Full Range Emotional Development and the Joyful Life

Gary L. Carson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol6/iss2/5

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
FULL RANGE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND THE JOYFUL LIFE

By Gary L. Carson, Ed.D.*

(Presidential address delivered at the Fifth Annual Convention of AMCAP, Salt Lake City, Oct. 4, 1979)

I know no better way of sharing my feelings and discharging my responsibility today in this presidential address than to tell you forth-rightly what I’d like to talk with you about, perhaps persuade you to consider more thoroughly, and then give you the substance of my thoughts which support my position. What I’d like to talk with you about is emotional constraint and its impact in terms of diminishing our ability to live a Christ-like or joyful life. What I propose to show is that, intentionally or inadvertently, we as people and as therapists may sometimes, by virtue of our own conditioning and the attitudes we reinforce in others, contribute to some of God’s children being restricted in their emotional development and consequently in their ability to relate to Him completely. Specifically, when we emphasize that persons should school their feelings and more particularly, control anger and negative feelings, without paying as much attention to the facilitation and growth of positive feelings, then we haven’t contributed maximally to the emotional development of the person. To be sure, individuals generate a lot of misery for themselves and others because they haven’t developed control over destructive emotions. Just as certainly, however, there are those who generate a lot of misery for themselves and others because they haven’t maximized the development of constructive emotions - I refer specifically to love - which leads to joy and so many of the other expansive emotions in life. That, then, is my position.

The same hymn that says:
School thy feelings, O my brother:
Train thy warm impulsive soul:
go on to say,
Do not its emotions smother
But let wisdom’s voice control.

Let me say at this point that a hymn, though inspired, is not scripture but represents one man’s position; granted it may be a wise one. However, the wisdom must be reflected in the total message, not just parts of it. The second verse reads.

School thy feeling;
There is power in the cool collected mind;
Passion shatters reason’s tower,
Makes the clearest vision blind.

The lesson of the hymn seems to be that we should overcome passion with intellect. For me the larger message is that we are to develop the wisdom to direct our feelings without smothering them or unnecessarily restricting them. To school one’s feelings is to enhance them. We go to school to become informed, enlarged, to pursue increased understanding. In this connection it is not that emotions are beasts that must be tamed by a school master. Rather emotions are a God given endowment, as is free agency. Our ultimate test is to use our free agency to magnify our talents, to bring to fruition the natural endowment we have received. Whether in the physical, intellectual or emotional domain, we have a responsibility to become an active and directing force in the process of our own personal enlargement or fulfillment, disciplining our body, our mind, or our heart as is necessary to allow us to maximize our growth. Schooling then may include disciplining where it is understood that the Latin root of the word discipline means to self-direct. Therefore we have a responsibility to self-direct our growth.

The theme of our convention is:
“...that your souls may be joyful.”
with the subtitle, self-enhancement approaches to therapy. The theme is taken from the 136th section of the Doctrine and Covenants and is supplemented by II Nephi 4:16-30.

Considering the context of these scriptures we find the following. In the 136th Section, the Lord is revealing among his last words in the formal scripture of the Doctrine and Covenants. His directions for the manner in which the saints are to conduct themselves as they leave Winter Quarters and head west. Among His instructions are some relative to the expression of emotions and how the saints were to cope with emotional stress. In verse 28 He says, “If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.” In verse 29 He says, “If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful.” In verse 28 He says if you’re happy or joyful - express it. In verse 29 He says if you’re not happy - get that way. Clearly the Lord seems to want His people to be happy, to be joyful. It would seem that this is good not only for the people themselves but it helps the Lord to get His work done. What therapist, or anyone else for that matter, ever heard of sorrowful, depressed people accomplishing much? God needs happy, productive people to do his work - to serve him in the process of getting others to progress.

*Brother Carson is a counseling psychologist at Weber State College, Ogden, Utah and immediate past president of AMCAP.
What allows us to be joyful? For me one of the greatest evidences of joy and the qualities that contribute to it comes from Alma 27:17. Ammon, one of the sons of Mosiah, has been among the Lamanites as a missionary. He has taught King Lamoni and his people and has brought them into alignment with the attitudes and life of Christ. They have become so converted that they refuse to take up arms, to shed any more blood. They have set themselves apart from the other Lamanites, calling themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehites. They have been scapegoats as the Lamanites (and Amalekites) unable to prevail against the Nephites, turn upon their former brethren and slaughter them. Leading these people, whom he has converted and learned to love so much, Ammon takes a course toward Zarabemla to see if he can find a refuge for his adopted people there. As he enters the land he meets Alma (one assumes for the first time in years since before their mission), and it is a glorious reunion. Verse 17 says, "Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God."

