

In Pursuit of Authentic Spiritual Growth and the Good Soil

Opening Thoughts

- The question every pastor asks – Why is it so hard to get people to grow?
- What I believe – The power of the Cross is the power to healing, restoration & maturity and is available to every born again believer.
- Romans 7 – Paul spoke of his human battle against his sinful nature – the war within that only in Christ can we gain victory.

Romans 7

15I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. 16I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. 17But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

18I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. 19When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. 20But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.

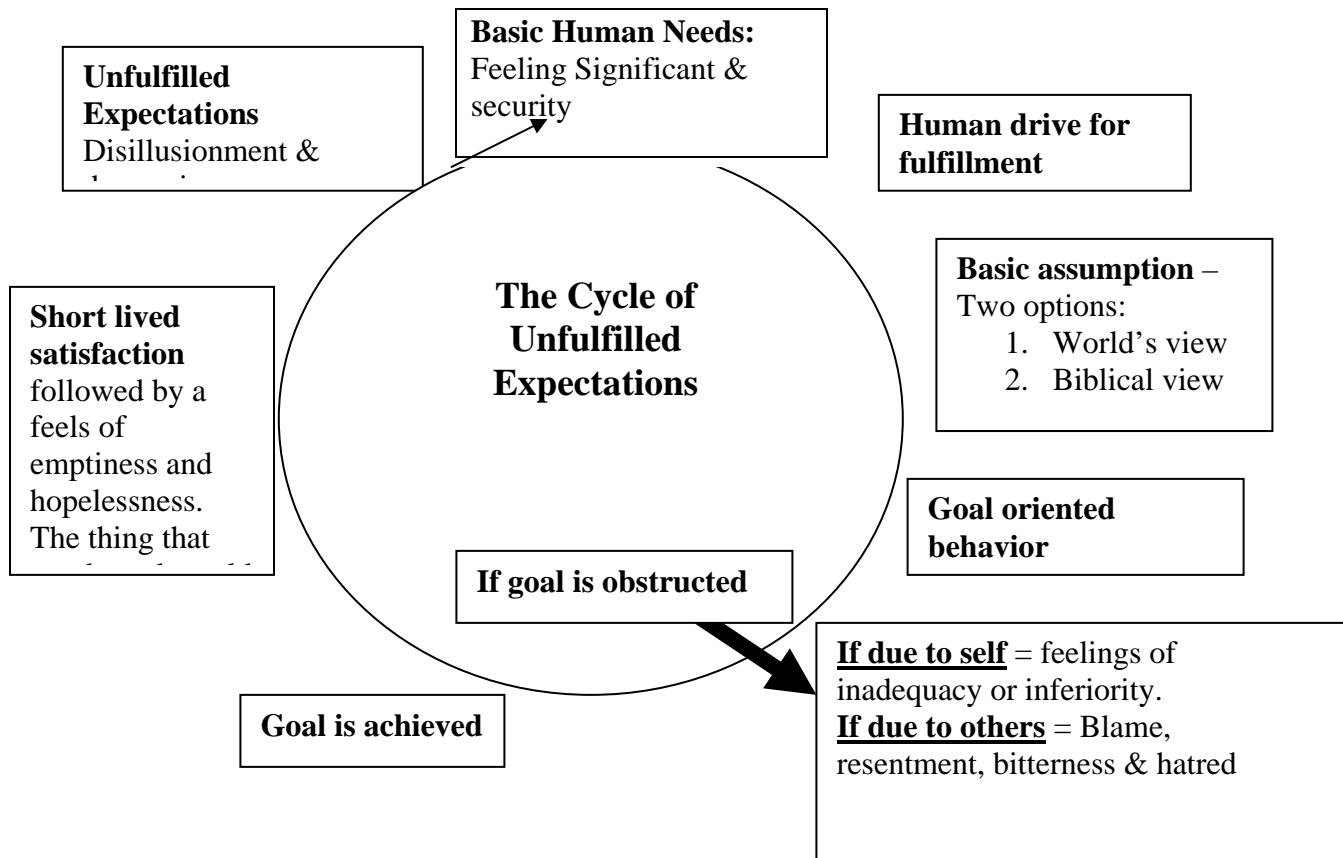
21It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22I love God's law with all my heart. 23But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? 25Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Four traditional models of Christian growth and maturity

