



Learning to Feel

Each week for the next 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. Once a month, 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

Excited

Excited - a heightened state of enthusiasm and eagerness

Language for feeling surprised -

“I can't wait”

“I feared this would never happen”

“I've worked for this for so long”

“I'm so stoked!”

Sometimes I find myself afraid to get excited. It often feels like my body is speeding up, like I'm racing toward something I want. It's easy to get caught up in this feeling. I want to be present here and not race ahead making plans and dreams of my own and forget that His plan is always better than my own. I want to slow down and enjoy this excitement without rushing ahead of God.

I GET EXCITED PRETTY EASILY. ACTUALLY, I THINK AS I GET OLDER, I GET EXCITED A LITTLE LESS EASILY THAN I USED TO, WHICH MAYBE MAKES IT SWEETER. EXCITED FEELS YOUNG. IT FEELS IMMATURE. I LIKE THAT FEELING. I GET EXCITED WHEN WE GO ON VACATION. IT'S A FLUTTERY PRESSURE FEELING IN MY UPPER CHEST AS WE ARE PULLING OUT OF THE DRIVEWAY WITH THE VAN PACKED, A FULL CUP OF COFFEE, AND TONS OF DRIVING SNACKS AT HAND... I'M SO READY TO BE ON THE ROAD, ON VACATION! IT FEELS LIKE HAVING A LOUD SHOUT OF JOY TRAPPED IN MY CHEST. THIS IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE FEELINGS.

I also find that too often my excitement is a place where I begin to focus only on myself and what I want. I make plans and forget that there are others impacted by my actions and desires. In that moment, I so easily lose the desire to serve others and to wait for what it is that God might have for me in this moment, and instead only focus on my excitement. I let my feelings get hurt when others don't want the same thing as me or when their enthusiasm is less than my own. God, help me to embrace this feeling while still being mindful of those you have placed in my care. I want to love them and include them in my excitement and not run them over with it.

I'M AFRAID I DON'T GENERALLY WORRY ABOUT OTHERS WHEN I'M EXCITED. I LIKE THAT ESTHER DOES, BUT I'M USUALLY JUST READY FOR WHATEVER IT IS THAT I'M EXCITED ABOUT. I DO GET DISAPPOINTED WHEN OTHER PEOPLE AREN'T AS EXCITED AS I AM. BUT I DO HAVE A COUPLE COMPLICATIONS WHEN IT COMES TO EXCITEMENT. FIRST, EXCITEMENT CAN MAKE TIME SLOW DOWN. WHEN I'M EXCITED, I'M READY TO GO. I DON'T WANT TO DO THE HARD WORK OF GETTING PREPARED. I DON'T WANT TO PLAN WELL OR CONSIDER OBSTACLES. I JUST WANT TO MOVE! EXCITEMENT CAN MAKE ME GET IN A HURRY. THE SECOND COMPLICATION IS THAT EXCITEMENT CAN SET THE BAR A LITTLE HIGH. DOES ANYTHING EVER REALLY LIVE UP TO THE EXCITEMENT? AS CHILDREN, DID THE GIFTS EVER REALLY LIVE UP TO THE EXCITEMENT LEADING UP TO CHRISTMAS? IS VACATION EVER AS SWEET AS THAT MOMENT OF BEGINNING? AND FINALLY, EXCITEMENT FEELS RISKY. WHAT IF I GET EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING AND IT DOESN'T HAPPEN? SOMETIMES I FIGHT AGAINST EXCITEMENT BECAUSE I FEAR DISAPPOINTMENT. WHICH IS UP NEXT.

A Prayer for Feeling Excited-

God, I am so excited. I'm trying not to get my hopes up because I don't want to be disappointed but I can feel hope fluttering in my chest. Help me to trust in your will and to truly believe deep in my inner soul that what you have for me is the very best thing, even if it's not what I want right now. Help me trust you with child-like excitement and abandon.

Disappointment

Disappointed - displeased because someone or something has failed to fulfill your hopes and expectations

Language for feeling surprised -

“I really wanted this”

“I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up”

“Why do these kinds of things always happen to me?”

“ugh”

This is a feeling I hate to feel. I avoid it because in this feeling I also often feel forgotten and ignored. I try to push it away, try to work harder and do all the right things so that others and even God will notice how hard I am trying. It becomes exhausting and my body screams for rest and peace. I want to learn to acknowledge and move through this feeling, trusting that even when things don't go the way I had hoped, His hand is still moving and His love for me has not changed. I want to remember that just because people sometimes disappoint us, God never does.

