

Discovering Buttons I

Welcome back to pastoral care and marriage. Today, we're going to talk about helping people discover their buttons. Now, what does mean? Well, here's a fact. Everybody has buttons. Everybody has this thing that pushes them to an angry moment or emotion. Somebody can be totally fine one minute. The next minute, angry as can be because their spouse said something or a friend said something or a pastor said something or their parents said something. A lot of people's buttons are there and sometimes they don't even know that they're there. Somebody in relationships you can just push them.

So today we're going to talk about that. First, what we're going to do is we're going to talk about some of those emotional dependency issues that are part of the button issues as well. It's just the kind of information I think you need to have. And then what we're going to do is we're going to start doing a survey that you can do with your parishioners. You can do it with people to sort of help them discover what their own personal buttons really are.

First of all, let's just talk about inappropriate dependency and people have called this co-dependency and people call this overwork sensitivities. The symptoms of that are things like experience hurt over little things and read into the actions and statements of other people too much like "I know what they were really saying" when maybe you really don't, expect the worst to happen in a relationship, always sort of having dread, assume others are more upset than they are. "I saw her face and I know that she was really mad. You didn't see that. But I did."

Frequently overwhelmed with emotions that are hard to control. Later even in this course, we're going to talk about some of those areas to help people with better boundaries, appropriate self-interest, and what appropriate self-interest is is the ability to just look confident who God made the person. There's also the enmeshment issues in an inappropriate dependency and co-dependency and what not where what happens is people are connected to each other and those boundaries get so broken down they go see people giving extremes of unsolicited advice.

They'll say, "I know what you're thinking" or "Because I know what you're thinking, I think you should do this." Or being so sympathetic that others take advantage of their forgiving spirit or feeling responsible for making other people happy. You know you can't make another person happy. They got

to be happy because of who they are in God. Or placing other's guilt on themselves. You go, "If I only would have made that phone call, if I only would have done that..." Or excessively investing in other's feelings and emotions where someone feels a certain way and the response to that brings great emotional investment to another person out of that response to feelings. Or just plain yelling, screaming to make a point.

You'll find there's a lot of control, manipulation, talking behind each other's back. It seems like some people they get into these dependencies where they call it a mesh. They're just like sort of not like their own person. They're sort of all combined together. You also find in inappropriate dependency the sort of weird understanding of recognition. Everybody sort of can do this at times, we all have our weak moments, where we instead of relying on who God made us to be, we sort of rely on each other for our self-worth, and if we're having a good day it's because we think someone feels better about us that day.

Now I bring up all these three things to sort of introduce the buttons assessment or finding out what people's buttons are and to help them get self-awareness because these types of things are going to come up when you start helping people see who they really are. Later in this class, we're going to talk about boundaries and all these things. We're going to actually get back into some of these subjects. But I want to introduce it at least today so that when we talk about the buttons and how to help people identify them, you'll see that a lot of these inappropriate dependencies come up when you start helping people identify their buttons.

I want to go back to Genesis 1:28. In 1:28, God blessed Adam and Eve, blessed the first humans and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the Earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." To me, this is the core foundational passage of pastoral care because in this verse are basically the topics that give somebody worth and value as image bearers of God.

There is the "Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the Earth and subdue it." That's our whole area of sexuality, marriage, children, parenting, all of those relationships that mean the most to us and then bringing that sexuality, that parenting, and all of that, the fruit of which we bring that into the world we live in. We bring it in such a way as to find fulfillment, in such a way as to raise families.

Then the rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, that's that aspect of dominion or getting something done, being a steward over the Earth that God had given us. It's interesting. Dr. Freud—you probably heard of him before. He talks about these same two topics as well. But he talks

about them from the fallen human nature. He says that most people are motivated and he talks about sex and he talks about aggression. He defines them, those two areas, in that post-fall world. That sexual problems and all of that... Again, be fruitful. Multiply will be the biblical word. But that whole piece of life—family relationships and all that. There's brokenness and anxiety and angst. He interprets "Be fruitful and multiply" as the fallen humans.

And then his second point that kind of starts all of his counseling would be aggression. He would say to control and to rule and he would take it that way. Whereas as Christians, we would go "It's to have dominion." So now I bring this up because when we talk about the actual buttons, they will fit into the either "Be fruitful and multiply" category or fit into that dominion. If somebody has been hurt, abused, if expectations are different in any of those subjects relating to anything like that, you will find that people have a button. They will many times express anger and angst against one another. When they come to you as a pastor, you're sort of just helping them to see what that is and understand and get self-aware of how not to beat each other up about each other's differences.