What allows us to be joyful? For me one of the greatest evidences of joy and the qualities that contribute to it comes from Alma 27:17. Ammon, one of the sons of Mosiah, has been among the Lamanites as a missionary. He has taught King Lamoni and his people and has brought them into alignment with the attitudes and life of Christ. They have become so converted that they refuse to take up arms, to shed any more blood. They have set themselves apart from the other Lamanites, calling themselves the Anti-Nephi-Lehites. They have been scapegoats as the Lamanites (and Amalekites) unable to prevail against the Nephites, turn upon their former brethren and slaughter them. Leading these people, whom he has converted and learned to love so much, Ammon takes a course toward Zarabemla to see if he can find a refuge for his adopted people there. As he enters the land he meets Alma (one assumes for the first time in years since before their mission), and it is a glorious reunion. Verse 17 says, "Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God."

When he arrived home, Mike Gold was asked by his frightened mother: "What happened to you, Mike? He could answer only: "I don't know." "Who did this to you, Mike?" Again he answered: "I don't know." And so the mother washed the blood from the face of her little boy and put him into fresh clothes and took him into her lap as she sat in a rocker, and tried to soothe him. Mike Gold recalled so much later in life that he raised his small battered lips to the ear of his mother and asked: "Mama, who is Christ?"

When he arrived home, Mike Gold was asked by his frightened mother: "What happened to you, Mike? He could answer only: "I don't know." "Who did this to you, Mike?" Again he answered: "I don't know." And so the mother washed the blood from the face of her little boy and put him into fresh clothes and took him into her lap as she sat in a rocker, and tried to soothe him. Mike Gold recalled so much later in life that he raised his small battered lips to the ear of his mother and asked: "Mama, who is Christ?"

Mike Gold died in 1967. His last meals were taken at a Catholic Charity house in New York City, run by Dorothy Day. She once said of him: "Mike Gold eats every day at the table of Christ, but he will probably never accept him because of the day he first heard his name."

Mike Gold never knew Christ, nor was he apparently interested in becoming acquainted with the person whose name had first introduced him to the battered child syndrome at the hands of young "Christians". Why did Mike Gold never come to know or accept Christ as did Ammon? What was the net result of his early conditioning? In the answer to the second question we have an answer to the first. (Another answer will come in the lack of relationship with a mortal that precludes really knowing God.)

The June 1979 issue of the AMCAP Journal described the processes of conditioning that brings about maladaptive, or adaptive but unnatural, behaviors. In the case of the Pike described there, conditioning generated avoidance behaviors that we’re maladaptive. In the case of the whale at seaworld, a creature, through selective reinforcement, acquired responses that were adaptive; they allowed the whale to sustain life, but were not necessarily natural or inclined to foster maximum effectiveness in the whale in its natural habitat. (Similarly with hatchery raised fish.)

Conditioning that takes place in the life of man can have essentially the same outcomes. Mike Gold acquired an avoidance response as a result of the aversive conditioning that took place the first time he heard the name of Christ. He was therefore reluctant, or unable, to develop a relationship with Christ - to love Christ, to experience a fullness of joy. Others of us have been restricted in our capacity to love Christ because of (1) being reduced in our desire to love anyone or anything, (2) because differential reinforcement has led us to value other things more than love; for instance, intellectual accomplishment rather than emotional maturity. As an example of being reduced in our ability to love anyone or anything, allow me to share an
example from my personal work as a teacher and a
counselor. A number of years ago, the path of my life
crossed that of a robust man from Wyoming. We’ll call
him John. John was attending school with the
assistance of the State Department of Vocational
Rehabilitation. While he had some physical disability
he also had been (or was) an alcoholic. He emulated in
his dress and character the last of a vanishing breed.
John was a rugged individualist in the truest sense of
the word. A nice enough guy, pleasant, easy to know
but wasn’t about to let anyone get close to him. He had
a marriage (his) annulled within 2 weeks during the
quarter we were together, and though his 35 year old
heart ached to return to the ranch where he grew up, he
would not allow it because he had been on the outs with
his dad for years and pride wouldn’t let him go back.
During the course of an encounter group, I thought of
him often. One evening as I listened to my son’s
Carpenter records I found a song that sounded a whole
lot like him and so brought the lyrics on a transparency
and the recording to class for John to consider.

