Emotional Issues and Concepts
Frank L. Reed

Emotional constancy

There is a concept called 'emotional-constancy'. (It is related to the concept of object-constancy which is the ability to know that an object exists even when we cannot see it.) It means that babies need physical presence to feel emotionally safe/secure. Most of this security comes from contact with the mother. Healthy development includes eventual differentiation and knowing and experiencing emotional security even when 'mom' is not present. When that is not sensed or experienced, alternate security is sought. So, if my wife loves me when she is with me, does she love me when she is not with me? Can I experience the emotional-constancy that assures me of her love in her absence or do I need to find an alternate source of security.

What about the love of God? Does He only love me when I feel and experience events that indicate His love or can I know that He loves me even when my experiences do not seem favorable? Is His love a constant and can I operate on that constancy or do I need another "fix" of emotional experience to feel His presence? The need for constant emotional highs and feelings indicates a lack of maturity – of not having grown out of earlier developmental stages.

For men, anger toward women could be (among other possibilities) a result of this lack of security due to an insecure attachment cycle developed early in life. Women may be seen as unreliable and undependable.

It can be remedied by making secure attachments with women later in life.

Maturity also means, however, that we need to accept challenges in and from those attachments. If we do not do that, it may mean that we have not reached a level of development that will tolerate any amount of ambiguity or discontinuity. Hence, we have not developed the emotional constancy that will allow mature function.

 Truth presented in love is the important factor and develops the most trust.

All these truths are also applicable to women but seem to be more frequent in men. Women who have not bonded with a father or a Godly man may lack emotional-constancy and feel a need to be physically bonded to the physical presence of a man to feel secure. This indicates a lack of maturity. It can be dealt with by loving friendships with Godly men who show love in acceptable ways and who assure by words and actions that their love is not transitory but enduring.

Security

Is developed by feeling safe in a situation; having needs met and having relationships that are meaningful and supportive. Insecurity is result of uncertainty about one's value and ability. This can take the form of possessiveness and fearfulness. It can be cured by close friendships with good people who really love and tell truth and respect you for your value as a person. A strong relationship with God will give the security we need to reach out to bless others. It will give us a foundation that realizes that if we are rejected by people we can still be secure in God.

Measurement of relationships

Relationships tend to change in intensity. We tend to measure the relationships by how much they change over time. Short-term relationships tend to grow rapidly because we go from no knowledge to some knowledge in a short time. In long-term relationships it is difficult to maintain strong growth patterns because we may know the person very well and relative to time our relationship may grow slowly

Transference

There are several types of transference. It can occur when someone has a long term relationship which terminates. They, then begin a relationship with another person at the level of intensity of the former relationship. Thus, the new relationship proceeds at a rapid rate and develops quickly perhaps without judicious evaluation of the developments. They assume that the new person has the same qualities as the former friend. This assumption is frequently unwarranted.

It can also occur when a person transfers feelings of affection or disaffection to a counselor or pastor, etc. When this happens the counselor should recognize that it is important that the emotions are expressed but that he/she is <u>not the object of the emotions</u> that are being expressed and should not respond in kind. The counselee is very vulnerable at these times. The correct response on the part of the counselor will, many times, be a wake up call to the struggling person as they realize that the counselor is there to help and not to harm.

Longing for acceptance

All persons long for acceptance. Sometimes this longing goes beyond the bounds of discretion. The person may compromise values or property to gain the attention of the other person. They may give gifts or sell something to the other person too cheaply or allow their values to be compromised by allowing access to their body or time. They do not have well defined boundaries.

Fixing family of origin by creating a perfect life

If early experiences are unpleasant we can attempt to create the perfect world in our own lives. This places too much pressure on us to perform and places pressures on those around us by asking them to be perfect.

Sometimes image maintenance causes fixations on repairing faulty experiences. For example if a person has an unhappy home and childhood and strongly desires a happy home. He/she may be determined to create a perfect marriage and family to fix the unsatisfactory image in his/her mind. This fixation may cause the person to become perfectionistic about all of life. It is important to realize that it is OK to not be perfect and that the past cannot be fixed. It is important to realize that life is full of difficulties but that they can be overcome and one problem does not make you a failure. Children who feel pressured to preserve the family image often destroy it intentionally or subconsciously.

Learned helplessness
Experiments with animals illustrate that when an animal is subjected to abuse from which it is not capable of extricating itself it can become helpless. Even when the constraints are removed the animal continues to act helpless. The conditions of abuse have been removed but the helpless behavior continues.

For example: a dog is given an electrical shock while being harnessed in a cage in a way that prevents the dog from removing itself from the shock. When the harness is taken off, the dog still allows itself to be shocked even though it now could move away from the shock. Why? Because the animal has begun thinking in terms of being helpless.

Can people learn to be helpless? They can. If subjected to abuse when unable to leave the situation, they may refuse to leave the abuse even when they would be able to leave. This creates a very destructive pattern of self abuse or allowing others to abuse them.

How can this be helped? In the case of the animal, a person had to physically remove the, now unharnessed, animal from the shock. This told the animal that it was possible to leave the painful situation. After several assists, the animal could remove itself from the shock. With humans the same principles often apply. They need help to remove themselves from the abusive situation. They need to be told and shown that they are no longer helpless and can, indeed, remove themselves from abusive situations and respond in a mature manner.

Maintaining images

Rather than seeing the truth, people ignore warning signs of dysfunction in others. Then they find themselves in the same difficult situations over and over again. They do not require others to be responsible for their actions and attitudes. They feel responsible for other's feelings.

Idealized feelings of home and the subsequent loss of home can create idealized images of home. It is not so strange to realize that childhood memories are just that - memories. Perhaps, though, if innocence is compromised, home becomes idealized rather than stored in memory as fond recollections. Healthy childhood memories can be stepping-stones left behind and built upon for development and maturity. Images, on the other hand, will distort reality.

Idealized images are difficult to erase. They serve functional purposes of maintenance. They can be adjusted as needed since they may not be totally accurate. They also serve as a point of reference or anchor or security or place to hide in times of stress.

In some situations, people grow up in a system of idealized images where the task was image maintenance at all costs. This sets a pattern of surface relationships that may serve some persons well but haunt others who think in more introspective terms.

Also complicating this process in image maintenance systems is the contamination of the child's (or spouse's) emotions. Since image maintenance is the critical task it is important that someone (powerful) control the thoughts of the others in the system. The result is that the controlled persons lose contact with their own thoughts and emotions. When they have a thought or emotion they are not sure if it is their's or someone else's. The unfortunate result is that they may never develop into their own person and what God made them to be.

Church systems can be similar. There can be a dominant leader who controls the thought processes (in spite of popular comments about Spiritual gifts, etc.). All persons are expected to walk in lock-step. Anyone who will not or cannot do so will be ostracized.

The strong persons who are the controllers are characterized by insecurity. Their situation is pitiable but not very easily remedied. It is usually my suggestion to leave the proximity, if possible, until personal internal strength can be developed and vulnerability reduced in a safe environment free of contamination and filled with support and affirmation. Reading books on understanding the symptoms and developing emotional and Spiritual strength is helpful.

Safe People by Cloud and Townsend is one of the best books on the subject. It helps identify the qualities of safe and unsafe people.