

# Better

## EMOTIONALLY



1 Samuel 18:6-11 & Nehemiah 5:6-7

It was the wrong valve... again. I just wanted to get the kitchen sink working, and after buying the wrong one twice already, I didn't want to make the hour round trip to the hardware store a third time. I was ticked. How hard could it be to replace this little valve? In frustration, I threw it down on the ground beside me.

I knew it wasn't my best moment, but that became crystal clear when my five-year-old son, who was "helping," quietly said, "Dad, you can't throw things because you're mad."

What do you do in a moment like that? You can justify your anger, because honestly, who wouldn't be frustrated after three trips for a five-dollar part? You can deflect or lie: "I didn't mean to throw it. It slipped!" Or you can own it and look your five-year-old in the eye and say, "You're right. My anger got the best of me, and I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry."

How can I expect to teach my son self-control if I'm not practicing it myself?

Emotional intelligence isn't about suppressing our feelings or pretending we're fine. It's recognizing that God created us with emotions and what we *do* with those emotions matters. Emotional intelligence means learning to govern our emotions instead of letting our emotions govern us.

As Mac Lake writes in *Leading Yourself*, "When we respond to our emotions through the lens of God's truth, we avoid making decisions that could rob us of our peace of mind, harm our relationships, or damage our reputation."<sup>4</sup>

## ICEBREAKER

**What's one of your biggest pet peeves? It can be something small or irrational, but it gets you every time!**

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<sup>4</sup> Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 42.

## READ IT

Read 1 Samuel 18:6-11 & Nehemiah 5:6-7

## GET IT

Read 1 Samuel 18:6-11

1. What emotions was Saul struggling with and what was the root behind those emotions?

2. How did Saul handle those emotions?

Read Nehemiah 5:1-13

3. What emotions was Nehemiah facing and what was the root cause behind them?

4. How did Nehemiah handle those emotions?

## LIVE IT

When Saul hears the people singing David's praises he reacts with jealousy, fear, and suspicion. Rather than pausing to reflect and regulate, he gives full vent to his emotions, letting his insecurity drive him to destructive behavior. This is a textbook example of poor emotional intelligence: his inability to process his feelings or see clearly leads to relational breakdown, personal torment, and eventually, leadership failure.

While we may not throw spears like Saul (hopefully), we often see similar signs when we struggle emotionally. Mac Lake, in *Leading Yourself* (p. 25), highlights warning signs of low emotional intelligence:

- Frequent mood swings
- Insensitivity to others' feelings
- Difficulty expressing emotions appropriately
- Lack of self-awareness
- Resistance to change
- Impulsive behavior
- Avoiding responsibility or blame
- Talking about yourself too much<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 25.

Whether at home, at work, or in ministry, these patterns undermine trust and fracture relationships. Emotional intelligence isn't optional, it's essential to leading ourselves and others well.

**5. Which of the signs of low emotional intelligence listed above do you see most in your own life?**

**6. Where did Saul go wrong with governing his emotions in this situation?**

**7. It's easy to pinpoint someone else's failures, but sometimes it's harder to be honest with ourselves. Thinking of a time when your own lack of emotional intelligence created unnecessary conflict, where did you go wrong with governing your own emotions in that situation?**

## Emotional Intelligence involves Self-Awareness

Emotional intelligence begins with *self-awareness*. Before we can govern our emotions well, we have to *recognize* them and be willing to ask the harder question: **Why am I feeling this way?**

Too often, we let our emotions govern us without stopping to examine what's beneath them. Anger might really be fear. Frustration might come from unmet expectations. Sadness might be rooted in shame or insecurity. But if we never pause to ask why, we'll keep reacting rather than responding.

This is what sets Nehemiah apart. In Nehemiah 5:6–7, he was very *angry*, but he didn't act immediately. Instead, he says, *"I took counsel with myself."* He slowed down long enough to reflect: What's behind this emotion? What's the right response? His self-awareness gave him space to act with wisdom, not impulse.

Being honest with yourself is hard. But it's essential. Emotional maturity requires us to dig beneath the surface of our feelings and look for what's really going on.

8. How would you describe the difference between feeling an emotion and being governed by it?
9. Nehemiah said he “*took counsel with himself*”. What might that look like in a situation you faced in the past week?
10. How can we be sure that we are being honest with ourselves and correctly governing our emotional responses rather than justifying unchecked emotions?

- 11. How can operating with sound emotional self-awareness help you navigate emotionally charged situations with wisdom and confidence?**

### **Emotional Intelligence involves Social-Awareness**

Self-awareness helps us understand *our* emotions. Social awareness helps us understand *others'* emotions. It's the ability to tune in to what others are experiencing and feeling, and then respond with wisdom, compassion, and respect.

