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Presentation Transcript
Wholeheartedness
December 2, 2010

I was thinking about some of my counseling clients recently – specifically, which ones succeed in counseling and which ones don't. If I could tell ahead of time which ones weren't going to make it, I'd just send them to somebody else. Right? Because all counselors like to see people succeed and overcome their problems. It makes us feel like we're doing something useful. But it's just really hard to tell who is going to make it and who won't. Even if I eliminate the ones that I don't know enough to help – because there are people that walk through the door that are just way beyond my capabilities – and if I could eliminate the people that aren't going to click with my personality and leave because they don't like me – think I don't like them, sometimes – even if I'd eliminate all of those people, I'd still be left with a mysterious mix of successful clients and failing ones.

There's a lot of research that's been on who can succeed in counseling and who can't. People who have avoidance-attachment problems, usually, are afraid to get close to people. So, as they start working with their counselor and getting to know him, they get frightened and usually wind up leaving. So that's a problem. Now, people who have been abused often have trouble trusting. So they can't trust their therapist to help them. There are some folks that are not well educated enough to participate in some types of counseling. And then there are the addicts, who tend to blame their problems on everybody else. So they never get well, no matter what you do.

I've had clients, though, who come from all of those situations, who have been successful in counseling. And I've had people, who have had none of those problems, who failed. So, really, the research isn't that helpful on a one-to-one basis. So I've been wondering how that works.

I mentioned, a while back, a teenage girl who had suffered a lifetime of abuse. And she should have been terrified of me and fearful of the relationship – and may have been at the beginning – but she would come in every week and sit down and buckle in, so to speak, for her EMDR sessions. I mean, she was just all over that! She ended her therapy with an absence of the symptoms that she came in complaining about. She was completely successful at what she did. She was just totally focused. And she put

everything she had into every session. She left every week totally exhausted, because she gave everything she had while she was there.

Then there was another fellow that I met. He had two strikes against him. He was an addict. He was depressed. And he was illiterate. So he didn't really understand a lot about what I was trying to do to help him. I did notice, though, when he got on topics that he was interested in, he could really focus and zero in on that. And over several years, I saw him stop drinking, learn to read, and begin to treat his kids with the love and respect that they deserved. So he was successful, too, even though he was a two-strike guy.

There are a lot of other examples I could cite to show that those who have the ability to be *wholehearted* seem to be the ones that are successful. But then it's not really that simple. I think that people who have all the problems, that indicate a low chance of success, would also tend to be lacking in wholeheartedness. It's really hard to be wholehearted about anything when you're suffering through a major depressive episode. Right? It's hard.

I met a young teen once, whose parents were not emotionally available to her, and she had a raging case of avoidance-attachment and all the relationship problems that went with that. She had been passed from her mother to her father, back to her mother again, and then, when I met her, she was living with cousins – distant relatives – that she didn't know that well. Not long after her mother sent her to live with her cousin, who was older and married, her mother, then, committed suicide. So there's this fifteen-year-old, pretty much, really alone at this point. And I was talking to this girl, who ought to have had many more problems that she had...she was a straight-A student, she'd never used drugs, she had no arrest record. She was, pretty much, on her own doing pretty good – had interests. I asked her, "How do you manage to get such good grades with all of the disappointments and hurts that have happened to you in your life?" She said, "I like to work hard." She's turned out to be a real bulldog for therapy, too. She told me the other day that she hates to come to therapy, because it's so hard, but she can't not do it, because she knows it's going to be good for her. Don't you love kids like that? It's just awesome. So I don't know how she came through all that she has experienced, but she does have the ability to be wholehearted in a number of areas in her life.

So that's what I want to talk about today – the capability that humans have to be wholehearted. I want to start with the idea that to be wholehearted is a mental health plus for people. And then I want to think with you today about how to *add* wholeheartedness – about the benefits and the choices that we make to *be* wholehearted.

