

First Installment in Radical Acceptance
March 5, 2021

Healthy Relationships are Integral to Christian Life

Having the ability to live at peace through the practice of “Radical Acceptance” gives us the best possible place to have relationships, begin reconciliation, and cultivate life-long love.

The practice of Radical Acceptance is a simple notion usually explained in secular terms. This makes it sound like a psychological method or behavioral therapy, when, in fact, Radical Acceptance is the way Jesus was able to be at peace in the inmost parts of his being, be merciful, and extend love to the whole world.

When we read the story of the life of Jesus, we are generally focused on the events in his life, things he did, and what he said. It takes a little work on our part to recognize that the way he lived was the best example of how to live what he was teaching, and that contrary to how difficult that path seems, if we can walk that way, then we also can live a life more free of agitation, more willing to forgive, more likely at peace, and filled with love. If we imitate the way he lived by learning and acting out the skills of Radical Acceptance, not only will the quality of our lives be vastly improved, but they will more closely reflect Christ-like qualities we revere and desire for ourselves.

There are four basic skills employed living into Radical Acceptance: mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Mindfulness

The practice of being fully aware and present in the moment.

Jesus was keenly aware of the present situation, who was there, and what they were thinking and feeling. Think of the woman who reach out to touch the hem of his robe, when he wept with his friends Mary and Martha at the grave of Lazarus, and when he sympathized the rich young man who kept the commandments but would struggle sell all of his possessions. Jesus was fully present to their hearts and minds (he was not thinking of something else).

Distress Tolerance

How to tolerate painful emotions in difficult situations and not act in self-destructive ways.

When priests, scribes, and other authorities questioned Jesus, hoping to prove him wrong, embarrass him, or ensnare him in blasphemous behavior, Jesus knew their intent and responded patiently and with authority. He did not commit the sin of hatred or malice, nor did he answer in a way that was dishonest or harmful to him. His answers exemplifying distress tolerance included: render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s. After teaching the disciples repeatedly about abundance, he did not kick them off the team or lash out in frustration. Once again, Jesus patiently fed thousands with a few loaves and fish.

Emotion Regulation

How to change emotions that you want to change.

Jesus' emotion regulation is a marvel, and one we can strive to imitate. In order to regulate extreme emotions, we have to be able to step outside their emotional grip and become a witness to how they make us feel and act. This is a complicated skill to acquire, so as you develop it, start by watching yourself in easy situations and work your way up to observing your more difficult emotions. Think of the way Jesus was controlling himself when Pilate was condemning him. Through not being debilitated by the emotional torment he suffered, he showed that Pilate had limited dominion and that he was subject to a far greater authority.

Interpersonal Effectiveness

How to ask for what you want, or to say "no," while maintaining self-respect and positive relationships.

This skill is the ability to tell the truth without harming self or the other. For example, Jesus told the disciples they were wrong when they worried about competition from outsiders and pursued a rivalry amongst themselves. He said: For those who are not against us are for us." He further corrected them saying: "If anyone wants to be first, they must be last, and servant of all." Jesus was a teacher, even when the rebuke had to be sharp. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus quickly admonished Peter for cutting off the ear of Malchus because Jesus was determined to be peaceful in the face of injustice.

Jesus knew he couldn't change the things which were outside of his control. Even though, on the night before he was crucified, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray for the cup to be passed from him, he went on to pray: but not my will, but thy will be done. Submission to the will of God, and the complete demonstration of divine love was what he had been called to do. He would see it through.

Accepting what we cannot change and seeing all without judgment is not an easy practice - at first. The more we do it, the more natural - and holy - it becomes to see everything without judgment. When we do this and make ourselves able to be the witness of our emotions, we are learning the way of Jesus and the way of a peaceful life. This is a life of Radical Acceptance and healthier relationships.

Over the sixteen weeks of my sabbatical, segments describing the practice of Radical Acceptance will appear in the eTower. As each section appears, they will be added to a collection on the parish website for your reference. May your being be well and may your heart, mind, body, and soul, dwell in peace and safety. **Amen.**