Nehemiah didn't just get angry in chapter 5, he got angry for the right reasons. The people were crying out about economic injustice. Families were being broken apart, children sold, homes and lands taken. Nehemiah didn't dismiss their emotions, minimize their pain, or get defensive as a leader. He listened (v. 6), reflected, and then acted in a way that honored their dignity and challenged those in power.

That's social awareness in action. He didn't just manage his own anger (self-awareness); he recognized the grief and burden of the people and chose to act on their behalf.

We often assume people are being difficult, moody, or disrespectful, when in reality they may be carrying unseen burdens: grief, stress, trauma, insecurity, or fear. Socially aware leaders slow down enough to ask, What else might be going on here? They resist jumping to conclusions and instead choose compassion over assumption.

Growing in emotional intelligence means asking not just *"What am I feeling?"*, but also, *"What might they be feeling, and how should I respond in love?"*

- 12. Why is it often easier to react to people's emotions than to pause and try to understand them?**

- 13. Think of a recent interaction where someone's behavior bothered you. Looking back, do you think there might have been something deeper going on?**

- 14. What are some practical ways you can operate with healthy emotional social-awareness at home, in your workplace, or in a ministry context this week?**

### **Emotional Intelligence involves Spirit-Awareness**

To do any and all of this, it will require a great deal of Spirit-Awareness. As Galatians 5:22–23 reminds us, *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”* To me, that sounds a lot like living with emotional intelligence! That also means emotional maturity isn’t something we white-knuckle our way into, it’s something God grows in us as we stay in step with His Spirit.

Proverbs 25:28 says, *“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”* Without Spirit-led self-control, we leave ourselves vulnerable to emotional chaos and ruin. But when we are aware of the Spirit’s presence and leading, we gain the strength to pause, to listen, and to respond in a way that reflects Christ, even when our emotions are intense.

The way Mac Lake puts it, Spirit-awareness means asking:

- “What does God have to say about the emotions I’m experiencing?”
- “How can I view someone else’s emotions through the lens of their relationship with God?”
- “What does God’s Word indicate is the wise thing I should do in this situation?”<sup>6</sup>

The goal isn’t just better behavior. The goal is becoming more like Jesus, and that happens when we allow the Spirit to rule our emotions, not the other way around.

- 15. Proverbs 25:28 compares a person without self-control to a city without walls. What do you think that image is meant to communicate?**

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<sup>6</sup> Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 33.

**16. In your own words, how would you describe emotional intelligence?**

**17. Why do you think emotional intelligence is essential for leading yourself and others well?**

**18. Looking at your own life, where do you most need to grow this week in self-awareness, social awareness, or Spirit-awareness?**

## INTRODUCING “BETTER: DISCIPLESHIP FROM THE INSIDE OUT”

Discipleship isn't just about what we know but who we are becoming. The call to follow Jesus is an invitation to a transformed life. Jesus calls us to a *better* way, one that begins in the heart and flows outward into every thought, every word, every relationship, and every decision.

When Jesus called His disciples, He reshaped their priorities, their values, and their way of life. As they walked with Him day by day, their character and conduct began to reflect His. That same transformation is His goal for us through the daily, patient work of His Spirit forming us from the inside out.

This series, *Better: Discipleship from the Inside Out*, takes that vision seriously. If we want to grow as disciples of Jesus, we must begin with the most foundational area of leadership, the leadership of our own lives. Self-leadership in the Christian life is not about willpower or self-improvement; it's about daily surrender to Christ and intentionally cultivating habits of life that align with His way.

Over the coming weeks, we will explore six areas where Jesus calls us to grow: missionally, emotionally, collaboratively, intellectually, physically, and relationally. These aren't separate compartments to check off, but connected aspects of a whole life shaped by the gospel. As we grow in one, we find the others strengthened. This is what discipleship does, it works from the inside out, touching every part of who we are.

While this series draws inspiration from Mac Lake's *Leading Yourself*, our purpose is not to teach a book but to preach the Bible. His framework provides a helpful structure, but the heart of this series is God's Word, anchored in Scripture, centered on Christ, and aimed at the transformation of His people.

Our prayer is that we will not only learn about the better way, but that we will live it. That we will see where our lives are divided and invite the Spirit to bring wholeness. That we will not settle for partial discipleship, but pursue an integrated life of faith that is shaped by Christ in every part, from the inside out.



## WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Our small group series is built around many of the key ideas found in *Leading Yourself* by Mac Lake.

This practical and insightful book is a valuable companion to the discussions we'll be having together. If you're looking to grow in personal leadership, character, and spiritual maturity, we highly recommend picking up a copy to read alongside the weekly lessons.

DISCIPLING LEADERS SERIES

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Mac Lake

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