The dictionary says that *wholehearted* means *to, one, be completely and sincerely devoted, determined or enthusiastic* – like a wholehearted student of social problems – or more like, in our area, a wholehearted four-wheel-drive guy, wholehearted Ford man. Have you ever noticed that there are never people that like both Fords and Chevys? There's a real good reason for that. We'll talk about it in a minute. And the second definition is *marked by complete earnest commitment, free from all reserve or hesitation* – he gave the proposal wholehearted approval. So that's what we're talking about today.

I had an awesome therapy moment a few weeks ago. There's a young woman that I've been working with, who is working through a disastrous relationship with a guy who is a real "sicko." She went with him for four years and the whole period he was just grinding her down emotionally. We were using EMDR on all of these thoughts that she had. She'd gone through the network of self-downing thought that he had placed there. There were lots of tears. Then it started to turn positive. And she said, "On the other hand, I *do* have the ability to love unreservedly and *he* didn't have the ability to value that" – to love unreservedly – wholeheartedly, is what she is talking about. After twenty minutes of self-downing, it was so good to hear her say something positive about herself. She *is* wholehearted in love. She's wholehearted in her career. She's wholehearted in her therapy.

She told me this story that, when she was twenty and in college, she had to be a student teacher as part of her college training. They placed her in a special ed class with kids – they used to call them BD – behaviorally disordered – kids. These are the kids that all the other teachers had kind of sloughed off, because they felt like they were uncontrollable. So they had them all in one room with an older teacher and that was where she was going to do her student teaching. A week after she got there.... Oh, and, by the way, the class teacher had, pretty much, given up on them, so they were just running wild and learning nothing all day long – fourteen-year-olds. So a week after she got there the teacher that was supposed to teach her how to deal with this, took a semester off because of illness. It took the school system three days to find a replacement. So she was supposed to be, kind of like, babysitting with these out-of-control fourteen-year-olds. She was only six years older. In three days, when the new teacher arrived, she had everything under control. All the kids loved her. They were doing their work. Very gifted, talented, knew just what to do kind of person. Having worked at school for six years, I know how rare that is. I only saw that once in six years – somebody that knew how to do that. So she was totally devoted to those kids, totally devoted to her career. She was a wholehearted person. And because she brings that to therapy, even though she sits there and cries a lot, and has to go through a lot of disturbing thoughts, she's going to do that and she's going to be successful. That's what I think is the most important factor in people working their way through their problems.

And like everything else, being successful at Christianity also requires a wholehearted approach, doesn't it? That's why we're talking about this.

Jm. 4:8 – *Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* When you're double-minded, you're not wholehearted, are you? You've got two things going on instead of one. Right? People that are supposed to be Christians...they're not supposed to be committing all kinds of sins. So he's telling us that we've got to become wholehearted if we're going to approach God. So that's very important – what he's telling us there.

We'll go to Mark 12, and verse 32. We can read another scripture. Here's a man that's talking to Christ, and they're having a discussion about what's really important. The man said to Jesus:

Mk. 12:32 – *Well said, Teacher. You are right in saying that God is One and there is none other but Him – to love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all offerings and sacrifices.* He's saying that, if you want to be successful with God, we have to be wholehearted in our approach to God. *And when Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And from then on, nobody dared ask Him any more questions.* It says that a lot after Christ gets done talking, doesn't it?

So God doesn't do things half-heartedly. If you look at the creation, the closer you look at it, the more you realize that there is huge detail involved in it.

I was watching a program – it's a documentary about the space program – and they interviewed, in the last couple of years, all the guys that went to the moon. They talked about how that affected them. This one guy said that he would get a Coke or an ice cream cone and he would go sit at the mall, and watch people, and think to himself, "We're so lucky to live here on this earth! We're so lucky! It's so beautiful! It's so great." Another one said, "We're worried about gas going to three dollars a gallon when, from space, you can see brown blobs over all the major cities in the world." He said, "It's ridiculous! We should take care of what God has given us." So they've all become...I won't say they've all become environmentalists, but I think they all become conservationists, at the least. And they all know that the big picture of what God has made is, maybe, just as astounding as how it is when it is small. It's just amazing what He has done. God does not slack off. He goes all the way with everything He does. And He wants us to be like that, too. He wants us to be wholehearted – close to Him.

