We come now to a section which I have entitled “With Heart and Mind.” It is crucial within the development of a Christian spirituality to affirm both heart and mind, both the intellect as well as the emotional, and to understand the ways in which these two affirm and endorse and sustain one another. I’m convinced that the key to a biblical, evangelical, authentic spirituality is found in the integration of heart and mind, which begins with the affirmation of both heart and mind. In affirming both, we are rejecting a sentimental spirituality. It is a spirituality that is informed by truth. We are rejecting a spirituality that essentially views emotion or experiences emotion as self-indulgence, as an end in itself not focused on God. We are also going to reject a spirituality that is characterized by a self-martyr complex, kind of a glorified form of self-pity, rather than a gratitude that is focused on God.

But we are also, on the other hand, going to reject a cerebralism, rationalism, or scholasticism—truth that is not informed by devotion, or truth that is not informed by compassion. We are going to call for a spirituality that is both mindful and from the heart, with heart and mind. This is the way of wisdom. This is the way of truth. This is the way of life. And though I want to affirm them in an integrated way, to do so requires that we affirm them individually, to affirm the mind and then to affirm the heart and the place of emotion in Christian piety. So I’m going to begin by first stressing the importance of the mind. Then I want to give attention to the whole question of emotion and its place within a Christian spirituality, and then I want to, thirdly then, consider the means of grace by which we are renewed in heart and mind and address particularly the role that the Scriptures have to play in this regard.

So point number one, or section number one in this whole theme: By the renewing of the mind. We need to begin in this regard by affirming the critical place of the mind in Christian thought.
and piety. There is probably no religious tradition that is given such central and critical importance to the mind as the Christian tradition, particularly when considered in the light of the overall Judeo-Christian heritage that we have. The Scriptures take as an assumption that Christians are intelligent, thinking, rational beings. It’s taken as a given that to be Christian is to be intelligent and to have the capacity to think clearly, to think deeply, and to think soundly.

In Romans 12:1-2, we have an interesting interplay, where Paul in Romans 12:1 says,

“Present your bodies as living sacrifices, for this is good and acceptable worship”

as he speaks of the unqualified commitment or submission to the person and glory of God in Christ and to His truth. And then he says,

“And be transformed by the renewing of your minds; then you will be able to test and approve what is good and noble and true.”

I’m paraphrasing there of course. When I grew up—and I’m speaking here particularly of the tradition or the influence of revivalism within my own heritage, which I did not think was really congruent with that heritage, but so influential and in many different ways instituted within so many of the traditions represented by my hearers even as I speak now—many of us would have grown up with the idea that if we’re going to become Christian, and more Christian, it is fundamentally a matter of the will, not so much of the mind as of the will.

And so we tended to think, as young people—and it came through in a myriad of ways in which we were taught and the kinds of things that we sang within our youth groups and within our churches—that if we were going to be changed, it was ultimately going to be up to us. That we had to somehow make a decision, a volitional action that would ultimately enable us to know God’s grace and to mature; and so I remember how many times as a young person at a youth meeting being told that I had not thought as I should have thought and I had not acted as I should have acted over the last week, and sure enough I felt bad about that. And when the reason for that behavior was outlined, it was because I had not surrendered all. The kind of imagery that was used was I had not placed it all on the throne and that somehow I need to get all of
this under the throne of Jesus, submit it all to Jesus, and then this would somehow fix it. And so every youth meeting, I dedicated my life again to God. I realized that I had not surrendered all to Him, and the theme song of those days was “I surrender all, I surrender all, I surrender all.” And the idea being that if we could surrender all—notice it’s an act of the will—if I could surrender all, that this would fix things, that this would solve the problem.

By my late teens and early twenties, I was becoming increasingly cynical. I began to realize that no matter how surrendered I was, I was not being changed and, of course, that’s most appropriate. We are not going to be transformed by our own volitional actions. We are transformed by the grace of God. We are not going to be transformed by the exercise of our will but rather by receiving the grace of God that comes our way; and so in a sense my own tradition—or I should say, better, not that tradition but revivalism as it has influenced so many of the streams of thought with an evangelicalism—revivalism instilled this idea that if you could only surrender all, that this would somehow fix it. That ultimately it was an act of the will. Unfortunately, what happened here was it just captured verse 1 of Romans 12:1 and 2: “Present your bodies as living sacrifices.” There’s no doubt that that choice of radical submission—that transfer of allegiance of which Paul speaks to in Romans 6—is essential if we’re going to be disciples who mature in God’s grace. But it tended to neglect verse 2: “And be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” If we are made new people, if we are set free, it will be because we engaged the truth—hear, respond, and obey.

