



Better

DISCIPLESHIP FROM
THE INSIDE OUT

STUDENT LESSON

LESSON 2

Inside Out

In the movie, *Inside Out*, the main character, Riley, is pulled from her Midwest life and moved to San Francisco. Her emotions—joy, fear, anger, disgust, and sadness—are in conflict with how to best navigate a new city, house, and school.¹ When anger, fear, and disgust take over the headquarters of her mind, we see Riley responding in ways that are harmful to herself and others. Allowing these negative emotions to control her actions is called poor emotional intelligence.

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."²

Icebreaker

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

¹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/plotsummary/>

² Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 42.

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read 1 Samuel 18:6–11 and Nehemiah 5:6–7.

Get It

Read 1 Samuel 18:6–11.

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

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Are You Emotionally Intelligent?

Read 1 Samuel 18:6–11.

When Saul hears the people singing David's praises he reacts with jealousy, fear, and suspicion. Rather than taking time to pause, calm down, and think about how to respond in a controlled manner, he gives full vent to his emotions, letting his insecurity drive him to destructive behavior. This is a perfect 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 much³

Do you see any of the above warning signs in your life? Acting out on others in anger, frustration or other destructive behavior at home, school or with friends hurts your relationship with them. 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. How could Saul have responded with emotional intelligence?

8. 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?

³ Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 25.

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Jesus Says...

Read Nehemiah 5:1-13.

A number of years ago, I took a bunch of students in my student ministry to a Christian bookstore. They had some rooms with a glass window on each door. I had one student, Lany, who was gullible, so we decided to play a prank on her. I had a student, Bart, go into one of these rooms and I told him to pretend to scream as loud as he could but don't let any sound come out of his mouth. I told my gullible friend, Lany, that those are soundproof rooms and that you can scream as loud as you can and no one can hear you. Through the glass window, we watched Bart "scream" as loud as he could, and we didn't hear a thing. Then Lany went into the room and screamed as loud as she could and the whole store heard her. Lany lacked self-awareness at that moment. Everyone in the store could hear and see her screaming, and she was unaware that the room was not soundproof.

Emotional intelligence begins with *self-awareness*. Before we can control 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 control 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.

9. How would you describe the difference between feeling an emotion and being controlled by it?

10. Nehemiah said he "*took counsel with himself.*" What might that look like in a situation you faced in the past week?

11. The next time you are faced with an emotionally charged situation, what can you do in that moment to respond in a way that honors God and honors others?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: What Does It Mean to Make Disciples?

Read Nehemiah 5:1–13.

In my early years as a student ministry pastor, I worked at a large church that has a Christian school attached. I was good friends with the Bible teacher, Bill. Bill was teaching a Bible class and Jennifer, one of his students, had to use the restroom. While she was in the restroom, Bill had everyone leave the classroom except the one kid who was a self-proclaimed non-Christian “bad kid.” Jennifer came back to the room and asked the boy, “Where did everyone go?” With a straight and serious face he said “The rapture happened.” Jennifer immediately started bawling and saying over and over again, “I missed the rapture, I missed the rapture.” (Of course the class came back into the room and the rapture hadn’t actually happened.) Jennifer had the social awareness to realize that the Christian Bible teacher and the rest of the Christian class was missing, and the one bad kid in her class along with her were the only ones left.

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. 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 and try to “place themselves in their shoes.”

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, at school, or with your friends this week?

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Emotional Intelligence Involves Spirit Awareness

Read Galatians 5:22–23; Proverbs 25:28.

To do any of this 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! Emotional maturity is like a fruit growing on a tree. You can't just force it to grow by pulling on it with all your might. **Instead, it grows naturally as you stay close to God and let His Spirit guide you.**

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 these questions:

- “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?”⁴

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?

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, in social awareness, or in Spirit awareness?

⁴ Mac Lake, *Leading Yourself: A Guide to Cultivating Personal Leadership* (100 Movements Publishing, 2024), 33.
This study was written by Pastor Mario Arindaeng, based on the adult study by the VBC pastoral team.