I think that this, actually, goes beyond just spirituality. It just seems to be interwoven into the whole creation: success with God – if we love Him wholeheartedly; success with people – if we wholeheartedly love them – not all the time, but more often than not; success at work – if we're wholehearted about our work. It even works in evil undertaking. Paul was successful at persecuting Christians, because it says he was zealous. He was wholeheartedly out to kill Christians. And I think it's, also, a human need – to be wholehearted.

People come into my office and some of them are very wholehearted about what they do to make a living. They love their work – like that teacher I was talking about. Other people don't like their work so much, but they have something else they are really interested in. They have a hobby or some kind of talent that they put to use. Some of them are wholehearted about their church, but not their job. Then, some of them aren't really wholehearted about anything. And they are the ones that are really unhappy. They can't find a way to be happy.

I know, when I'm really excited about something, I feel more alive than I am when I'm just kind of not excited about anything. And I think that God has put in us a drive to live. And wholeheartedness is a part of that at an emotional level.

I've also noticed some roadblocks. I mentioned one of them. That was depression. I think another one that keeps us from being wholehearted is ambivalence – you know, the strong feelings in several different directions that keep us from just getting on one thing. That's why, by the way, there are no Ford *and* Chevy guys. You have to be a Ford guy or a Chevy guy. Otherwise, it's unpleasant in the mind. We don't like to be ambivalent, but some of us *are*, and it makes it hard to be a happy person.

I think another thing that causes us, sometimes, not to be wholehearted is that we don't have enough life experience to know what we would like to be wholehearted about. We haven't *seen* enough.

I have a client who is twelve. I think, for a long time, I was the only older male in her life. So she only had one man that she knew. She knew her mother. She knows her big sister from the big brother/big sister program. She has an older sister, but she doesn't have, really, that much connection with other adults. The only things that she likes to do are text, talk on the phone sometimes. She hates to read. She has My Space, which she likes to keep adding songs and pictures to – pictures she takes with her phone. But she doesn't have anything of any interest in her life. She doesn't do anything extracurricular at school. So it's hard for her to be excited about things, because she doesn't know what there is to be excited about. Her mother is trying hard to make that change. She did tell me she is going to go out for cheerleading next year. So that should be interesting, but we'll just see how it goes. But that's a roadblock – that some people don't have enough life experience to know what there is out there that they can get excited about.

Let's talk about the benefits of being wholehearted. Have you ever noticed that some days you get up and you just feel full of energy, and then other days, you just feel totally blah? It's all right here. It's all right there! Guys, you get up at six in the morning to go to work and you can hardly drag yourself out of bed, but you'll get up at four to go fishing! No problem! Right? I'll drive a thousand miles through the night, sleep four hours, and backpack all day long and I'll feel great! But, if I have to go up on the roof and do the coolers, I can hardly make myself get out of bed. So can you tell which one I'm wholehearted about? Yeah! So energy is a byproduct of being wholehearted.

I think I mentioned the Buddhist that said, "In the West, people's solution to weariness is rest and our solution is wholeheartedness." I think that really is true. I think one of the other things it does – when we're wholehearted – is that we *attract* wholeheartedness to ourselves from other people.

I've noticed, since I've been single-mindedly involved in my personal community outreach in my counseling, that I've made a number of friends who are also excited about the same things. That's really fun – when you've run into those folks – that are as excited as you are about the same stuff you're excited about. You attract energy.

When I was working at Southwest, there was a young woman there. She was married and had two kids. She had no family support. All of her support came from her church. We got into a discussion one day – she and I and another lady all got cancelled on by our

clients, so we took the hour to go to Starbucks and get coffee, which is right across the street. They were telling me about this attachment class they took. And I told them that was one of the things I liked and blah, blah, blah. We were all excited about. And on the way back, she said, “Say, could I talk to you sometime? If I’m stepping on your toes, just let me know.” I said, “Well, what did you want to talk about?” She said, “My attachment to God.” So we did. We went to my office sometime later, and we talked about it, and we’ve kind of been connected ever since. We’ve gone to their house for dinner. They’ve come to ours.

