

Exploring Feelings - Stephen Ministry

Excerpts from SM training materials and a Continuing Ed Session with Rev. Matt Rhodes (Director of spiritual care and chaplaincy training for Penn Medicine Princeton.)

- Feelings are not something that should be judged as good or bad, because they are not something we can control. They simply are what they are.
- Feelings are data – they point to places that may need further examination.
- They are a gift from God intended for our benefit.
- Care Givers need to listen to the feelings behind their words of their Care Receivers. Our ability to care for others is contingent upon becoming aware of what they feel.
- Most people aspire to maximize positive feelings and to minimize negative feelings, which can lead to trouble if we try to ignore or repress the feelings we don't like rather than experience them.
- Working through difficult feelings is one of the hardest things we will ever do. All addictive and compulsive behaviors are attempts to deal with feelings that feel unbearable.
- Repressing feelings can also make it harder for us to meet people in the midst of their difficult feelings. We can't relate.
- Stanford research has shown that one of the most important things you can do to help a person who is suffering is to help them name the feelings being expressed behind their words. People's sense of distress markedly decreases when someone acknowledges the feelings they are experiencing.
 - It seems like you're feeling sad right now.
 - I don't know about you, but I'd be really angry I that were me
- Many of us have been taught from an early age not to share feelings and to stuff them back. What do we often say when a child starts to cry?
 - Oh you're okay
 - Don't worry about it
 - It's not a big deal
 - Instead you might say – "Oh, are you sad?" and just hold the child for a minute. You will be amazed how much more quickly the difficult feelings resolve.
- Telling someone not to feel guilty has never helped anyone. It's better to help them examine their feelings and where they are coming from.
- No one fails a suffering person more than the person who tries to cheer them up.
- "Be not be afraid" is the most common phrase in scripture. This shows us that God appreciates fear as part of the human condition. We, on other hand, tend to deny our fear and the fear of others .
- Our story is best shown rather than told – Rather than say I understand, I know, it's better to draw on the "well" of your feelings as you listen. This leads to being compassionate.
- When listening, sit down so the person knows your intention is to stay there as long as needed.

- Communicate that you can handle whatever someone wants to share. Don't show shock, dismay, frustration, anxiousness, or any other upset feelings. These can communicate a lack of acceptance. Stay calm and peaceful.
- Don't talk to fill the space. Stay quiet a bit longer than may be comfortable.
- The pathway to depth is silence.



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