

Getting to the Deep-Seated Root of Rejection

The core cause of an inability to love is the inability to accept yourself as loved. This is fed by the belief that you are irretrievably defective, unredeemable and unlovable.

Such beliefs emerge from the emotions of a child as he or she grows and develops in key environments where there is rejection (e.g., family, friends, authority figures).

This rejection can be overt or the result of neglect. And for the more sensitive child, the cause(s) can be unpredictably subtle. For example, if a child runs home from school and bursts into the house with great excitement over what they've just experienced but is shut down by punishment or shaming, that one incident alone can be painful enough to a sensitive child to create an unspoken, interior commitment never to share their deep heart again. They have just learned that sharing a deep feeling can make them vulnerable to pain. So they erect a wall in their heart beyond which no one can enter.

The degree of suffering experienced by any given child varies according to their level of sensitivity and their capacity to observe both overt and covert signs of rejection by others. An additional variable is the accuracy with which they perceive rejection.

As you might imagine, with all of the abused and mistreated people on the earth today, this condition is epidemic and has given rise to a massive population of individuals who are incapable of loving others—truly. They know only the romantic fantasy of loving, and how to mimic it, but not the reality. Their experience of rejection has made them so self-focused and protective that they have never learned how to give

themselves selflessly and sacrificially for the good of another. Their inner wounds scream at them continuously: "Protect yourself at all costs! Do not trust! Do not be fooled! Do not be vulnerable! Do not give yourself to others in a sacrificial way unless there is a reciprocal benefit to you. Do not commit to others on an emotional level, because they will only hurt you and let you down in the end." These are some of the core beliefs of the person who cannot love.

What makes it even more complicated is that many such individuals are not even aware that they hold to such foundational beliefs. Yet they enshroud themselves in self-protective mechanisms that keep them from experiencing the deep pain of being reminded (via perceived rejection) that no one really loves them. And should someone profess to love them, they cannot accept it, believing that once that person discovers who they really are (i.e., defective and unlovable), they will reject them. And on that day of impending rejection, it will hurt less if it comes from a person with whom they have not shared their deep heart.

These people also tend to be perfectionists. They see the world in black and white terms and tend to romanticize relationships. The hard fact for them is that since we are a fallen race, no one can perfectly love them all the time. And so their expectations eventually become self-fulfilling no matter how hard another person may try to love them.

Our world can be very fallen in the lives of some whose experiences of rejection have been quite dark, and ongoingly so. In the 1940s and '50s, Dutch psychiatrist Dr. Anna Terruwe got everyone thinking about this when she diagnosed such problems as issuing from what she termed, "emotional deprivation disorder," which is a repression of the emotions brought about as a result of love-deprivation. Her colleague Dr. Conrad Baars, who brought this discovery to the U.S. in the 1950s, referred to it as "deprivation neurosis." Contrary to the Freudian teaching that emotional repression belongs to

the “superego” or conscience, Dr. Terruwe discovered that, “It is not what a man *believes* about his emotions that makes him repress, but what he *feels*.”

Feelings, of course, are the product of experiences that are then translated into beliefs. If your belief is that you are unlovable (based on the way you’ve been treated or neglected and how that has made you feel about yourself), then you will erect a strong emotional wall that protects you from the pain of such feelings and beliefs and from anything that might trigger them.

Such a person needs to come to know that they are loved, not just as a rational fact (i.e., Jesus died for you—therefore you are loved). They actually need to *experience* love from the Triune God and ideally from other human beings. They need to *feel* the reality of it.

Suzanne Baars, (the daughter of Dr. Conrad Baars), says that people need to learn how to communicate love in *affective* ways—ways that go well beyond simple kind deeds and intellectual statements. She defines “affectivity” as “the capacity to be moved by the emotions of love, desire and joy—emotions given to us by God.”

So if you know someone who does not seem to have the capacity to love, even given the limitations of a fallen world, according to Suzanne, you need learn how to communicate your love for them “affectively”—not with mere words, but with the way you celebrate their presence, the way you look at them with a twinkle of delight—in general, the way you act when they’re around, the way you find a unique and keen interest in them and the issues of their deep heart. Additionally, this kind of affirmation needs to be ongoing, because it will probably take a long time for it to have the effect of helping your friend to heal and to re-calculate their worth.

The bad news is that almost no one knows how to do this. You

can always move to the Dallas area to become one of Suzanne's patients, but for most people, that is impractical. Plus, there is a hidden problem in becoming a practitioner of affective therapy. The love that you try to communicate must be genuine in order for it to have its proper effect! It cannot simply be a technique for the counselor to learn. A transformation of the counselor's own heart needs to take place first. They cannot communicate love that they do not possess. They must acquire it for themselves. And God is the only source for the real thing.

Anyone can learn to do it really. And in the learning of how to affectively love others, we actually learn to see ourselves as loved.

Tune in Wednesday for Part 2 of this article. {eoa}

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