DESPERADO

Desperado

Why don’t you come to your senses
You been out ridin’ fences
For so long now
Oh, you’re a hard one
But I know that you’ve got your reasons
These things that are pleasin’ you
Can hurt you somehow

Don’t you draw the queen of diamonds, boy
She’ll beat you
If she’s able
The queen of hearts
Is always your best bet

Now it seems to me some fine things
Have you laid upon your table
But you only want the ones
That you can’t get

Desperado

Oh you ain’t gettin’ no younger
Your pain and your hunger
They’re drivin’ you home

Freedom, Ah freedom
That’s just some people, talkin’
You’re prisoners walkin’
Through this world all alone

Don’t your feet get cold in the wintertime
The sky won’t snow
And the sun won’t shine
It’s hard to tell the night time
From the day

You’re losin’ all your highs and lows
Ain’t it funny how the feelin’ goes away

Desperado

Why don’t you come to your senses
Come down from your fences
Open the gate

It may be rainin’
But there’s a rainbow above you
You better let somebody love you
You better let somebody love you
Before it’s too late

( Words and Music; Don Henley and Glen Frey)

At the conclusion of the song and after my sharing
some impressions as to how I saw him being depicted in
the song, John related the following story - reflecting
his awareness of what had conditioned him to become
as he was.

From his earliest memories he aspired to be like his
dad - tough, rugged, hard, a real cowboy. Before ever
going to school he was in the saddle. By the time he
reached adolescence he had already become a man. He
had been out on the range with his dad before sun-up,
riding, fixing fences, driving cows and drawing the
cowhands wage - so to speak. Fourteen to sixteen hour
days were not alien to John. His wages during his
earlier years had really been hard work, sweat, and the
company of his dad. As he started to come of age and
enter his teens his dad gave him his first paycheck. At
this point he had the chance for the first time in his life
to buy without begging, and to buy something he really
prized and really wanted - a horse. Not being allowed to
show much tenderness or affection within the
constraints of being a tough, rugged, hard cowboy,
John channeled his natural inclinations for warmth,
approval and the sharing of affection toward his horse.
His world was more complete than it had ever been. He
had the identity of his dad and the love of his horse;
but, the two were shortly to come into conflict. At
about the age of 15 or 16 they went to the state fair.
They were enjoying the spirit of the fair until someone
interrupted that spirit with the news that one of their
horses was down in the stall and seemed to be unable to
get up, John ran to the stalls to find that it was his horse
that was in trouble. He was desperate. His horse was ex-
piring and there was nothing he could do. Try as he
may, he couldn’t get the horse up. Futily the horse
struggled, looked at him through a glassy eye, nickered
and rolled on its side. Momentarily it was dead. This
was more than John’s young, and not so hard heart
could take. Even hard, rugged, young cowboys break
when they lose the object of their affection in life. As
John was lying there sobbing with his arm around the
neck of his still warm but departed friend, his dad
arrived on the scene; grabbed him by the nap of the
neck jerked him out of the stall and informed him that
"that’s the last time I want to ever see you cry over a
damn horse!" Well, John was shattered. He left the
stalls, he left the fair, he went home, fixed up a
packhorse and saddle horse, and went into the
mountains. No one saw him for 3 months. When he
came out of the mountains, his dad would be proud of
him. He was tougher and h;lrder than ever. Nothing
was to hurt him or make him vulnerable again. But he
was through with his dad. He took a job as a hand on a
neighboring ranch - one that had been in an adversary role with his father. From there he had gone into the Navy, become a pugilist and later a roughneck in the oilfields - drinking, fighting and not giving a damn for man nor beast. It had been 15-20 years since he'd had any civil or relationship-generating words with his father. While his dad was a millionaire and John was struggling with physical, personal, and financial problems in an attempt to get through college, his pride and his acquired hard-heartedness would not allow him to ask dad for help or to return to the hills and plains that had given birth to his appreciation of God's creation.

How many John's are there in the world, people whose emotions have been abused to the point that they are more interested in self-protection than they are in self-development - who can't love because they can't trust, and how does this affect their relationship to God and subsequently their capacity to be joyful? We are told in Matthew, that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, might, mind and strength. What does it mean to love God in this way? What keeps us from doing so?