She also, by the way, is a trained teacher for this parenting program, called *Parenting with Love and Logic* – probably the best one out there right now. I had a client who told me the program was good, but it didn’t talk about some of the really important things as to why people can’t parent – like, getting angry. I said, “That’s such a true thing. They tell you that you can’t get angry when you parent kids – or it kind of short-circuits what they’re trying to accomplish in that program – but they don’t tell you how *not* to get angry. So we decided we would start a parenting group called *Button-free Parenting*. Kids pushing your buttons? Having trouble being patient with them? You can take it from there. We got all excited about it and it was just so much fun to plan that. We haven’t found a way to market it yet, but we’re working on it. We think that it will generate work for my practice and for her parenting program. So it’s kind of like a win, win, win, win kind of deal. It’s *so* much fun when you’re into that kind of stuff.

Another benefit that goes along with wholeheartedness is *achievement*. When we’re wholehearted, we often get to experience the satisfaction that comes with achievement in our lives.

I met a young guy awhile back, and he was depressed over a girl that had dumped him. He said that he felt completely foolish, because all his friends and his parents told him from the get-go that she was trouble. But he didn’t listen. So she led him down the primrose path and he wound up all messed up over it. I could tell that he was depressed and I was thinking, “Is this guy even going to be able to make it in the door every week and talk about all this hard stuff?” So I told him that it wouldn’t work if he didn’t work it and I couldn’t do the therapy if he didn’t come. Here’s what he said: “I’ll be at every session.” He said, “I didn’t get a 4.2 GPA and a free ride to UNM by slacking off. I didn’t get to be the captain of my high school football team by missing practices.” So I kind of changed my attitude about him really fast. Even though he was depressed, he could still be wholehearted. I just see that over and over again.

Let’s talk about another aspect of this though? Is it possible to *become* wholehearted – if you’re not naturally that way? I don’t know that much about this, but it seems to me that, in my life, it’s easier to be wholehearted about something when it’s about what *I* chose. So, if I chose the right thing, then I am choosing to be wholehearted, in a way, aren’t I?

I have a client who is tens years old. His dad came in and showed me a video of this little ten-year-old guy at a karate tournament. He’s been doing karate since he’s been five and he just *loves* karate. He talks about it all the time. But there’s this other kid that’s been

doing karate since he was five, and this kid beats him *every* time at *every* event – especially at the sparring thing – you know, where they actually duke it out. He showed me this picture, and he told me the story before he showed me the video. He said he and this other kid wound up, again, in the finals for the sparring championship. He said, “I noticed before the match that his opponent’s parents were off to the side and they were putting a chest protector on him, which is a legal device. Most kids don’t use it at that level, because they don’t get kicked that hard. He had one. So he walked over to his son, and he said, “You know, I was watching your opponent’s parents put a chest protector on him under his shirt.” His son said, “So...” He said, “So you can kick him in the chest as hard as you want and he can take it.” So they got out there – they have a big helmet on with a face mask and everything, so they can’t get hurt – and the way you score points is, you kick the other guy; if you hit, you make a point. After the first hit, it stops and they line up again. I mean, you can’t go in there and hit somebody three times.... Whoever gets the first one, they stop it and start over again. I don’t remember if it was three points to win or two – at that ten-year-old level. The first thing that happened was my client’s opponent hit him right in the face. So they stop it, line up again, and he’s down one. Right? Well, they lined up again and start off, and, amazingly, my client hits him right in the face. So now they’re tied. I don’t know if there was another one in there or not, but I know we got down to the part where it was going to be, whoever gets the next contact is going to win. So this little guy – the opponent – realizes that he’s never been in this position with this guy, because he usually just hit him twice and that was the ballgame. But he’s hit now, and it’s tied up, and if he doesn’t hit him first this next time, he loses. So they come out, and they kind of spar around a little bit, and then this little guy rushes right at my client – just tears right at him. And my client just leaned back and kicked him as hard as could right in the chest and, literally, lifted him off the ground. And that was it. He won! Nobody was more surprised than he was, but it happened so fast he just did it instinctively.

