



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 December 29, 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

Fear

Vulnerable- being exposed

Language for feeling Vulnerable -

"I feel naked"

"Please, say something... I'm feeling pretty exposed right now"

"Please accept me... Please don't reject me"

"I feel powerless"

I have a deep fear of abandonment. Not the kind where people physically leave me (though there is some of that), but the kind where they physically stay and build a wall protecting themselves from me. I hear the words, "I don't want to be around you." "I don't want to talk to you." Or worse yet, I hear nothing at all. My mind will fill in the blanks. I've been seen and they looked away. This fear, this vulnerability, has driven my life more than I care to admit. I struggle against this feeling as though I'm trapped in a cage. I try to make myself small, to need nothing, to stay quiet. I try to tell myself I'm simply waiting for God to show up and work, but often it's simply that this vulnerable feeling has me wanting to protect myself.

In this past year though, I've found that in the places where I'm seen in all my ugly anger and self protectiveness, I find God right there. He's always waiting to envelop me in his love. He sees me and doesn't walk away. He sees me and doesn't sit silently in judgement of my weakness, failure and selfishness. Instead he calls to me, "come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." God, help me to run to you when I feel vulnerable. Help me to find myself reaching for your love and acceptance when I feel exposed and lacking, and from that place, let me be a shining testament that your strength really is made perfect in my weakness.

VULNERABILITY IS A WEIRD TWO-EDGED SWORD FOR ME. LIKE EVERYTHING IN THE "FEAR" CORE EMOTION, I FEEL IT VERY BIG. IT FEELS LIKE THE OTHER FORMS OF FEAR. IT'S POWERFUL AND IT THREATENS TO RUN THINGS SO I RESPOND BY RUNNING TOWARDS IT. I HAVE A VERY ACTIVE INTERNAL WORLD. I HAVE A NEVERENDING INTERNAL DIALOGUE AND I LOVE SHARING IT WITH OTHERS... I OFTEN OVERSHARE AND SAY THINGS THAT PEOPLE AREN'T SUPPOSED TO SAY. MY CYNICISM MAKES ME ASSUME THAT NO ONE WOULD LOVE ME IF THEY REALLY KNEW ME SO I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ME. I WANT THEM TO SEE THE REAL CRAZY THAT IS ON THE INSIDE, SO I CAN ACTUALLY KNOW IF THEY LOVE ME FOR ME. SO I OFTEN SHARE MY WHOLE GUTS WITH PEOPLE. AND IT NEVER FAILS, AS SOON AS I DO, I FEEL LIKE I'VE MADE A MISTAKE. I FEEL NAKED AND EXPOSED AND I WANT SO BADLY TO TAKE IT ALL BACK. IT'S A NAUSEOUS FEELING LIKE I'M GOING TO LOSE MY LUNCH. I OFTEN WISH THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY TO BE SEEN. I WISH THERE WAS AN EASIER WAY FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW ME. I OFTEN PRAY FOR BETTER CONTROL OF MY MOUTH BUT SO FAR GOD HASN'T ANSWERED THAT PRAYER.

Nervous- fearing that a good thing won't happen

Language for feeling Nervous -

"I can't do this"

"I'm going to throw up"

"What was I thinking"

"I'm so scared something is going to go wrong"

When Chris first told me that I was the one that should speak on our emotions, I immediately balked. I didn't want to be that vulnerable. What if I offended someone? What if my words simply made things worse? All these fears and more swirled through my mind, but as I continued to pray, I realized I was really just extremely nervous about using my voice. Then I decided I would do it afraid. I would preach four sermons and then I could be done. But as I wrestled with how to invite all of us to continue to dive deeper into this invitation from God, Chris came up with the idea for this devotional and our monthly meetings. I agreed, but inside the nervousness intensified. All the, "what ifs," screamed for space in my brain. In fact, they are still screaming. Each week as I sit down to pray and write, I wonder if this really means anything. I recognize this nervousness in my body. Am I over sharing? Am I somehow making this about me rather than connecting others to Jesus.

Then this hits me. If no one else ever reads this, if no one else is changed by my simple words, I will be changed. I am being changed because I'm doing something I'm totally afraid of, and at each turn I'm meeting God in all his goodness and faithfulness. I pray that others will join me. I pray that I'm not alone. I pray that you will find God in your nervousness giving you courage to do the next thing He has for you, and that in that place you will encounter Him in a new and life-changing way.

