**Managing One's Emotions to Build Rather Than Blow Up Relational Bridges**

by Paul Louis Metzger, Ph.D.

The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote a classic self-help guide titled *Meditations*. He understood well the need for an emperor to rule his emotions if he is to rule an entire empire well.

It is quite fitting that New Wine also has a resident Italian ruler of the emotions, Ministry Council leader Pastor Tom Schiave. Like his famous Italian forebear, Pastor Tom understands how important it is to manage one's emotions and conduct well. In fact, Tom could write his own equivalent of the *Meditations* for pastoral and missional leadership. If he doesn't, I just might, albeit as a ghost writer!

I asked Tom for permission to craft this leadership initiative for New Wine that draws attention to his wisdom concerning emotional health and self-management given what his counsel has meant to me personally. Due to the incredible challenges, stress, and trauma I have been facing on so many fronts the past few years, including advocating for my adult son Christopher with TBI, I need good counsel on how to be self-aware, manage my self, and regulate my emotions so that I am a thermostat rather than a thermometer. (By the way, I got that line from Tom!)

I am not alone in needing such counsel. Given the increasing tensions we all face, and the vast challenges in being a redemptive presence in a polarized society today, we could all benefit from insights regarding how to build relational bridges with people of diverse backgrounds in contemporary culture rather than blow those bridges up.

It grieves me deeply that one of the main reasons Christian leaders struggle to lead effectively is that we often lack the wisdom and skills to approach conflicts wisely and graciously. In the sphere of ministry leadership, we all need to grow in understanding Scripture, theology, and ministry management. But perhaps, in view of all the tensions inside and outside the church today in our polarized culture, nothing rises to the level of importance as the need to manage ourselves as leaders in ministry today!

In any given conversation, you might find Tom sharing with you what he has shared with me. The following 'meditations' have proved indispensable in advocating for my son, Christopher, and in other domains where I am seeking to bridge the gap in conflicts: "Make points, not enemies;" "Get better, not bitter;" and "Stay in your lane!" Last but not least, Tom has shared with me a line from one of his own 'pastoral counselors' ("Dirty Harry" played by Clint Eastwood): " 'A man's got to know his limitations'" (Check out the movie link).

How often do I make enemies rather than make constructive points in advocacy work? How often do I hold grudges and get bitter, failing to grow and become better as a follower of Jesus? How often do I veer into someone else's lane in a situation rather than staying in my own lane and focusing on what's mine to do in the situation? If only we stayed in our rightful lane, as

Pastor Tom Schiave and his Italian ruler of emotions counterpart, the Stoic philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius, would encourage us to do.

No matter what position you hold, including perhaps in senior management, if you or I cannot manage ourselves, we will only harm the very people we are responsible for leading. Just as no ancient Roman aqueduct or poorly constructed modern day American bridge can withstand hurricane-force winds, it's extremely doubtful that fragile and tense relationships can bear the weight and onslaught of our emotional outbursts. Like me, you will find Pastor Tom's counsel invaluable in addressing conflicts so as to build rather than blow up relational bridges in contemporary culture.

If you wish to reach out to Pastor Tom to inquire about how to grow in emotional intelligence and self-management, you can reach him at the following email address: tom@gatewaychurchpdx.com