

The Emotional Life of the Christian

Introduction

If you were here the last Equipping Night, we talked about the Emotional life of Jesus. It was fitting as we approached Good Friday and Easter to focus on the humanity of Jesus. And part of his full human nature, was a full experience of human emotions. We saw how the emotional life of Jesus was essential to our salvation.

Tonight, we are discussing the Emotional Life of the Christian.

Recommended Resources

You may be wondering, why is this topic worth talking about?

Well, first we need to recognize that our life is full of emotion. We can still remember our emotions as they relate to certain milestones in our life. Our graduation. Meeting our spouse for the first time. Marrying our spouse...or perhaps losing a spouse. Having our first child...a child moving out of the house, the list goes on and on. From the most pleasant feelings to the most dreaded feelings, our lives are full of emotion.

But these feelings don't only happen on the memorable days, they happen on even the most ordinary days.

One source online said we have more than 400 emotional experiences every day. For the hours we are awake, that is about 25 emotional experiences every hour. We often feel multiple emotions at the same time.

You may say, "well I'm not that emotional of a person." But I would say, the question is not *if* you are emotional. You *are* emotional because you are a human being. Now, some of us are more emotionally *driven* by emotions than others. We may "feel" more than others, but we're all emotional on some level.

Most of us struggle with one of two responses to emotion

- 1- Stoicism and Suppression – We internalize and suppress our feelings. We may think emotions are a sign of weakness. Especially us men, we may think, "to be truly masculine is to not express emotion." One of the major tenants of Zen Buddhism is to emotionally distance yourself from the world, because the world is full of suffering.

Many Christians struggle with this, especially when it comes to the negative emotions. We might think, "if God is always good, maybe it's a sin for me to be sad." My week was terrible, but I feel pressured to show up to church with a smile on my face. People ask how I'm doing, and I say "good" because it feels like the only acceptable answer. I must look like I have it all together.

According to stoicism, emotions are a curse. But there is also an opposite error we might struggle with...

2 – Hyper-Emotionalism – This says my emotions are always right. Follow your heart. Be true to yourself. I am my emotions. I am what I feel. My emotions are the most important thing about me. To be truly “authentic,” I must embrace all of my feelings and do what they tell me to do. If something doesn’t feel good, then I have a hard time being motivated. If something does feel good, then its hard for me to stop, even if its bad for me.

In extreme cases, we see this in gender dysphoria. I feel like a woman, therefore I am a woman.

Christians can also struggle with Hyper-emotionalism. Sometimes we make our “feeling” the most important thing about our faith. I don’t feel like reading my Bible, so it would be inauthentic if I read it. I’m not feeling anything from the sermon, I’m not feeling anything from the music. Is my faith even real if I’m not feeling it?

Don’t mishear me, feeling is important, but feelings aren’t everything. According to hyper-emotionalism, emotions are always right.

So, think about yourself right now. Do you lean towards stoicism and suppression? Do you lean towards hyper-emotionalism side? Maybe a mixture of both?

So, if those are the two pitfalls, what is the correct response to our emotions? We’ll come back to this, but first...we have to understand why God gave us emotions in the first place.

Why did God give us emotions? Are they a blessing or a curse?

Emotions are a gift from God. They are part of what it means to be made in his image.

Scientists debate whether animals have emotions or not. Is your dog wagging his tail the emotion of happiness, or is it just instinct? Whatever the case, it is clear that human beings are the *most emotional* beings on this planet.

God made us with emotions because he himself has emotions. (His emotions are not exactly like ours, because he is the creator and we are his creature). God’s emotions aren’t unstable, they aren’t inconsistent. But the Bible does express that God *feels* things about us and about his world - and because we are made in his image, so do we.

There are three main reasons that God gave us emotions

1 - Emotions tell us what we love and value. We are joyful when we gain something that we love. We are sad when we lose something that we love. We are anxious when something that we love is at risk of leaving.

Every emotion is a clue that tells you what you love. *KEY IDEA*

2 – Emotions help us connect with other people. Your closest relationships are those with whom you’ve shared the deepest, emotional connections. The team you’ve celebrated with. The person you’ve mourned with. Emotions connect us.

3 – Emotions can be an expression of worship. Jesus says the greatest commandment is to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. Emotions connect us to God as an expression of worship.

