘[They] were both naked and they felt no shame.’

Look at the difference. Before fear entered the relationship they were totally unconscious of themselves. They were focusing completely on each other. They weren’t inhibited. Fear always inhibits. They weren’t uptight, they weren’t nervous, they weren’t under tension; they weren’t under stress. They were enjoying each other without guilt or shame. The moment fear entered their relationship they became very self-conscious. That’s what happens. When we allow fear to take over we become very self-conscious.”³

Why are we afraid of our feelings? The reason why is because most people are unable to talk about how they feel. It scares them to death. Some of you are nervous to even have your pastor talk about feelings and emotions. Yet you’re bugged, frustrated and you don’t know how to bring it up. You’re afraid to openly express yourself or to be honest about your needs or to sit down and say, “This is what I would like. This would make our relationship better.” We’re just unable to talk about how we feel. We’re frightened by what we feel and so many are inhibited by previous experience or past misconceptions.

We don’t manage our feelings the same way. There are many different approaches. For example, those who are more stoic tend to keep feelings and emotions bottled up inside, while those who are more passionate tend to let emotions go, dealing with whatever happens. Men and women manage feelings differently. Our birth order makes a difference. The culture we were raised in makes a difference.

It’s not wrong. It’s just different.

³ Rick Warren, *Building Your Marriage: 2 of 6*,

How do we face our feelings? Truth is the way. Let's admit that we're frightened by some of the feelings we have. Maybe we're not adequate or competent some days. Admit it. All of us have our own struggles. Proverbs 28:13 says, “*You can't solve a problem until first you admit it.*” That's why honesty is the best foundation. And 1 John 1:8 reminds us, “*If we pretend that we're perfect we're living in a world of illusion*” (Phillips).

That leads to the question “How to we share what we feel?”

How we share the truth matters. It doesn't help if we harm others or get hurt ourselves.

Communication is the #1 area we all need to improve, publically and privately. “There are three levels of communication:

- The shallowest level of communication is when you talk about trivia - events, the weather or other people (BTW, that's gossip).
- The next level of communication is when you talk about ideas - ‘I think this...’ or ‘My opinion is that....’ You’re sharing ideas.
- The deepest level and the level of communication you must have in order to build a relationship is when you share how you feel. Gut level feelings. ‘This is the way I feel about ...’ and you share it. Every person in the world needs at least one person that they can be totally, absolutely, unconditionally honest with and know they'll be loved and accepted for who they are in spite of it.”⁴

Sadly, many people don't have someone like that in their lives. They may have had that kind of relationship at one point, but they're separated now. That happens for a lot of reasons: illness, distance, death or disability. To add insult to the injury, some of us said hurtful things the last time we saw our loved one. We did our best to burn the bridges.

That's the situation in Genesis 33. Jacob and his brother Esau have been at odds for more than twenty years. As a matter of fact, the last time they saw each other, Esau wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob wanted to come home, but he was very afraid. He didn't know how his brother would respond. Esau was there with 400 men, while Jacob had his

⁴ Ibid

wives, children and servants. Jacob approached Esau with respect, fear and trepidation. And he was amazed! Esau came to him, hugged him, kissed him and asked to be introduced to his family. What a change! That's forgiveness in action.

By God's grace, there's always hope. We see the depth of God's love in the words Jesus spoke on his last night, “*Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many so that their sins may be forgiven*” (Matthew 26:27-28). And Jesus' last words on the cross were words of forgiveness and love. They give us hope when we're hurting and strength to face our fears with the truth.

“Church isn’t a hotel for saints. It’s a hospital for the hurting.”⁵ No perfect people need apply for membership here. This is a place where people don't have it together. We're all struggling. There's a growing awareness in our church of the fact that we're all in the same boat. We're all working hard. We're all struggling together. We all have hurts and struggles. Nobody has arrived yet but we're growing and that's why we keep getting together and looking into God's book.

I was sowing anxiously when God called Esperanza and me to Corona a year ago. You were sowing anxiously as well. And, by God's grace, we've seen a harvest – new believers, baptisms, lives changed and a renewed spirit of faith and hope. We're experiencing joy and new freedom. All that happened because we didn't do what we felt like doing. We did what we did by faith. Let's continue to do that as members of a community of faith, trusting in Jesus and forgiving in love.

At some time, God will call you to make a sacrifice. It may be financial or it may be through your time, abilities or maybe even your life. You may think, “I don't feel like it.” But if you don't act, you'll miss the blessing God wants to do by using you.

Sow by faith, not by your feelings. Trust God and forgive others. Love will set you free.

⁵ Ibid

Let us pray...

Fill us with your Spirit, the spirit of love and truth. Show us how to forgive each other, seek truth and find ourselves in you. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Psalm 25:4-7 (NRSV)

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD.

Genesis 33:1-12 (NRSV)

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God - since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.” So he urged him, and he took it. Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.”