If we are going to be people who live in the Spirit, by definition we will have to be people who respond intentionally to the Word of God. For the Spirit’s work in our lives will always be a work that is through and in the Word of God. In Ephesians 5, Paul says to his hearers, to the Ephesian believers, “Be filled with the Spirit” and then goes on and urges them to sing songs and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in their hearts to God. In a parallel text in Colossians, he says, “Rather,” saying much the same thing but with one difference, “be richly indwelt by the Word of God” or “let the Word of Christ dwell richly within you.” And you might want to say, “Well, which one is it? ‘Be filled with the Spirit’ or ‘be richly indwelt by the Word of God’?” And, of course, the answer is it’s a false question. It’s both and. The Word of God dwells richly within us, as I stressed in the lecture on discernment through the ministry of the Spirit, but the Spirit of God dwells within us and changes our lives through the Word of God in the same way. They
are in a sense . . . distinct but inseparable. If we want to live the life of the Spirit, we must live as people whose minds are engaged with truth, whose lives are indwelt by the Word of God.

So, first, under the renewing of the mind, I stress the critical importance of the mind in Christian thought and piety. Second, it is helpful, I think, to identify: Well, then, what represents a Christian mind? What is the content of a Christian mind? And most scholars and theologians and Christian teachers recognize that fundamentally a Christian mind involves two central foci. On the one hand, there’s a biblical understanding of God and of God’s work in the world. Who is God? And what is God doing? The fear of the Lord is essentially an acknowledgment of living in the light of who God is, so we only live in the fear of the Lord if we have a Christian understanding of who God is; and of course any other understanding is idolatrous. But more than that it’s not just an understanding of who God is but what God is doing in the world; to understand God’s work, God’s narrative, the story of God’s activities, the acts of God of creation, and then a response to the fall of redemption to say: Who is God and what is God doing? And then the second component of a Christian mind is a biblical understanding of the human person that recognizes on both sides: One, the glory of the human person, what it means to be created in the image of God and, using Pascal’s language, the “wretchedness of the human person,” the phenomena, the character of sin. Who are we? and then, What is our human task? What is God calling us to be? Who is God and what is His work? Who are we and what is our work? That would be what I would call essentially the focus of a Christian mind.

But now, thirdly, I want to talk about the need for mental renewal and particularly give attention to what we focus our mind on. To be Christian is to think Christianly. To walk in the Spirit requires a spiritual mind. Our transformation into the image of God is dependent then on renewed minds. The Bible calls us to love God with our whole minds. Consequently, there are few things more crucial to a Christian spirituality than care about the mind and care about one’s thinking. Indeed, it is not possible to think of being Christian without realizing that fundamental to walking with Christ is the renewal of the mind around these very themes—who God is and what God is doing and who we are and what our call is, what the human vocation is.

The Bible clearly assumes the need for and calls for the renewal of the mind. It’s found throughout the Scriptures, and we cannot
grow in Christ if we allow the world to shape the way we think, if our values, our norms, our worldview are determined by our culture rather than by God’s self-revelation. The Bible, therefore, calls us to turn. It calls us essentially to repentance in the way that we think. It calls us to a change of mind. Those who are not in Christ are described by the apostle Paul as darkened in the way that they think, while those who are in Christ are urged to set their minds on things that are above (Colossians 3:2), being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator (Colossians 3:10). This largely involves allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly within us (Colossians 3:16). This [is] conversion, the turning from the unspiritual mind (Colossians 2:18), with the goal that every thought be taken captive and made obedient to Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). What we think is what we are. Unless we are renewed in the attitudes of our mind in the way that we think, we cannot hope to become what God would like us to be. The mind is the steering wheel of the person. It is only as our minds are renewed and controlled by the Spirit of God that we can hope to become mature in our faith; and it is, of course, a matter of discipline.

