

Day 3

Emotions: Part 1

START WITH HEART

Lord, as You speak please help me listen with my whole heart and Holy Spirit please meet me today and make me more like Jesus.

Psalm 6:2-3

“2 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. 3 My soul also is greatly troubled”

Today I'd like to start talking about emotions. Now, we all experience emotions but as Christians we might believe that there are certain emotions (particularly difficult or painful emotions) that we are not allowed to acknowledge or feel. We might think that we have to keep up “good Christian appearances” and always be happy or “in control” because feeling an unpleasant emotion somehow makes us “bad” Christians. However, the more we deny our emotions and try and push them to one side and ignore them, the more likely they are to build up and, more often than not, the suppressed emotions end up becoming more unmanageable and our response to them more destructive or unhelpful than if we had acknowledged and been honest about the emotion in the first place.

The Bible actually talks about people, their emotions and how they respond/or should respond to these emotions. It shows us examples of those who acknowledged and were often very “real” about their emotional experiences but chose to respond to these emotions by turning to God rather than being led and ruled by them. King David is an example of someone who was very honest about his often intense, overwhelming emotions, yet he is referred to in the Bible as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14). Job experienced intense emotional reactions to his suffering, yet he did not sin or blame God (Job 1:22). The prophet Elijah experienced periods of great despondence and turmoil, yet he allowed God to strengthen and sustain him (1

Kings 19:3 – 8). The Bible even mentions times when Jesus felt strong emotions: anger when he cleansed the temple (Matt 21:12 – 13), sadness when Lazarus died to the point that he wept (John 11:35) and great distress in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion (Matt 26:36 – 44). Yet, in all these instances, Jesus did not sin but turned to God and placed his faith in the Father.

So, if the Bible speaks about emotions, then surely it would be important for us to think about our emotions and reframe our perception of them. In other words, to allow ourselves to be honest and real about our emotional experiences but also to put our emotions in their right place i.e under submission to God, and find ways to respond to them that are honouring and obedient to God.

Now, I know that “emotions” is a very broad topic and we can probably spend days speaking about it, but today I just want to have a look at two things. Firstly, why we have emotions/the purpose of emotions and secondly, identifying/naming emotions.

So, to start off with, we might wonder why we have emotions in the first place? Especially when it comes to uncomfortable or unpleasant emotions, we might think that we would be better off not having these emotions. The reality, however, is that all emotions have a purpose or function and the emotion in itself is not necessarily the “problem”. It is how we RESPOND to our emotions that can either be helpful and effective or unhelpful and ineffective (but more about that in the next devotional). There are a few basic reasons why we were created with emotions:

Firstly, emotions give us INFORMATION that helps us to make sense of situations or help advise us in situations. Our emotional response to a situation serves as a guide and can, in fact, warn us, with the purpose of keeping us safe. Where this can become “messy” or confusing is when we take our emotions at face-value and treat them as facts.

For example: Fear could help us make sense of a situation by warning us about potential danger or a threat. However, if we just take that fear at face-value, we will believe that something definitely is dangerous just because we feel afraid and this is not necessarily true without first checking the facts. Or, for example, just

because we feel depressed when we are on our own, we might believe that we should never be alone based purely on the emotional experience.

Our emotions are supposed to be helpful in giving us information to help make sense of situations but should not be the ONLY information that we use when responding to situations as emotions are subjective and don't always give us the entire picture.

Secondly, our emotions help prepare us for ACTION. Emotions motivate us to behave or respond in certain ways. In a crisis, emotions often help us to react instinctively. This could be very useful.

For example, if we respond to fear in a threatening situation by running away or calling for help, this could help keep us safe. Or, if we respond to anxiety about an exam by studying, this will help us be more prepared.

The key, however, is HOW we respond. I will discuss this in more detail in the next devotional.

Thirdly, our emotions help us to communicate with others. Our emotions determine our non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice as well as our verbal communication. Without emotions, we would probably be like robots or computers, giving and receiving information without the depth and quality of connection and relationship that goes with our communication.

So, now that we have established that our emotions do, in fact, serve a useful purpose, I'd like to take a step back for a moment and have a look at how we can IDENTIFY emotions. This might sound quite simple but sometimes our emotions can be so overwhelming and confusing that we might struggle to actually KNOW what we are feeling. And when something is unknown, it can often feel even more overwhelming, scary or unmanageable. So being able to identify and name our emotions is often the first step in helping us deal with especially difficult and uncomfortable emotions.

A really simple way of doing this is first being familiar with the six basic emotions. These are namely; **happy, sad, angry, afraid, surprised** and **disgusted**. Now, if we can identify our emotional experience as falling into one of these six categories, then we can start fleshing it out. I have a really handy “emotions wheel” that can help to look at more specific emotions in each category. I will link it to the written version of this devotional.

For example, if you can identify that what you are experiencing falls into the **sad** category, the next step is to try and identify what *type* of sad or down emotion you are experiencing:

- Are you feeling *bored*?
- Are you feeling *lonely*?
- Are you feeling *depressed*?
- Are you feeling *guilty*?

As you can see, these emotions are quite different from one another and a lot more specific than just “sad” or “down”. The more specific we can get regarding our emotions, the more likely it is that our emotions will feel slightly more manageable. When we give something a name, we know better what to do with it.

A useful way of identifying emotions is to try and identify the emotion in the moment that you experience it, or, at least, to be aware of the emotion as you are experiencing it. Another useful way of being able to better identify one’s emotions is to keep a journal or emotions diary. Try and find a time in the day where you can write down and reflect on how you felt during the day, what triggered that emotion and also how you responded. This will help to become more aware of your emotional experiences. This will take practice, but the more you do this, the more your “emotional vocabulary” will develop.

JOURNALING QUESTIONS:

1. What emotions do I find particularly difficult to deal with? (Start with the six basic emotions and work to a more specific emotion from there using the emotions wheel).

2. What information or advice could these emotions possibly be trying to give me?
3. What am I trusting the Lord for in terms of my emotions (what specifically do you want to see changed or different when it comes to your emotional experiences)?

Lord, thank you that I am fearfully and wonderfully made and that I can come to you just as I am. Please help me to understand my emotions, especially the ones that I find so heavy and difficult to face. I commit my emotions to you and wait upon you to guide me and lead me.

WORSHIP SONG:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhwvq8lIL7A&feature=youtu.be>

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