



Learning to Feel

Each week for 6 months we will send out a couple thoughts and a journal prompt to guide us through this process of learning to love God with the emotions that He created us with. Each month we will focus on a different core emotion and we will look at it from multiple different angles, because though core emotions are foundational, we experience them very differently in different situations. These mini devotionals are meant to be used as tools to help each of us continue practicing the 4 questions we've just spent the past month learning. Our hopes are that we, as a church, will find ourselves learning how to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, AND to love our neighbor as ourselves.

As you work through these thoughts and prompts, remember to ask yourself...

What am I feeling?

Where am I feeling it in my body?

When did I first feel this?

Who am I going to share this with?

There will be times where you are not feeling the emotion we are talking about, but I would encourage you to think about times in the past where you have felt that emotion. Allow yourselves to be drawn into that memory and meet God there. Allow yourself to be pulled closer to God in those

feelings. At our next meeting, on February 23, we'll gather to talk and process what God does in us as we learn to feel.

For the sake of this devotional, Esther's words will look like this...

AND CHRIS' INPUT WILL LOOK LIKE THIS

Happiness

Happy - experiencing joy

Language for feeling Happy -

“Everything feels right with the world”

“I just like where I am right now”

“*Can't stop smiling*”

“I feel good”

For me, feeling happy can be tricky. I feel happy when all my kids are in the house. I feel happy when everyone is getting along. I feel happy when a project is completed. I feel happy when I plan an event and it goes according to my plan. I think if we all look at our lives we can find lots of things and situations that make us feel happy. I remember years ago though, coming home from a vacation we had taken to Florida where we had taken our kids to Disney World. It had been a dream of mine to take the kids there for probably as long as we had had kids. I had so many wonderful memories of Disney World from when I was a child and I wanted my kids to experience it as well. It had been a truly wonderful trip complete with a side-trip to visit my Granny on the opposite side of the state for my kids to see some of the places I had so enjoyed as a little girl. As we began to make our way back to Kansas I was hit with feelings of guilt and sadness along with my happiness, and I actually felt ashamed for being happy. You see we had planned this particular vacation with Chris's two best friends and they had died before we were able to take our vacation together. We had so looked forward to doing all the things together, and suddenly my happiness at making such fun memories with our kids somehow felt wrong. I also remember, though, that when I was finally able to express what was going on in my emotions, Chris reminded me that sometimes happiness can live simultaneously with other emotions. Looking at my life now I realize that often

when I feel happiness it can make me uncomfortable, like someone is somehow going to steal it away from me, or I try to grab onto and control things so that I can keep feeling this way. I'm slowly realizing that this feeling like all the others is a gift, a reminder to come and meet with God, to actually feel it in my body and enjoy and embrace it while not trying to push it away or make it stay.

HAPPINESS IS ALSO STRANGE FOR ME, BUT FOR COMPLETELY DIFFERENT REASONS. I'M NOT SURE WHY, BUT I DON'T REALLY EVER SEEK HAPPINESS. SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE MAYBE I DON'T DESERVE IT. SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE IT'S A GREAT THING TO EXPERIENCE, BUT A DANGEROUS THING TO SEEK. I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT IT IS, BUT I CERTAINLY NEVER FEEL LIKE HAPPINESS IS MY RIGHT AND SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD IF I'M NOT HAPPY. I EVEN OFTEN COMPLICATE THINGS RATHER THAN JUST DOING THE THING THAT MAKES ME HAPPY. IN FACT, IF I'M BEING 100% HONEST, I HAVE A HARD TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO SEEM TO FEEL THAT THE WORLD (OR GOD) OWES THEM HAPPINESS. GENERALLY WHAT I SEEK IS PURPOSE AND MEANING. I WANT TO FEEL LIKE MY LIFE MATTERS, LIKE MY DAY MATTERS. (I'M SURE THAT IS A FORM OF HAPPINESS). SO I DON'T GENERALLY SEEK HAPPINESS. BUT THE WEIRD THING IS... I AM USUALLY PRETTY HAPPY. IT'S NEVER THE GOAL, I EVEN TRY TO AVOID IT AT TIMES, BUT WHEN I DO A DEEP DIVE INTO MY FEELINGS, I'M USUALLY PRETTY HAPPY.

Creative - inspired

Language for feeling Creative -

“I have so many ideas!”

“I can't wait to get started”

“*Vibrating with good energy*”

“I just feel connected to something bigger”

I love this feeling. There is nothing quite like the feeling of walking into a space and envisioning it to be something entirely different than it currently is, or dreaming of ways to make it work more efficiently. I love taking raw ingredients and turning them into something beautiful and tasty to eat. I love dreaming with Chris of ways to engage our family or others in community with one another and with God. I can feel the excitement building in my body as I plan and execute the plan. I can feel the hope that comes with wanting what I created to be helpful or delicious or truly help another person connect with God. God created us to be creative, and I think when we feel this feeling it connects us to him in a unique way. Unfortunately, I think sometimes we ignore this feeling because we're too busy or too tired or too overwhelmed or we believe the lie that we

aren't creative. Or, we fall prey to the lie that because God gave us this creativity our way is the only way it should be. God, I want this feeling to be a place where I can stand in awe of all the different ways you show your creative nature in each and every one of us. Help me to value and foster this feeling both in myself and those around me.