NERVOUSNESS IS WEIRD FOR ME. IT'S LIKE HUNGER. IT'S THERE AT SOME LEVEL ALL THE TIME. IT COMES AND GOES REGULARLY. THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN I CAN BARELY FEEL IT AND SOME MOMENTS WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE IT COULD KILL ME. IT'S A FLUTTERY FEELING IN MY THROAT. I GET REALLY NERVOUS ANY TIME I SING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE. I DIDN'T USED TO BE ABLE TO DO IT. AS I WOULD TRY, MY THROAT WOULD TIGHTEN UP AND SINGING WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. TO GET OVER IT, I HAD TO ACT. WHEN I USED TO ACT IN CHILDREN'S CHURCH, I WOULD FULLY SUBMERGE MYSELF IN THE CHARACTER I WAS PLAYING. I LEARNED THAT IF I CREATED A "WORSHIP LEADER" CHARACTER IN MY BRAIN, I COULD ACT LIKE I WAS THAT PERSON AND NOT ME. THAT PERSON WOULD NEVER BE NERVOUS ABOUT SINGING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE (I KNOW I'M SHARING SOME OF MY CRAZY RIGHT NOW BUT PLEASE SEE MY COMMENTS ON VULNERABILITY AND OVER-SHARING ABOVE). SO FOR YEARS I DEALT WITH MY NERVOUSNESS BY PRETENDING TO BE SOMEONE I WASN'T. I'M LEARNING THAT GOD IS INVITING ME TO JUST BE NERVOUS... AS ME. HE'S INVITING ME TO QUIT PRETENDING TO NOT BE NERVOUS AND JUST SEEK HIM WHEN I'M NERVOUS AND DO IT NERVOUS.

Overwhelmed - being buried under the weight of too many things

Language for feeling Overwhelmed

"It's just too much"

"I'm just so tired"

"I can't breathe"

"I'm sinking"

Chris and several of the kids have ADD/ADHD. Unfortunately this means I often have to plan and organize really well. Unfortunately, this also means I often can't count on help until the last possible second. You see, one of the superpowers of Chris and our kids is that they are incredibly helpful at the very last second. They are great at problem solving and making things happen when it really counts. They can get things done in a quarter of the time it takes other people, but not until the pressure is really on. This often means that I plan and organize for a whole lot of people

who have no concept of time, only for them to ignore my plans until I lose my cool. I hate losing my cool. I hate feeling overwhelmed. I want all of them to magically change and pay attention to my lists and schedules, because if they would, we wouldn't wind up in this pressure cooker every single time... but they just don't. Often, when I feel overwhelmed, I'm tempted to give up hope that things can ever be different. I know this is where Satan wants me to live, feeling overwhelmed, lonely and unloved playing the victim to their clearly broken brains.

Before you start to feel sorry for me, God has recently begun to remind me (maybe even convict me) that this place too is a place where he wants me to come and meet with him. I'm starting to see that before anything changes outwardly, he wants to change my heart. What will it look like? I don't know, but I do know that I want Him to have my whole heart, even the overwhelmed victim heart that wants to sit and sulk. Where are you feeling overwhelmed and hopeless? That place is his invitation.

I'M REALLY AFRAID OF THIS EMOTION. IT DOESN'T HAPPEN OFTEN... IT DOESN'T HAPPEN AS OFTEN AS IT SHOULD. I ALMOST ALWAYS FEEL LIKE I CAN HANDLE MORE. I TEND TO SAY THAT I BELIEVE "GOD CAN DO ALL THINGS" BUT IT'S PROBABLY JUST THAT I THINK I CAN ALWAYS FIT MORE ON MY PLATE AND SINCE I HAVE VIRTUALLY NO CONCEPT OF TIME, THINGS WILL JUST KEEP GETTING BUMPED UNTIL THEY GET DONE. THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TIME (😬) BUT WHEN I DO FINALLY HIT THIS POINT OF FEELING COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED, IT'S NEVER A GOOD THING. I SHUT DOWN. I USUALLY GET VERY NEGATIVE ON MYSELF AND THE TEMPTATION TO GIVE UP IS HUGE. I GET BOMBARDED WITH THOUGHTS LIKE, "WHY DOES ANY OF THIS MATTER ANYWAYS. WHY AM I FIGHTING SO HARD WHEN NOTHING EVER GETS ANY BETTER." I CAN HEAR SATAN IN THE VOICE OF JOB'S WIFE FROM CHAPTER 2 OF THAT BOOK SAYING, "JUST CURSE GOD AND DIE!" IN MY BODY IT FEELS LIKE HAVING MY CHEST AND HEAD SQUEEZED AT THE SAME TIME. I DON'T LIKE IT.

A Prayer for feeling Vulnerable, Nervous, and Overwhelmed...

God, this week I pray as I navigate fear in all its forms that I would know your power. Whether I feel vulnerable, nervous or overwhelmed, I feel like I'm not enough. Like I can't affect my circumstances enough. Like I have no power. Show me your power. Show me that you are in control so I don't have to be. When your Spirit is in me, I am enough... Because you are enough. My vulnerability with you is my power. Your strength is made perfect in my nervousness. When I am overwhelmed, you are there and you are never overwhelmed.

Psalms 43:1 NLT

[1] Declare me innocent, O God! Defend me against these ungodly people. Rescue me from these unjust liars.

[2] For you are God, my only safe haven. Why have you tossed me aside? Why must I wander around in grief, oppressed by my enemies? [3] Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me. Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live. [4] There I will go to the altar of God, to God—the source of all my joy. I will praise you with my harp, O God, my God! [5] Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again— my Savior and my God!