1. Empowered free will model – a decision to turn from a life of sin & experience sanctified change.
 - New creation in Christ
 - God is good. - You're bad. – So stop it!
 - Brent Rue
2. Truth model
 - Evangelical movement
 - The truth will set you free
 - Nancy as a young wife and mother
3. Inter-healing and deliverance model
 - Charismatic movement
 - Go back and discover the pain and abuse and take it to Jesus
 - Prayer, revelation & Spirit-led council

- Use of imagery
- 4. Supernatural model – holy Spirit encounter
 - Pentecostal movement
 - Power encounter – “floor time”

A Basic Understanding of human nature



As humans we are driven to experience security and significance.

- Felt needs:
 - Significance – feeling needed and valued
 - Security – feeling loved and needed
- Human drive for fulfillment
- Basic assumptions – two options
 - World's view
 - Power, position or prestige
 - Money & wealth
 - Beauty or physical looks
 - Intelligence
 - Biblical View – The transformed & renewed mind

- True significance & security can only found in God's unconditional love.
- Goal oriented behavior – What we do based on our assumptions.
- Two scenarios
 - Goal is obstructed
 - Because of people
 - Resentment, bitterness, anger and hatred
 - Rejection or rebellion
 - Because of self – incompetence or ability
 - Feeling of inadequacy, inferiority & self hatred
 - Leads to all kinds of dysfunctional behaviors
 - Goal is achieved
 - Short lived satisfaction followed by a feeling of emptiness
 - Disillusionment & depression
- Unfulfilled expectation - the cycle repeats itself over and over.

The main point

- The desire of every true pastor is to see people mature, grow and change in an authentic way.
- My point of crisis and the cry of my heart.
- The Lords response – “It all happens in the Good soil.”
- Parable of the sower in all three synoptic gospels explain why many people never grow to maturity.

Soil Conditions summary

- Hard – Clear Biblical message – they could understand it.
- Rocky – Issues of adversity, cares and trouble. When the rubber met the road they couldn't bring application.
- Thorny – Issues of the “Cosmos” world. The message of simplicity - “No longer conforming to the world's thinking but being transformed by the renewal of the mind.”

The Good soil

1. Cultivated & Broken
 - The gift of authentic confession & repentance.
 - Genuine humility and contrite hearts – not regret or remorse.
 - Transparency, Authenticity & Vulnerability
2. Environmental Conditions conducive for seed development & rebirth.
 - Warmth of the Son – Love of God
 - Rain of the Holy Spirit – The experienced presence of God.
 - Enriched soil conditions – manure, worms and compost
3. The secret work below the surface in the seed and its root.
 - Dormancy and stratification

- Softening of the outer shell
 - Timing & seasonal change
 - Helping people in their desert seasons – (Example Paul's 15 years)
 - Not getting ahead of God – not letting people hurt themselves.
 - Value of home-growing.
4. Organic crop development – growing up together.
 - A symbiotic interdependent community
 - Synergy defined –
 5. Growing towards the light & the boost of precipitation.
 - Stretching towards the Son – sanctification
 - The ongoing work of the Spirit – surrender to self.
 - Growing = growing pains. When you stop growing it's usually because you're dying!
 6. The fruit of a mature community.
 - The work of God exposed in attitude, behavior and action.
 - The fruit = love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control.
 7. The great harvest – 30 - 60 - 100 fold.

Parable summary

- Matthew 13
- Mark 4
- Luke 8

Thorny ground

- **Luke** - represents those who hear and accept the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.

The good soil

- **Matt.** - represents the hearts of those who truly accept God's message and produce a huge harvest--thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted."
- **Luke** - soil represents honest, good-hearted people who hear God's message, cling to it, and steadily produce a huge harvest.

Conclusion

Ephesians 3:17-19