Some might think that the call for a renewed mind only applies to intellectuals or academics, that it is not applicable to those who do not feel that they are very intelligent. But Paul makes no such distinction between intelligent and unintelligent people, scholars and others. Rather Scripture assumes that all of God’s people are intelligent. That’s what it means to be a person, a thinking rational being. All people can think and know. All Christians can come to love God with their whole minds. Each person in Christ can come to have a mind renewed according to the image of Christ. The renewal of the mind is a concern much broader than the intellectual or academic life of a society. Academic study may be helpful but the renewal of the mind is essential for all thinking people, that is, for all people.

As the apostle Paul puts it, “We are transformed by the renewing of our minds.”

There are two aspects to this mental renewal. The first is the renewal of the way in which we think. The second relates to what we are thinking about, the focus of our thoughts. A full and extended renewal of the mind includes both. Few people recognize how they think. Thinking is not usually something that we think about, to put it that way. We just do it, and that is the problem. We will not be renewed in the way that we think unless
we make it a matter of serious attention. A Christian mind is one that has come to think in terms of and according to the truth. It is a mind that understands life as God sees life. We seek the mind of God, which means that we want to think God’s thoughts and see the world, ourselves, our society, our past, and our future as He sees these realities.

Again, to go back to the content of the Christian mind, it’s a mind that focuses on God and on His work and on the human being and on that to which we have been called. To grow in grace requires that we come to develop a Christian worldview, to think Christianly. To be renewed in the way that we think focuses on thinking on that which is true and noble and right and pure and admirable and excellent, all that is praiseworthy. If we are going to be renewed in what we think, we need to be careful about what we think about.

But, secondly, it’s also on the focus. The issue becomes the focus of our thoughts. I’m deeply impressed by the words of the apostle Paul in the opening verses of Romans 8. When he stresses the importance of personal transformation, he stresses the fact that it comes as we set our minds on things above rather than on the things of the flesh; and clearly he assumes personal responsibility. That is, he takes it for granted that we will set our minds on something, and so he says essentially the choice is yours. If you set your minds on things above, you will live. If you set your minds on things below, on the flesh on the carnality, you will die.

The mind is an amazing thing. It is our most private space. When it comes to the focus of our thoughts, we are all individuals standing alone and choosing what we will think about and when we will think it. A doctor can look inside my body and tell me what my heart is doing, when I don’t know what it is doing, and what my kidneys are doing, when I don’t know what they are doing, but the mind is my private space. The mind is also amazing in that it never stops working. The mind is active even when we sleep. The mind is affecting the direction of our lives even when we are not thinking about profound questions.

But what do we think about? Or, to put it another way, what do we think about when we have nothing to think about? What passes through our thoughts when we are riding on the bus to our place of work or going to a store to do some shopping? What happens in our minds when we are just waiting? It is in these times as much as anything that we need to recognize the discipline, the
importance of discipline. We cannot know the peace of God and be renewed in our thinking unless we allow the Spirit of God to control our minds, unless we set our minds on that which is good and noble and excellent. Even as we go to sleep at night, the mind will focus on those thoughts that dominate our thinking when we actually fall asleep. We are, therefore, urged to give special attention to those moments in the day and settle our thoughts possibly through the Word on that which is good, noble, and just.

Our goal is the biblical ideal of a renewed mind. The concept that captures this in Scripture is the principle of the mind of Christ. We are called to have attitudes that are in accordance with Christ's mind. [A Christian Theologian] suggests that by implication we are called to have a crucified mind. In contrast, he says much of Western Christianity as it is encountered in the East has been governed by a crusading mind, which summarizes in many respects the ideals of Western culture with its aggressiveness and sense of manifest destiny. But as he notes, this attitude of the mind is utterly opposed to the gospel.

