

DEVELOPING EMOTIONALLY MATURE LEADERS

How Emotional Intelligence
Can Help Transform Your Ministry

AUBREY MALPHURS



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Acknowledgments

We all walk with a limp, only some of us limp more than others. I have written this book for all of us admitted “limpers” who’ll take the challenge to address our limps that result in growth and emotional maturity. This includes my pastoral and leadership students at Dallas Seminary and the pastors I have worked with over the years with the Malphurs Group.

Introduction

I spotted him walking across the campus. He was a gifted student and leader that I had in class over a period of two to three years at Dallas Seminary. He took several of my courses that addressed such areas as biblical leadership, church planting, and church revitalization. When he graduated, he opted to go on the international mission field and lead a team he recruited to plant churches. But that was only a year or two ago. What was he doing back in Dallas so soon? I decided to find out. I greeted him and engaged him in small talk. Then I popped the question, “Why are you back in Dallas? Is everything okay?” His response troubled me. As the leader, he had recruited and formed a team of like-minded church planters; however, the whole thing had imploded. The gist of it? They simply couldn’t relate to one another and get along together. So after a short time, they went their separate ways, wondering what they could have done to keep it together and become a successful church-planting team. Instead, they had failed to realize their dreams and had paid dearly from an emotional perspective. They viewed themselves as failures who possibly were not cut out of the leadership bolt of cloth. Since then, I have encountered too many others as well.

So the question begs an answer. What could they have done from the very beginning to assure that they would not only stay on target but keep the whole venture together? What’s more troubling is that their experience mimics that of countless others who fail and quietly fade into

oblivion. They start with a bang only to end with a whimper. I didn't have an answer to the question back then but I do now.

The answer is emotionally intelligent leadership, or as I like to refer to it, emotionally mature leadership. What we haven't realized for many years, and far too many don't get it today, is how critically important our emotions are to effective ministry in general and leadership in particular. What I know now is that how you feel impacts how you lead and how followers feel about themselves when around and led by you affects how well they follow your leadership. It takes emotionally intelligent leadership to inspire the best in us, to arouse passion, and to keep us motivated to serve our Savior as leaders in Christ's church and beyond. Yes, effective leaders cast vision and design powerful strategies to help the church advance. And they do this at least on a regular basis. However, highly effective leaders move us. They are in touch with and lead through the emotions, and this takes place much of the day every day.

My experience is that not many churches have in place a pathway for developing leaders at every level in their churches. Some talk about it but more often than not fail to deliver. And seminaries are not much better. Very few seminaries address how to develop leaders, and those that do emphasize a more formal cognitive, intellectual approach that includes training in Bible knowledge, languages, theology, church history, homiletics, and Christian education, most of which takes place in a classroom environment. Not that these are bad in themselves, but they need to be balanced with the more noncognitive, relational skills that are vital to excellence in leadership. It's not intellectual versus emotional, but the two working together. What we desperately need is training that intentionally seeks to bolster the leader's emotional side, which deeply impacts their relationships with those whom they lead or desire to lead. Consequently, this is a work about emotionally intelligent or emotionally mature leadership that seeks to do just that.

This book is seminal. At the time of this writing, I'm aware of few in the Christian leadership world who are exploring the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership to effective ministry except for an occasional doctor of ministry dissertation. Much of the work on emotional intelligence is being done by those who make no profession of the Christian

faith. I've also found a few dissertations in the world of higher Christian education, but they're not readily accessible. Hopefully this work will serve to inspire you and others to discover the importance of emotional resonance and to lead accordingly.

Simply stated, the purpose of this book is to come up with a process or pathway that challenges Christian leaders to become more aware of, understand, and manage their emotions and those of others so that they can be emotionally mature leaders who relate well with and truly inspire their followers. And this can take place in a formal or informal context that includes both parachurch and church ministries.

I have divided this work into three parts. Part 1 provides an orientation to the world of emotional intelligence. It addresses the basic assumptions I bring to this study, provides a brief history of emotional intelligence, and seeks to convince you that emotional intelligence is important to the world of Christian leadership.

Part 2 serves to help leaders understand emotional intelligence. It drafts a definition of emotional intelligence and a definition of an emotion for the purpose of clarity. It establishes what I believe are seven primary or core emotions found in the Bible. It addresses how the brain functions in emotional intelligence, and it provides a biblical theology of the emotions that answers the question, what does the Bible teach us about the emotions? This latter portion is worth the price of the book as little work has been done in the Christian community on a theology of the emotions. It also guides leaders in assessing or measuring their emotional maturity. How are they doing? Where are they in their emotional development? It will briefly present three widely accepted assessments along with an assessment that I've developed called the Basic Emotions Audit.