John Powell answered the question concerning what it means to love God in this way:

I think that St. John would answer this question by telling us that before anyone can really give his heart, soul and mind to God, he must first know how much God has loved him, how God has thought about him from all eternity, and desired to share his life, joy, and love with him. Christian love is response to God's infinite love, and there can be no response until one has somehow perceived that God has first loved him, so much so that he sent his only begotten son to be our salvation.

We know something of this love in our own instincts to share that which is good and is our possession: good insights, good news, good rumors. Perhaps the best analogy in our human existence is that of the young married couple, very much in love and very much alive because of love, wishing to share their love and life with new life which it is in their power to beget. But it is even more than this with God who tells man; if the mother should forget the child of her womb I will never forget you!

It is precisely this that is the point of most failures to love God truly. Most of us are not deeply aware of his fatherly, even tender, love. It is especially the person who has never experienced a human love with all of its life-giving effects, who has never been introduced to the God who is love through the sacrament of human love, that stands at a serious disadvantage. The God of love who wishes to share his life and joy will probably seem like the product of an overheated imagination - unreal.

What keeps us from loving God?; not having had the experience of being loved in the physical reality of the human condition; and, whether a John or a Mike Gold, having our natural tendency to express curiosity or love blunted by those who should lead us to Christ. On another plane many cannot love deeply, not because love has been blunted, but because other values have been more highly rewarded, as may be the case when reinforcement schedules reward intellectual accomplishment and ignore emotional development and expression.

Of major concern for me then is how our lives have been shaped, with or without our knowledge, to the point that we have acquired, like some of our clients, maladaptive, or adaptive but unnatural behaviors. We avoid love because of aversive stimulation or we are shallow in our capacity to love because other things were more highly valued and therefore reinforced by those who reared us. Either way we are limited in a significant domain of our emotional development.

Another concern is generated when we look at how our becoming hard hearted, or emotionally shallow in our capacity to love, affects our ability to relate to God by virtue of being receptive or un receptive to His spirit and the promptings of the Holy Ghost. We are told that we are to seek the Lord for guidance. We are to ask Him, after studying it out in our mind, if something is right for us, and if it is He will cause our bosom to burn within us (D&C 9:8). If we have no relationship with the Lord, no trust in Him, will we ask Him for guidance? If we do ask Him and we have suppressed our capacity to feel, to hurt, will we have the capability of registering the burning in the bosom? Nephi at the time he is called to build a ship chastises his brothers for their unbelief and says, in 1 Nephi 17:45, "... ye have seen an angel, and he spoke unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder ... " It would seem from this that the Lord had to communicate by shouting because Laman and Lemuel were not subject to the still small voice - being past feeling. At numerous places in the Book of Mormon reference is made to the people hardening their hearts and turning away from the Lord. Notice they did not harden their minds; they hardened their hearts - not their capacity to think but their capacity to feel was diminished. Similarly, when the Lord desired to really communicate, He did so through the heart, not the mind. As Nephi was closing out his account on his stewardship he wrote some things of significance, at the same time noting that he was not mighty in writing as in speaking for he said "... when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it into the hearts of the children of men. But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them ... " (2 Nephi 33:2-3)

Within father Lehi's family there was constant concern over the hardening of the hearts of Laman and Lemuel and their eventual separation from the family and the Lord. How it must have grieved Lehi as a father to have a vision of the tree of life and see that two of his children were not partakers. In 1 Nephi 8:37 he exhorts
and entreats them "...with all the feelings of a tender parent ..." Nephi, after gaining an awareness of the meaning of the analogy of the tame and wild olive trees, clarifies some things for his brothers but not until he observes that "being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought." (1 Nephi 15:3) and asks them in verse 10 "How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?" In 2 Nephi 5:21 we find that the Lamanites hardened their hearts like unto flint and were given a dark skin so as to not be enticing to the Lord's people.

Finally, in the closing chapters of Moroni's record, he notes that the Nephites were due their destruction because of their iniquity. They did exceed the Lamanites in the gravity of their abominations. They devoured the flesh of their victims "...because of the hardness of their hearts;" (Moroni 9:9-10). The scripture is replete with references to the hardening of hearts and the removal of the person or people from being subject to God's spirit. When we insulate ourselves against feeling or fail to develop feelings we restrict ourselves by that amount in terms of our ability to relate to God, to know Christ as our Lord and redeemer and to be joyful.