The next question that we need to ask then is to ask: What shapes our minds? What informs our minds? If the mind is so important by its very nature—it's so crucial to us—then by its very nature we need to ask: What is it that shapes and informs the mind? The human mind is conditioned by outside stimuli. It is not self-contained. The mind can only think in terms of what we feed into it. For instance, a computer is a wonderful thing, but it's useless unless it has a powerful and helpful program that is booted into its system. Similarly, the mind functions constantly on the basis of what we allow it to receive. Part of personal discipline is determining what will and will not enter our minds. We need to decide: Will our minds be filled with the values and perspective of our society and culture—that is, the world and its values, its vision—or will our minds be richly indwelt by truth, particularly by the Word of God? It is not a mute question for the simple reason that our minds are being shaped, whether we are conscious of it or not. Christians in the 20th and into the 21st century need to deal with the issue of television viewing and the programming that comes through television. The television is the most significant factor shaping the mind of many contemporary societies. It is one of the most powerful forces in the battle for the mind; and the mind of the Christian is often a battleground between the television and its values and the preacher's sermon on Sunday morning.
Jean Cover, writing a few years ago in religious education, effectively showed how television advertising, and most television programs, essentially desensitizes our vision and imagination and forms priorities. The problem Sister Cover argues is that the values portrayed through the television medium are nonbiblical. Commitment to marriage is trivialized. Religion is downplayed. Illicit relationships are accepted. Violence is condoned, and a variety of commercial products are portrayed as essential for personal dignity, happiness, meaning, and success. And while it is true that television may well reflect the breakdown of family life and commitment in relationships, the unnerving truth is that the television advertising and programming legitimize this deterioration. Cover notes, “We have now come to accept the priorities and attitudes of the powerful that permeate our televised lives. Success, affluence, private property, efficiency in competition, consumerism, and the supposed advantages of technology the marketplace prescribes have come to be given universal validity.” In other words, the TV does not merely entertain. It creates attitudes and priorities. It portrays a life dominated by consumerism.

We need to realize that television is an entertainment medium. Many attempt to use it for other purposes. Jacques Cousteau used the television for years to bring people to an awareness of the oceans of the world. Television evangelists seek to lead people to knowledge of Christ, but it is an entertainment medium. And Neil Postman cogently notes that to use the television as an educational medium is as absurd as using a 747 plane to deliver mail between New York City and Newark twin cities. It is the wrong medium for the purposes. The television is imagistic. Our analytical, linear thought processes are bypassed.

“We do not think,” he says, “when we watch TV.”

We are entertained. We are passive recipients of whatever is shown to us. The influence of TV then is not only subtle and direct, it is also pervasive and to a remarkable degree subconscious. It permeates the mind and radically affects the way in which a person perceives the world and discriminates between good and evil.

This has particular relevance as we wrestle with the reality of sexual drive and marital fidelity. Television blatantly and subtly caters to prurient sexual interest and curiosity. It trivializes and makes our God-given sexuality mundane by affirming immediate
gratification. Television advertising panders to our greed, our desire to impress, the longing for comfort and amenities. Rather does television advertising assume that we are intelligent, thinking persons. Rather its purpose is to bypass our rational faculties and get us to buy or consume something regardless of whether we really need to. What is alarming is that this happens when our guard is down, when supposedly we are being entertained. For many, it comes after a difficult day at work. TV is an evening activity for relaxation and leisure. It may be the single most significant influence on the way that people think, even Christians. Their devotional lives, their participation in public worship (including the sermon and other valuable inputs such as Bible study), cannot offset the far more pervasive influence of TV. In other words, television is the dominant stimuli and shaper of their lives, so much so that they cannot be richly indwelt by the Word of God.

Television is really one of several influences, but it is singled out because of its pervasive effects on the mind in urban societies. We are no longer shocked by violence we repeatedly see. We are no longer shamed by sexual explicitness. We are humored through repeated viewing of that which is explicitly contrary to our declared values. We must then seriously consider what it is that shapes the way that we think as we respond to the call to live a renewed mind.

Fifthly and sixthly, two final points here still on the renewal of the mind, and I’ll state them briefly: that ultimately we only live the truth when we obey the truth. Point number five: Understanding leads to obedience and obedience leads to understanding. We only know the light when we live in the light; and many times we need to challenge one another to say: Why does our understanding not go deeper? Why does it not permeate more fully into our bodies? Because we have not obeyed the light that we already have. If we what to know the truth, we must live the truth; and ultimately the truth permeates, indwells richly, within us when it is habituated within our actions, within our behavior, within the disciplines and habits of our lives. We must live the truth in order to know the truth, even as we know the truth and thereby live it.