CREATIVITY IS A BIT OF AN ADDICTION FOR ME. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING IN A CREATIVE HEADSPACE AND NOT BEING ABLE TO FIND THAT SPACE, FEELS LIKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING PLUGGED INTO AN ELECTRICAL OUTLET OR BEING UNPLUGGED. THE VERY FIRST WAY WE MEET GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES... BEFORE FATHER, BEFORE JUDGE, BEFORE WARRIOR, BEFORE LOVER, BEFORE LAW-GIVER, BEFORE SAVIOR... WAS AS CREATOR. "IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED!" I HONESTLY THINK I CAN ASSESS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BASED ON HOW MUCH CREATIVITY I FEEL FLOWING THROUGH ME. SO THIS FEELING SCARES ME WHEN IT'S NOT THERE. HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKS. IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT'S MINE TO CONTROL. IT FEELS LIKE I USE IT AND GET TO STEWARD IT, BUT WHEN IT GOES AWAY, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO REALLY FIND IT AGAIN UNTIL I RECONNECT WITH GOD. SO I DO LIVE WITH THE FEAR THAT IT WILL ONE DAY DRY UP. I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I GO TO THAT WELL AND IT'S EMPTY. I DON'T FEEL SMART ENOUGH OR TALENTED ENOUGH TO DO WHAT I DO WITHOUT THIS GOD-GIVEN MIRACLE SO I JUST PRAY THAT GOD CONTINUES TO BE GRACIOUS WITH THIS GIFT.

Safe - feeling secure

Language for feeling Safe -

"I feel like I'm at home"

"I feel very comfortable with you"

"Slow easy breath"

"I feel like all the stress of the world is outside this little bubble"

I can remember some very distinct moments in my life when I felt truly safe. It is truly the most wonderful, relaxing feeling. I feel like I can melt away and there is no pressure or stress.

Unfortunately, this feeling is one I think I usually don't feel I deserve. My mind races ahead assuming I've forgotten something or done something wrong that I'm not yet recognizing. When I allow myself to think more deeply about my relationship with this feeling I realize that often, I'm simply pushing this feeling away so that I can move onto the next thing, the next task. But, God is calling me to sit and feel this feeling. He calls me to come and sit with him, allowing him to speak to me of the safety found only in my relationship with him. God, You know me and love me. You see

me for all that I am, even the motives and intents that are hidden deep within my heart, and you love me. That is real safety, and I pray that you will help me to lean into you and the safety that you bring.

THIS IS A CONFUSING EMOTION FOR ME. I HAVE BEEN TOLD MANY TIMES THAT BECAUSE OF MY SIZE, I DON'T FACE A LOT OF THE STRESSFUL, SCARY THINGS IN THE WORLD. PEOPLE DO TEND TO TREAT ME BETTER AND THEY PROBABLY THREATEN ME LESS THAN OTHER PEOPLE JUST BECAUSE I'M BIG (AND I'M TOLD, SCARY LOOKING). SO I TEND TO WALK AROUND FEELING PHYSICALLY SAFE MOST OF THE TIME. I HEAR OTHER PEOPLE EXPRESS BASIC ANXIETIES AND I CAN NOT RELATE. I'M TOLD THIS IS ODD. THE FLIP SIDE . /IS THAT THIS FEELING OF PHYSICAL SAFETY ALSO HINGES ON THIS WEIRD NEED TO CONTROL THINGS. WHEN I WALK INTO A ROOM, I TEND TO SIZE UP ALL THE OTHER GUYS TO ASSESS WHERE ANY THREATS LIE AND I MAKE A PLAN ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THAT THREAT IF NEEDED. I KNOW WHERE THE EXITS ARE AND HOW I WOULD GET MY WIFE AND KIDS OUT OF HARMS WAY IF NEEDED. MY FEELING OF SAFETY COMES AT A COST.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY IS ANOTHER THING. I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THIS IS SUPPOSED TO FEEL LIKE, BUT I DEFINITELY KNOW WHEN IT'S NOT THERE. I LIKE DISAGREEMENT AND DEBATE. I FEEL REALLY SHAKY WHEN I AGREE WITH EVERYONE IN THE ROOM BECAUSE I ASSUME EVERYONE IS BEING FAKE. FULL AGREEMENT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN. SO I DON'T TEND TO FEEL SAFE THE WAY OTHER PEOPLE DO. I FEEL SAFER IN HONEST CONFLICT. BUT I DO KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN SOMEONE STARTS TO PULL AWAY AND THAT DOESN'T FEEL SAFE AT ALL. SO IN A WEIRD WAY, I THINK I ONLY KNOW THIS FEELING WHEN IT LEAVES.

Psalm 61

O God, listen to my cry!
Hear my prayer!

From the ends of the earth,
I cry to you for help
when my heart is overwhelmed.
Lead me to the towering rock of safety,

for you are my safe refuge,
a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.

Let me live forever in your sanctuary,
safe beneath the shelter of your wings! *Interlude*

For you have heard my vows, O God.
You have given me an inheritance reserved for those who fear your name.

Add many years to the life of the king!

May his years span the generations!

May he reign under God's protection forever.

May your unfailing love and faithfulness watch over him.

Then I will sing praises to your name forever

as I fulfill my vows each day.