As is noted in Helaman 16:22 "...Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come." Thus we see that Satan is the author of the hard-hearted syndrome. If people are to develop a capability of really being joyful they must learn to love God, which means overcoming Satan and his efforts to make them hard hearted. How is this love developed?

The case of John and Mike Gold tell us how not to engender love. The work of Harlow, Montague and others underscores physical closeness or contact comfort as a prime vehicle for generating love. Brother Robert Harbertson, a Mission President of the California Fresno Mission and presently a Regional Representative, said that following his initial interview with missionaries as they came into the mission he would clasp their right hand, place his left hand behind their neck, look them in the eye and tell them that while not their father, he hoped to serve that role while they were on their mission and that he loved them very much. He would then pull them to him to give them a hug. The response in many cases was astounding - tension inducement. One elder, after months of wearing a sneer expressed, through tears, how he had always tried protecting himself. What had teaching for Christ and working with a companion for Christ ultimately taught him? - to love.

My experiences in teaching and counseling are not too unlike those of Brother Harbertson. As an inservice teacher I went into a Sunday School class of four year olds. Their teacher, my wife, was taking them through a make-believe world of their creation to teach them how to relate to and appreciate all of God's creation. The children cast me in the role of the little boy who went on the walk. I took my dog (the college president's boy) and we walked through this world appreciating and loving all that we had put into it, each aspect being represented by the child who had placed that particular sun, mountain, tree or animal into our creation. Our interaction was significant and our involvement more than just cursory. I felt prompted after the prayer to invite them for a hug as they left the room. I got down on my honorches and got a spontaneous hug from one little boy. Seven or eight other four year olds filed out.

In another instance I had a student in an encounter class who years earlier had taken several classes from me. Confided in me regarding his involvement with LSD in the early days of the drug culture, helped me collect data for comparing background and responses to stress of drug users and nonusers and then had disappeared. I often wondered what had happened to him. I was definitely closer to him than to the average student and his presence was missed. Then one December I got a Christmas card. The postmark read Indian Creek, Alaska. The card bore his name - nothing more.

I was both gratified to hear from him and provoked to hearing nothing from him. Now he had returned, we had had some good interaction in my office but in the classroom he had disclosed or given very little. Wanting to help others know and appreciate him as I did - to see that he had substance - I reviewed some of our past experiences together in a general way, and without violating his privacy I told him how I had felt about him and how I had genuinely missed him. I asked him to ponder these things, to realize that class and the quarter would be over the next day and that we might part again without knowing when we might see one another again. I told him if there were feelings we needed to express we maybe ought to take the chance because we didn't know when we would get another one. If he had nothing to say to me then he could just say goodbye. Nonchalantly, and without feeling he said, goodbye. I was hurt and I guess I showed it. He asked if he hurt me and as I tried to express myself tears rolled down my checks. At this point this young man expressed, through tears, how he had always tried to please his dad, how he had virtually "busted his back" on the farm to get dad's praise only to get criticism and experience hurt. He concluded that all he could do was hurt. He tried to help but ended up hurting. Eventually he had tried to seal himself off from hurt. He taught me a great lesson that day and I hope I gave him something to take away. He had concluded that in trying to help you end up hurting. I concluded that unless you could hurt you couldn't help. Only when I could be hurt and could show it could he be helped to realize that he had insulated himself from deep loving
relationships for fear of being hurt and only when he
could risk the hurt and pursue love in those relation-
ships that were most significant could he ever be com-
plete; and, I might add now, could he ever have
knowledge of Christ and be joyful.

School thy feelings. O my brother;
Train thy warm impulsive soul;
Do not its emotion smother,
But let wisdom's voice control.

Wisdom's voice says love completely. Control but do
not smother the emotion of your warm impulsive soul.
Develop a full range of human feelings. Regulate those
that would restrict your growth and cause you or others
to suffer. Enhance those that bring about your growth,
your joy and the joy of those most meaningful to your
life. Love your fellow man and allow him to love you.
We are our brother's keeper and must stand in for God
in the expression of love that we may come to know of
His capacity to love us. Then and only then will we be
magnified to our utmost. Then perhaps we can register
and express the joy of Ammon. In the name of Jesus
Christ, Amen.

References
1. Powell, John, Why Am I Afraid to Love? Niles. Il-
   linois: Argus Communications Co., 1967, pp. 114-116
2. Ibid., pp 9-12.

Biography
Powell, John, Why Am I Afraid to Love? Niles. Il-
linois: Argus Communications Co., 1967.