And point number six: It’s also imperative to stress this: that when we think Christianly about the truth, we always think about the truth as that which is informed by love, generosity, and compassion. Truth is only truth in that sense when it is informed by love, generosity, and compassion. Paul, in Ephesians 4, stressed
the importance of speaking the truth in love. Somehow when the truth is not informed by love, it is twisted and destructive. It is not liberating. And I want to highlight another text that I think is particularly important within the evangelical community in our day, particularly to the development of an evangelical piety. In Romans 14, we find Paul writing to a community that was being torn apart by differences of opinion; and evangelicalism today is going to face a similar kind of tension if we don’t design and live with a piety, a spirituality that allows us, that enables us, to come to terms with significant and fundamental differences that we have as Christian believers. For many Christians, if you know the truth, anybody who disagrees with you is automatically wrong, that somehow they do not see the truth as you see it and therefore they are living in darkness while you are living in light.

An intriguing thing though happens in Romans 14. Paul is writing to a community of Christians in Rome who differ on two fundamental issues. They differ on whether some days are to be more sacred than other others. And so probably in fact more than likely it was the Jewish people, of course, who viewed the Sabbath and the feast days as having particular significance, sacred significance; and the Gentile community who said one day’s the same as every other. We don’t need to observe special days. And then there were those who decried the consumption of meat offered to idols. And again the Jewish community would have been horrified that meat offered to idols was being consumed by Christians. It’s not that the meat was bad. It was that it was associated with idolatry, and anything associated with idolatry was idolatrous. But the Gentile Christians were inclined to think that good meat is good meat and that idolatry is empty, is meaningless; and so [they] refused, in a sense, to allow their lives to be governed by the principle of association.

While there’s great implications to both of these themes, what I want to speak to more than anything right now is this: Paul had the opportunity to set them all right.

_He had the opportunity because of apostolic authority to say, “This is the right way. This is the correct understanding. This is the apostolic truth.”_

The intriguing thing for me is that he refused to do so. He said, rather, “Welcome one another,” and he urged each one to live by their own conscience. What he did essentially was legitimize this: the importance, the legitimacy of legitimate differences of
opinion. He said each will have their own understanding. Each therefore must live by their own conscience, and each must not require that the other live by their conscience. He had the chance to speak; and we have intimations within the text of his own convictions when he makes references to stronger and weaker brothers, but he stresses that the stronger brother is not to impose his or her views on the weaker brother or sister. Paul had the chance to speak but urged generosity, urged tolerance, urged us to welcome one another even when we differ even on some very fundamental and important things with one another. But they are not the fundamentals of the gospel. And I cannot help but wonder, in the kinds of themes and issues that might tear apart the Christian community today, if we don’t urgently need to develop a piety that is informed by truth, but a truth that is lived with compassion, generosity, and love. First, then, by the renewing of our minds.

Now, secondly, I want to address the theme from the heart. And just as I stressed the importance of the mind, I need to at this point also stress the importance of emotion and particularly emotional resilience. Only as we come to terms with our joys and our sorrows can we truly be all that we are called to be. Indeed, I believe it’s not an overstatement to conclude that one of the most crucial signs of spiritual maturity is emotional resilience. We remain perpetually adolescent if we fail to develop emotional maturity. Further, this emotional maturity or resilience is our primary resource when it comes to living out our lives in the world and fulfilling all that God has called us to be. It is emotional resilience that enables us to respond to changes and challenges that will inevitably come and which will enable us to respond with strength to setbacks and disappointments.

It is tempting throughout the course of this study on the Christian life to identify what is the particular fact, what is the crucial sign of emotional maturity and the goal . . . I mean the crucial sign of spiritual maturity and the goal of the Christian life. But increasingly in recent years, in my own work both as a pastor and as a theologian and as a teacher, I’ve increasingly come to see that one of the most crucial factors in spiritual maturity and development is the capacity to respond emotionally with grace; the capacity to learn is rooted in emotional maturity. The capacity to serve with strength is rooted in emotional maturity. The capacity to love, even—as I have just been speaking—to love with generosity and compassion, is rooted in emotional maturity. Increasingly, I’m coming to see that the thread of emotional
maturity and resilience runs like a thread through the whole of an understanding and practice of the Christian life. And a lack of emotional maturity and resilience will ultimately sabotage our lives, our capacity to live the Christian life. Intelligence, giftedness, hard work, dedication—all of these, of course, are important, but without emotional maturity they’ll be forfeited and wasted. It is for this reason that I consider it so crucial.

Yet I grew up within a Christian subculture that viewed emotion as incidental or secondary at best. People who were “emotional,” to put it in quotation marks, were in someway suspect. If a person was cerebral or rational, we tended to view them as deep, profound, and trustworthy. But if someone was deemed emotional, they were not to be trusted. They were generally viewed to be superficial. Part of the horror of this was that, as often or not, gender stereotypes were also involved, and frequently women were portrayed as more emotional and therefore as less competent or rational or, horror of horrors, as less dependable or trustworthy.