I was thinking about that whole thing. You could tell that he was pretty intimidated at the beginning of the match. And even after he scored a point, it was like, “Did I really do that?” You could just look at his body language and see it. But he loves karate so much that he’s just always going to be there – totally excited about it. It’s really fun to watch those little guys do that. They’re not going to get hurt and it’s a lot of fun for them.

I also noticed, in my own life, that after being a minister for thirty years, it was extremely interesting to me to learn how to help people, at last, when I took up counseling. After having to be a counselor without training for so long, it was so nice to be able to learn some of the principles about how to help people. I think it was easier for me to be wholehearted about it because I was already interested in it and I was choosing that path for myself.

Well, let’s look back at a scripture we read earlier for this next point. If we can choose to be wholehearted, then there are things that we can do to *learn* how to be that way. James did tell us:

Jm. 4:8 – *Purify your hearts, you double-minded.* Stop having too many things to focus on and focus on one thing. Purify your heart.

So we can choose to be wholehearted and there are things that we can do to cause that to happen. I haven't talked to too many people about this, because I'm just coming on to this. But in my own life, when I have been able to be wholehearted, it's come from two sources. I watched my mother and father work hard all their lives. They were very single-minded about that. And the other that really helped me when I was younger was, when I went out for track when I was in high school. I was not naturally good at it. I don't have talent that some people have. But I learned that, if I worked harder than they did, I could compete. I had limited success, but I could compete. We didn't know about proper training back then, so we were all over-trained. I think that, if I had the techniques that they have now, I might have even done better. But I never would have been as good as the best because I'm not built the way they are. I did learn that, if I put everything I had into an activity, most of the time I could do well. That's what I learned when I was seventeen years old.

So I suppose there are as many different experiences of learning wholeheartedness as there are wholehearted people, but when I've been able to *be* wholehearted, I think I draw on those two things. Where do you get yours? Just think about it.

I think we can, also, *ask* to be wholehearted. David said, "Create in me a pure heart, O God." A *pure heart* means to not be a bunch of stuff there, but just one pure thing. Right? So God can help us do that. I think he was asking God to help him be wholehearted about God. That's always a good thing to ask for, because, when we do that, we're asking for success in the physical, success in the emotional, success in the spiritual, financial. It all goes together. I think it's possible that we can ask God to partner with us and show us how to be wholehearted in anything that we attempt.

I will say, though, that every time I ask Him to help me with a project, it always takes *way* longer than I thought it was going to. So, is that good or bad? Well, I think that's good, because you're learning how to stay wholehearted while you're fighting your way through all the obstacles.

I know both my counseling practice and LifeResource have taken a lot more effort than I thought. Elaine and I have been stretched and tested in those areas and we had to learn how to *remain* wholehearted through the process. It's easy to be excited about something in the beginning, but then when things get tough, you have to learn to stay *in there* with it. In the end, it's paid off for us. I look back on it and wonder how we did all that stuff, but God provided what we needed. He provided the wholeheartedness, and that, in turn, generates the energy that it takes to do all those hard things.

I'm sure most of us have our own stories to tell about how God helps us be wholehearted. And if we feel drained, we might look at our level of wholeheartedness to find more energy for the task. Or, if we look at a task, and we see that we're not wholehearted about it, we might need to think about dropping it and finding something that we can be

wholehearted about – more interested in. With both those items, we can always ask God to help us.

We also have, in the LifeResource – on the Website – a presentation, called *Being Alive*, that goes right along with this and talks a lot about that drive that people have to live. There is quite a bit of discussion about wholeheartedness there, as well.