Now, what do I do? As a pastor, I'm going to have somebody come and we'll talk and I'll say, "Hey, would you like to find out what your buttons are in your relationship?" They will go like "My buttons? What is that?" I'll say, "You'll find that you have different expectations and sometimes it will be a conflict. Let's just talk about those areas of life that can create all sorts of buttons." "Okay." Well, here's one. Food. Back to the great cultural mandate, in order to live and to have dominion, you have to eat. So how about food?

Let's say you're doing marriage counseling hypothetically and then you'll ask, "So, Susan, how was food thought of as you grew up?" Let's say Susan said, "Well, we ate really healthy." Bob, Susan's husband, "No, no. We didn't eat healthy at all." So now you have two people married. One sort of was raised with everything healthy. We went to Trader Joe's. In America, it's a place with organic type of food. And then Bob, their family went to Aldi which is sort of lower cost type of food. Not as much concerned about the ingredients. So now, someone gets married like that.

Or let's say one of them ate for comfort growing up. Food was a comfort. If something was hurting, the first thing you do is give someone a cookie. In the other, food wasn't that way at all. You'll find that those are possible areas, and I call them buttons, where you relate with one another and how someone thought of food will really potentially set each other off. Or one family, "Did you guys eat out or did you eat at home?" "Oh, we ate out most of the time." And then a lot of times in marriage, they married someone who ate at home a lot.

Habits. What were your food habits like? Was it three meals a day? One meal a day? Was it two meals a day? Was it snacks all day? What's the experience at the dinner table? "Oh, we didn't have any experience in the dinner table. We ate once a month at the dinner table." "Oh, we ate every day at the dinner table together." And then you'll have two people. "We ate every day at the dinner table." Both people maybe in marriage ate every day. But in one home, it was fighting and putting each other down and giving each other a hard time. Well, the other home, it was all pleasant conversation, very manneredly.

Can you imagine getting married and, just over food, there are all these possible things that set each other off? Or their spiritual practices at the dinner table. In our family, we read the Bible and prayed every day it felt like of my childhood. That's what happened to me. But what if I married someone and they didn't do it that way? And then you get married or you're talking and then you say, "Okay, it's time to read the Bible." The person will say, "We never read the Bible. Why would I read it now?" "That's because that's what we do." "Why do you do that?"

Maybe I marry another Christian, and that other Christian, they read the Bible at that time, and you learn to read the Bible as a family at the dinner table." Now what you have is these different expectations, and then what happens if you have those emotional dependency issues that we just talked about, if people are trying to secretly control each other through expectations and buttons.

Let's take another one. Discipline. How someone understands discipline is how they think about authority. If somebody had a different attitude to discipline that was applied to them growing up and then they get married or they're in a relationship, they're at work, those expectations come forward even in your church. I'll give some examples.

Let's say somebody was disciplined but in their home it's very permissive. The kids got away with everything. Often, the permissive child marries the strict parent whose parenting style is strict. So now you have a young couple have their first child. One of them is like "You know, just let them be. They'll be fine." The other is like "We can't let them be. They're going to be a rotter someday." Those two different styles, or in a strict area, a lot of people were raised with spanking. Some people were raised without spanking. Those are big controversial issues.

But when you're pastoring someone, you're going to find those disciplines come in someone's background and they replay what they themselves experienced. Or do they have a balanced discipline? A little permissive and a little strict. Here's something else to deal with. What happens if someone

somehow had abusive discipline? I put this in the area of discipline. Some ways it could be its own slight abuse, maybe they're just plain abuse—verbally, physically, sexually. You bring that out. This one too on the abuse, you often find that you can't just as a pastor, you don't have the time or the expertise to undo some of the hurt and the sadness that was brought in some of those areas. But as you ask people about these things from their past and about their life now, what you'll find is you'll get to help people be self-aware of those buttons that they have in their life.

Here's another one. Spiritual attitudes. You'll find that maybe both are raised Christian or maybe they're both raised religious. Well then, you can talk. What level of practice? What I like to do is get a whiteboard out. So I will write down what level of practice. Did you go to church? Was it once a week? Was it once a month? What about level of leadership was modeled? One person might go "We have a really close pastor who is very encouraging all our lives." "Well, my background is we went to a Catholic church and there was a priest and I don't even know his name."

What about the home practices? What are their home practices? What are they like? Did you have a bad experiences with churches? "We left church when I was eight years old because the church is always asking for money than someone else is." "No, we loved our church and we loved to support our church." Questions like when did you begin a personal relationship with Christ? How does that work itself out? What role does Christianity play in your life now, your marriage, your family? Did you get an out-of-balanced view of Christianity?

All those questions become very important questions as you look at helping people identify their buttons. If you take someone through these questions in the next presentation, we're going to actually keep going now. We call that part two. What you'll help people do is get self-aware of where those inappropriate dependencies are, where those buttons are, where they flap the handle at each other. As a pastoral care provider, you can lead people to that clarity, that understanding, and how to love each other more if you can help them understand and listen to where they have been.