Indeed, I remember as a child being in a Sunday school class in which a train was put up on a flannel graph board, and I believe the words were fact, faith, and feelings. The irony being that it violated the Christian tradition at so many points. The whole tradition of faith preceding understanding is so fundamental to the Christian tradition, but then more to the point here, the fact that somehow feelings were at the back end of things. Feelings were secondary. We kind of dragged them along. Feelings were incidental. Feelings were not to be trusted, and those who were emotional were not to be trusted. But I have come to learn that all of this was completely backwards. The force of emotion within Holy Scripture has helped me to see this. The powerful emphasis on joy—that I’m still going to come to—in the ministry of Jesus and His explicit assumption that He came that our joy might be made complete within us. The marked emphasis on emotion in the writings of the apostle Paul who speaks of a peace that transcends all understanding. In fact, this is the key to life; and he speaks of this peace as something that guards heart and mind in Christ. But this is only a brief sample of what is probably most explicit in the Psalms, the prayers of the Old Testament that are obviously rooted in the heart arising out of the depth of human passion. Each of those psalms is a demonstration of emotion such that I cannot but conclude that true prayer arises from the depths of our beings; and what I have come and many have come to see is that people who are cerebral and rational are probably superficial. That people of depth are those who have learned to live from the
heart, from the core of their beings. They have learned the power and truth of responding emotionally to God, to His creation, and to others. As such, it may well be that there's nothing so crucial to our call to become Christian, to mature in our faith, to love God and others as reflection on our emotions and the intentional development of emotional maturity.

This means then that an emotional person is weak not because they are emotional but rather because they have lost the capacity either to express the whole range of emotions or because they have lost the capacity to express them in a manner that is appropriate for the occasion. They are weak because their feelings are erratic. They are not able to engage the emotions. They're not able to engage their emotions in a way that is constructive. They express great anger, for example, at a minor inconvenience. They have unreasonable fears in the face of what seems to be an obstacle or a problem. That is, they have undermined, they have lost the capacity for elemental human joy and comradery. Their weakness is the inappropriate expression or the lack of expression of emotion.

What then are the signs of emotional health? I want to speak first to what is the objective: What represents emotional maturity? And then, secondly, address how we get there, or thirdly. So, first, the importance of emotions. Secondly, the signs of emotional health. And then, thirdly, I’ll address the means by which we get to emotional health. It could be put this way, and I’ll put it in the first person: You are a person of emotional health if, first, you know your feelings and are able to draw upon them in making significant decisions, rather than having your choices sabotaged by your emotions. That is, you are able to live out and manage your emotional life so that you are not paralyzed by long-term depression or worry, or swept away by anger. You manage your emotions. You are not managed by your emotions.

Secondly, another sign of emotional maturity is that you are able to persist with discipline and focus in the face of setback and disappointment. You are able to channel your emotional energies towards worthy goals, particularly in the face of difficulty, setback, disappointment, and even failure. The bottom line here is that you are able to live with delayed or deferred gratification.

Thirdly, another sign of emotional maturity is that you are able to empathize with others and recognize the feelings of others, and you are able to handle the emotional aspects of relationships.
with grace. This means that your own emotional state does not undercut your capacity to listen to and identify with others. It also means that you can speak openly and frankly with grace, patience intact, and say what needs to be said to another person even if this means it will stir up the emotions of others. And so it means the capacity to have another person be angry with you, yet respond to them in grace even if that anger is expressed towards you. You are not paralyzed by their anger or defensive in the face of it.

Furthermore, it means that you are not then paralyzed by the fear of another person’s response—by their anger, as I’ve indicated; or, if you have a difficult thing to tell them, by their mourning, if you have sad news to share with them. This does not mean you are uncaring. Not at all. Quite the opposite. You do empathize, but we are not sabotaged or fearful of the emotions of another person. On an organizational or group level, you have a sensitivity to the group process that enables you to be alert to emotional responses and dimensions of community life.