Part 3 provides three widely accepted models for developing emotional intelligence and will address the question, Is it okay to use material and research developed by people who may not be Christians or even open to the Christian faith? Finally, it will present my leadership model that consists of four skills to be developed by the Christian leader: the leader's emotional self-awareness, the leader's emotional self-management, others' emotional awareness, and others' emotional/relational management.

Introduction

I have included questions at the end of the chapters to facilitate reflection and discussion. I would suggest that first you read the chapters and reflect on them on your own. Then you would be wise to work through the same material with your leadership team, getting their input and thus enriching the entire process.



INTRODUCTION TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1

Six Basic Assumptions of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Foundation Stones

I bring six basic assumptions to this material on emotional intelligence. They will serve as emotional foundation stones on which the book rests.

1. Emotionally mature Christians are spiritually mature believers. The popular term for this concept of emotional maturity is emotional intelligence (EI), also referred to as emotional quotient (EQ). Perhaps a better term is emotional maturity, which is a reflection of one's spiritual maturity. To be spiritually mature is to be emotionally mature. And to be emotionally mature is to be spiritually mature. While not the same, like twins they are inseparable. You don't have one without the other. So those Christians who believe they are spiritually mature persons, but who evidence little emotional maturity, are mistaken.

2. The Godhead is characterized by emotions. An aspect of who God is—his identity—has to do with the fact that he's an emotional God. What I mean by that is he is a God who experiences emotions such as love, anger, joy, and hope. And most important to this book, he has created us in his image (Gen. 1:26–27). That means we too are emotional beings—that is a part of our identity. I'll say more about this in the sections on the theology of emotions in part 2.

3. The hope of the world is an emotionally mature church. Bill Hybels once said that Christ's church is the hope of the world. What he means is that every church exists to bring Christ's message to a lost and dying world. Churches are vehicles of grace, and that message is their mission. Therefore this book will reflect a love for Christ in general and his church in particular. In its pages a high view of God's church will be seen. When functioning as Christ designed it, the local church can be a wonderful, God-honoring entity that reaches lost, unchurched people while edifying those who have embraced the Savior. This is an emotionally mature church and what Christ intended. It is his desire to build this kind of church (Matt. 16:18). However, when not functioning as Christ intended—emotionally immature—the local church can be ugly. Currently the latter seems to be more the case, as many churches are in decline (some say as many as nine of ten), and a large number of their young people are walking away from them.

4. Emotional intelligence is critically important to God-honoring leadership. Most important, after professing that Christ's church is the hope of the world, Hybels added that leadership is the hope of the church. A church can't function well—it can't accomplish its mission—without godly, servant leadership. And emotionally mature leadership is key. If a church is not doing well, it is largely a reflection of its leadership. Consequently, this book is about leadership and the critical importance of EI to good, Christ-honoring leadership of his people.

5. Scripture undergirds the importance of emotional maturity. Through the Scriptures God has revealed himself to humankind. Paul says that the Bible is profitable for reproof, correction, and for instruction in godly living (2 Tim. 3:16–17). At a time when most believe that truth is relative, the Bible provides us with absolute truth that addresses who we are and what we do. Thus in this book we will constantly look to Scripture for the truths that undergird and reveal the importance of maturity in general and emotional maturity in particular. This will be most evident when we explore the theology of emotions later in this book.

6. Emotions are central to what it means to be human and live life. Emotions are not fickle, not to be trusted, or a sign of weakness, as some Christian Stoics profess. Instead, they are central to what it means to

be human and live life. Robert Solomon says it well: “We live our lives through our emotions, and it is our emotions that give our lives meaning. What interests or fascinates us, who we love, what angers us, what bores us—all of this defines us, gives us character, and constitutes who we are.”¹ Again, this addresses our identity. We talk about our emotions every day. We ask or are asked, “How are you?” We tell someone about what has upset us or has made us happy. Everything we do would seem to involve our emotions to some degree.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Everyone brings his or her assumptions to a discussion of any topic. What assumptions do you bring to the topic of emotional intelligence and leadership?
2. Which of your assumptions agree with the author’s, and which disagree?
3. Is there any assumption that stands out above all the rest?
4. If you were to add to the author’s assumptions, what would you add?