Now, love is not *only* emotion. Biblical love is an action, but it is not an action absent of emotion. That's why we are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Even Psalm 88, the saddest psalm in the whole bible, is an expression of Worship. Every emotion can be an expression of worship. That's what we see in the Psalms

Let's go back to how we respond. If Stoicism is not the answer, and Hyper-Emotionalism is not the answer, then what is the answer?

I believe we see the answer in Psalm 42 (Read entire psalm)

This Psalm has a refrain in verse 5 and 11 - Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

The answer is, **ENGAGE** your emotions. Don't run from them. But don't blindly follow them either. Engage them. Some of us that are hyperemotional may be really good at listening to our emotions. But when is the last time you spoke to your emotions? Ask these questions:

1 - What even am I feeling? The writer knows, he's "cast down." Sad. "In turmoil."

2 - Why am I feeling this way? What is causing this emotion? What does this tell me about my own loves and values.

What am I feeling? I'm sad. Why am I feeling this way? Because I wanted that promotion. Dig deeper. I think I deserved that promotion. I think I was a better fit for that promotion. I'm worried about my finances without that promotion.

Maybe I'm sad because I hate rejection, and when I'm rejected it opens old wounds. Or maybe its because I compare myself to others, and my peers are further in their careers than I am.

You see, it's not enough to just know that we're angry, or happy, or anxious, or joyful – we need to know *why*.

3 – Am I feeling this emotion for a godly reason or sinful reason? (Often times, it's a mix of both)

Some emotions are pleasant, and some emotions are unpleasant. Some are positive feeling, and some are negative feeling. But it's not as though some emotions are always good and some emotions are always bad. Sometimes we have a good reason to feel unpleasant emotions. Also...sometimes we have bad reasons for feeling pleasant emotions.

Joy is not always godly, and sadness is not always sinful. Emotions are not that black and white.

Sometimes, joy is sinful. You might think, my neighbor is a real piece of work...and I heard he got fired from his job. That makes me so happy because he had it coming. That's sinful joy. Because what does that joy reveal about your loves? I love me, and I love it when my enemies get crushed.

Sometimes, sadness is Godly. You need to move because of work, and you are sad to leave your old neighborhood, old house, old church, old friends. Because you love them. This sadness reveals that you love your community, you love your friends, you love your church. That is a godly sadness because it points to a godly love.

When we experience loss. It is godly to grieve the loss, because it whets our appetite for Jesus to return. We say come, Lord Jesus, and defeat death once and for all!

Remember how we said emotion is an expression of worship? Be encouraged by this: Even our unpleasant emotions can be expressions of worship.

Your sadness, fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, are all meant to push you closer to God. If you don't believe me, read the psalms. The Psalms are full of tears!

Look back at Psalm 42:3-4 - ³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴These things I remember, as I pour out my soul...AS I POUR OUT MY SOUL

He is pouring out his soul to God. Imagine a bucket full of emotions -pleasant, unpleasant, and ugly, Sinful and Godly, being poured out. It's not a trickle, not a slow drip, there is no filter, but God says, "pour out your heart to me, all of it, even the ugly parts."

When is the last time you've honestly poured out your heart to God? No holding back? When I was an intern at a church in Charlotte, one of my pastors and mentors gave me a warning: He said "Matt, you present well...you're too good at acting like you don't need help." I wonder if any one else here can join my club. And you know, I often catch myself doing the same thing to God. Good, I think I'm doing pretty good, I just need a *little* help in a few areas.

And when I do that, I refrain from pouring out my soul to him

So, along with the psalms, we are called to engage our emotions and pour them out to God. And you know what happens when we do that? Our emotions bring us closer to him. The great blessing of emotions is that they are a tool to bring us in closer fellowship with God.

Now here's what we need to understand rightly - Engaging God with your emotions does not guarantee that your emotions will change right away. Your anger may remain anger. Your sadness may remain sadness. Your grief may remain grief for a while.

If your sadness remains sadness for a while, that doesn't mean your faith is broken, or that God doesn't care.

That's because The goal is not to change your emotions, the goal is nearness to God and growth in Christlikeness

As you bring your emotions to the Lord, your heart will start to change. You'll start loving what God loves, and hating what God hates. You'll start feeling joy over what brings God joy, and you'll start weeping over what made Jesus weep.