Fourthly, emotional maturity is found in this: that you are able to express honestly your emotions in appropriate settings and appropriate ways. Whether it’s ardent devotion or anger or disappointment, whether to God or to a spouse or a friend or a child or a colleague, the emotional response is appropriate to the setting, to the purpose, and to the actual circumstances. For example, if you are angry, it corresponds to the wrong. That is, you do not lose your emotional keel. You do not lose your temper when you are angry. You do not in your anger take out your anger at work on a spouse or a child or cast your anger in the wrong light. A feeling of discouragement, for example, is aired where there are confidants who can work through that disappointment with you and where your comments will not be misunderstood or misread. You do not, for example, as a pastor pour out your discouragement on your congregation on Sunday morning. There’s a time and a place to express discouragement. Part of emotional maturity is to express honestly your emotions but to do so in appropriate settings and circumstances.

Fifthly, another sign of emotional maturity is that you do not use emotional blackmail to get your way by threatening to resign or to quit if you do not get the things that you want, or by withholding favors or goodwill because someone is not fulfilling your expectations. This means that you respond with openness and honesty but also with grace towards those with whom you
differ, particularly family and co-workers. But more, it also means that the fear of hurting your feelings does not keep others from acting according to their convictions and conscience. Notice that the fear of hurting your feelings does not keep others from acting as they should act. They are not straitjacketed by fear of your emotional reaction, whether it will be anger or the loss of temper or just the fact that your feelings will be hurt. How frequently I hear people say, “Well, we really need to do this, but you know so-and-so's feelings are going to be hurt if we do,” and I think what a testimony or what a nontestimony that people are somehow intimidated by your emotional immaturity.

Number six, something that I’ve learned reading about Martin Luther King Jr.—something that he spoke about as an ideal for himself—you are able, he would say, to respond both to praise and criticism with grace. Martin Luther King Jr. was resolved in his own emotional development to seek this goal: that he would not be crushed by criticism or have his head inflated by praise. One sign of emotional maturity is that you do not crave praise. You are able to respond to criticism with grace rather than with undo defensiveness, or you’re able to respond to criticism without deflecting the criticism so that you neither hear it or benefit from it or essentially blame others or blame the one who brings the criticism. One sign of emotional maturity is that you are able to respond to both praise and criticism with grace—not crushed by criticism; not having a head inflated by praise.

And finally, and I would say most critically, the sign or evidence of emotional health is the capacity to respond with sorrow, anger, mourning, or discouragement when pain intersects our lives but always come back to an emotional center of joy. Indeed, in the end, a person of emotional maturity is an individual in whom the dominant emotional center of their lives is joy. A joy rooted in a confidence in the goodness of God, a trust in the providential care of God, and a hope in the ultimate triumph of justice and joy. I stress this importance because I'm convinced that one of the central purposes for which God sent His Son was that joy would come to the earth, that the mission of God was rooted in this very restoration of joy. Jesus indicates that central to His mission (John 15) is this, “I have told you this that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” And His assurance in John 16 was that eventually sorrow would be turned to joy, and so His explicit affirmation in John 17. His intent was that His disciples would know the full measure of His joy. This joy is rooted in the reality of the resurrection. That is, the hallmark of the early church
was joy. Why? Because they believed and were confident in the resurrection; and thus while being created to live in joy, that is, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but very much a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy. We live in joy not because, so much, of the circumstances around us, which admittedly might be characterized by trial and temptation and difficulty and suffering and disappointment. We live ultimately in joy. Why? Because of our conviction that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and that ultimately all will be made well.

Consequently, joy is found when we live in faith in the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and His ultimate triumph in the world. And thus I am convinced of this central critical and important fact: that the primary evidence of faith is that we live in joy. It comes then it makes abundant sense that in the prophetic book Habakkuk, Habakkuk, who describes in chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Habakkuk the very difficult circumstances of the people of God at that time. He described their trials and their tribulations, but in the end he concludes that God will be God. He will let God do His work in His time, and then he goes on to conclude by saying even though, even though, even though, even though, even though nothing happens in the circumstances of our lives according to our expectations for what we long would be in place, even yet I will rejoice. That is, he chooses the way of joy even in the midst of suffering, setback, and disappointment. Why? Because he’s a man of faith; and thus I’m convinced that the primary, premier evidence of faith in our lives is the central emotional expression of joy. When I talk then about what it means to mature emotionally, it’s going to come to our emotional development in such a way that it leads us to live lives that are centered in joy.