I THINK I USUALLY BLAME MYSELF WHEN I GET DISAPPOINTED. I FEEL STUPID FOR GETTING MY HOPES UP. IN FACT, I TRY REALLY HARD NOT TO FEEL THIS FEELING AND I DON'T KNOW IF I ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE IT WHEN I DO. I THINK I TRY TO RATIONALIZE MYSELF OUT OF IT INSTEAD OF JUST ALLOWING MYSELF TO FEEL IT. WHEN I WAS MUCH YOUNGER, I WOULD DAYDREAM QUITE A

LOT. I WOULD IMAGINE SOME GREAT THING HAPPENING AND EVERYTHING TURNING OUT MY WAY. THEN I WOULD GET DISAPPOINTED WHEN THINGS WOULDN'T TURN OUT THE WAY I HAD HOPED. WHAT'S WORSE IS THAT THIS CAN AFFECT MY FAITH. SOMETIMES I BELIEVE GOD IS GOING TO DO SOMETHING MIRACULOUS. I BELIEVE WITH EVERYTHING IN ME THAT HE'S GOING TO HEAL MY DEAR FRIEND. MY FAITH IS BIG. THEN IT DOESN'T HAPPEN. THE DISAPPOINTMENT FEELS LIKE THERE IS NO GROUND UNDER MY FEET AND I'M BEING CRUSHED ALL AT THE SAME TIME. I THINK AS I HAVE GROWN OLDER, I HAVE ALLOWED MY DISTASTE FOR THIS EMOTION TO KEEP ME FROM IMAGINING GOOD OUTCOMES. I HAVE GROWN A LITTLE JADED. THE PROBLEM WITH AVOIDING EMOTIONS WE DON'T LIKE IS WE DON'T REALIZE THAT WE END UP BLOCKING EMOTIONS WE DESPERATELY WANT. BUT PROTECTING MYSELF FROM DISAPPOINTMENT, I FEEL LESS EXCITEMENT AND HOPE.

Years ago Chris and I wanted to open a coffee shop. We had done a ton of research about market trends, customer base and traffic flow, products, inventory, and types of necessary equipment and formed a business plan. We had secured a business loan and had found the perfect location. We were so excited. We knew we needed a change in our family and in Chris's job, and we felt like this was a great fit for us to be able to continue doing ministry and work as a family. We even prayed and told God that we knew this was something we wanted so badly that we might totally be missing his plan for us. We asked him to open the door wide open if it was his plan, but to close the door if this was not the path we were supposed to take. We fully recognized that we weren't going to hear a whisper. When things fell apart, Chris was somehow ok. It made me so frustrated. I was disappointed, really disappointed. I spent months trying to make things fit. I was so upset and felt like God was playing a cruel joke on me because I had done something wrong. Finally, Chris reminded me that maybe this was God answering our prayer and protecting us from something that was actually not good for us. I remember going for a drive by myself later that day and crying so hard. I had wanted this so badly, and when God said, "no," I was hurt. But, that day, as I drove around crying and frustrated that Chris was handling this so well, and

wrestling my feelings of disappointment, God's voice finally broke through. He had been trying to get my attention the whole time. His plan was to change Chris and I, not our circumstances, and today I get to live in the fruit of that season. Today, I see that my disappointment was actually the doorway to so much good in our lives, and for that I am grateful. Lord, help me to run to you even in the moments of disappointment where I can't seem to find your hand, trusting that you are still writing a story of your love and faithfulness.

WHEN THE COFFEE SHOP FELL THROUGH, I WAS DISAPPOINTED. I HAD GOTTEN MY HOPES UP. BUT I WAS ALSO RELIEVED. WHEN I REALIZED THAT THIS WAS A HUGE GAMBLE AND THAT WE BOTH REALLY, REALLY WANTED THIS... I GREW NERVOUS THAT WE WOULDN'T HEAR FROM GOD UNLESS GOD SHOUTED. SO WHEN I FINALLY PRAYED, "GOD, WE'RE TOO EMOTIONAL TO HEAR YOUR VOICE. WE ARE GOING TO GO FOR THIS. WE REALLY WANT IT. SO PLEASE, PLEASE SHUT THE DOOR IF THIS ISN'T FROM YOU. IT'S THE ONLY THING WE'LL HEAR. DESPITE OUR EMOTIONS, WE REALLY DO WANT YOUR WILL MORE THAN ANYTHING." ... WHEN I PRAYED THOSE WORDS, I MEANT THEM. THEY ALLOWED ME TO PURSUE WHAT I WANTED WITH ABANDON WITHOUT GETTING STUCK IN TRYING TO DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD FOR MY LIFE BUT WHEN THE STORE FELL THROUGH, I HAD TO TRUST THAT THAT WAS GOD'S PROTECTION. MY DISAPPOINTMENT WAS THERE BUT IT WAS TEMPERED BY RELIEF THAT GOD HEARD AND HONORED MY PRAYER. IN A WEIRD WAY, MY DISAPPOINTMENT DREW ME CLOSER TO GOD AND DEEPENED BY FAITH IN HIM. INCIDENTALLY, INSTEAD OF OPENING THE COFFEE SHOP, WE MOVED TO GARDNER AND TOOK ONE STEP CLOSER TO WHAT WOULD BECOME OPEN TABLE COMMUNITY CHURCH.

A Prayer for Feeling Disappointed-

God, I am so crushed. I feel like everything I had hoped for has fallen through. What's worse is that I really thought things were going to turn out differently. I feel like I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up. I'm so bummed. Help me to trust your plans for me. I know you are good and that if you have sent me down this path, it's better for me, but my emotions don't feel that truth. Right now, I'm hurting. I don't want to run from this feeling. I

need to feel it and to meet you here. Help me to recount your goodness even as I'm frustrated that things didn't turn out the way I had hoped.

Psalm 40:16-17

But all who are hunting for you—

oh, let them sing and be happy.

Let those who know what you're all about

tell the world you're great and not quitting.

And me? I'm a mess. I'm nothing and have nothing:

make something of me.

You can do it; you've got what it takes—

but God, don't put it off.