So the Biblical Way to Engage Emotions is to talk to your emotions and ask these three questions:

1 – What am I feeling? 2 – Why am I feeling it? 3 – Is this for a godly reason, sinful reason, or mixture of both? Then, pour out those emotions to the Lord in prayer, no holding back, and your heart will grow closer to the Lord, and your heart will begin to change.

2 years ago, I taught an entire series on this topic to my High School Youth Group. And on my last day in Columbia, a bunch of students gave gifts and wrote letters. One letter was from a girl – relatively new to our church. She said,

(Read part of the letter)

General Questions (5 minutes)

- 1- Would you consider yourself to be more at risk of stoicism and suppression of emotions or hyper-emotionalism (following your emotions even when they ought not be followed)?
- 2- What is something you found interesting or thought provoking from Matt's talk?

Your Group's Emotion: FEAR (Remainder of Time)

- 1- Read Psalm 55 Together as a Group
- 2- How can experiencing fear help identify what you love and value? Think of specific examples.
- 3- What might be some godly reasons to experience fear?
- 4- What might be some sinful or inappropriate expressions of fear?
- 5- How is fear used as an expression of worship in Psalm 55? Dig deep on this question.

General Questions (5 minutes)

- 1- Would you consider yourself to be more at risk of stoicism and suppression of emotions or hyper-emotionalism (following your emotions even when they ought not be followed)?
- 2- What is something you found interesting or thought provoking from Matt's talk?

Your Group's Emotion: SADNESS (Remainder of Time)

- 1- Read Psalm 88 Together as a Group
- 2- How can experiencing sadness help identify what you love and value? Think of specific examples.
- 3- What might be some godly reasons to experience sadness?
- 4- What might be some sinful or inappropriate expressions of sadness?
- 5- How is sadness used as an expression of worship on Psalm 88? Dig deep on this question.

General Questions (5 minutes)

- 1- Would you consider yourself to be more at risk of stoicism and suppression of emotions or hyper-emotionalism (following your emotions even when they ought not be followed)?
- 2- What is something you found interesting or thought provoking from Matt's talk?

Your Group's Emotion: GUILT and SHAME (Remainder of Time)

- 1- Read Psalm 51 Together as a Group
- 2- How exactly would you define guilt and shame? Is there a difference between the two?
- 3- How can experiencing guilt and shame help identify what you love and value? Think of specific examples.
- 4- What might be some godly (or appropriate) reasons to experience guilt and shame?
- 5- What might be some sinful or inappropriate expressions of sadness?
- 6- How is guilt and shame used as an expression of worship in Psalm 51? Dig deep on this question.

General Questions (5 minutes)

- 1- Would you consider yourself to be more at risk of stoicism and suppression of emotions or hyper-emotionalism (following your emotions even when they ought not be followed)?
- 2- What is something you found interesting or thought provoking from Matt's talk?

Your Group's Emotion: GRIEF (Remainder of Time)

- 1- Read 2 Samuel 12:15-23 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 together as a Group
- 2- How exactly would you define grief?
- 3- How can experiencing grief help identify what you love and value? Think of specific examples.
- 4- What might be some godly (or appropriate) reasons to experience grief?
- 5- What might be some sinful or inappropriate expressions of grief?
- 6- How does David use grief as an expression of worship on in 2 Samuel? Dig deep on this question.
- 7- What do you think Paul means that we are supposed to grieve, but "not as others do" in 1 Thessalonians 4?

General Questions (5 minutes)

- 1- Would you consider yourself to be more at risk of stoicism and suppression of emotions or hyper-emotionalism (following your emotions even when they ought not be followed)?
- 2- What is something you found interesting or thought provoking from Matt's talk?

Your Group's Emotion: ANGER (Remainder of Time)

- 1- Read Ephesians 4:26-27 and Psalm 109:1-15 together as a group
- 2- How can experiencing anger help identify what you love and value? Think of specific examples.
- 3- What might be some godly (or appropriate) reasons to experience anger?
- 4- What might be some sinful or inappropriate expressions of anger?
- 5- How does David use anger as an expression of worship on is Psalm 109? Dig deep on this question.
- 6- How do we know when our own anger has become sinful? Are there certain things that can help us identify sinful anger.