



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, 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

Scared- fear that comes when something bad has happened or is happening

Language for feeling Scared -

“I can't look”

“I can't breathe”

“scream”

“I don't think I can handle this”

As a little girl I remember being scared A LOT. I used to have nightmares of our house catching on fire and me being the only one to survive. I was scared to be left alone. If I'm honest, this still scares me. As I've unpacked this particular fear I've come to realize that what I am really scared of is the possibility of being emotionally left alone. All the way back to my dream as a little girl, I was scared of being shunned and left alone. There are times in my life where this fear has been very real, where I really have been relationally abandoned. And, there are other times where the threat or possibility of being left alone has enabled me to make some poor decisions or worse yet to allow myself to fall victim to Satan's lies that I am helpless to make a difference and therefore this scary feeling of being abandoned will always be my reality. I can feel this fear everywhere in my body, in the tightness of my muscles, in the way my brain bounces from one thought to another never really focusing fully on anything other than my fear of abandonment. I don't like feeling scared at all, and will often do just about anything to avoid feeling it.

FEELING SCARED HAPPENS IN MY SKIN. MY SKIN FEELS ELECTRIC AND PRICKLY. I USED TO WATCH SCARY MOVIES WHEN I WAS GROWING UP. I WATCHED THEM BECAUSE MY FRIENDS DID. I DON'T THINK I EVER ENJOYED THEM. I HAD TO COME TO A REAL,

MATURE, GROWN-UP DECISION TO STOP WATCHING SPOOKY MOVIES. IT WENT SOMETHING LIKE, "I AM A GROWN MAN! I DO NOT HAVE TO WATCH SCARY MOVIES IF I DON'T WANT TO." IT ACTUALLY SOUNDED IMMATURE AND PETULANT, BUT IT WAS ROOTED IN THE FACT THAT I DON'T LIKE FEELING SCARED AND I WON'T VOLUNTARILY DO IT. SCARED FEELS FROZEN TO ME... IT'S THAT MOMENT RIGHT BEFORE A JUMP SCARE IN A MOVIE. IT'S THE "BOO!" MOMENT. I THINK I HATE IT SO MUCH BECAUSE IT FEELS OUT OF CONTROL. THERE'S NO TIME TO THINK OR REASON. WHATEVER IS INSIDE JUST COMES OUT.

This past year, I've felt scared a lot, but in the midst of this feeling I have also found myself reaching out to God and asking him to bring peace where there is so much fear of the unknown, where there is so much possibility of abandonment. I don't have to live in this feeling. I can feel it, acknowledge it, move through it, and make changes. I can instead meet Him there in this feeling, whether it is real or imagined, and there I can find him seeking to bring peace and connection with Him. He can help me to recognize that this feeling is his gift to me that there is something wrong and that I need to pay attention, invite Him in and ask Him to bring growth and change in this area where I feel scared. God, help me to listen to this gift and allow it to bring me closer to you.

Desperate - feeling that nothing you can do is enough

Language for feeling Desperate -

"what's the use?"

"I'm just really tired"

"I don't think I can do this anymore"

"I would do anything to not feel this way"

I don't know that I feel desperate very often, but when I do it seems all consuming. My body seems to revolt against rest and peace in an effort to make things ok. I will work myself too hard trying to get someone to notice my efforts, usually with no results. Sometimes I will even yell and scream just to get the attention I want, but none of that really is what I need in those moments.

I've begun to discover that what I really need in those moments is to truly be seen and known. In these places where desperation sneaks in, I need God to show up, to remind me of my value and

worth, and to reassure me that this desperation I am feeling is an invitation from Him to come and meet with Him. He has truly loved me from the moment He created me in my mother's womb, and my value and worth will always be found at His feet, not in my frenzied efforts to be noticed. He longs for me to come to Him for rest and peace and to not seek to find it through hard work for Him or others. God, help me to come to you in the places where desperation seeks to run away with my thoughts and feelings. Help me to find myself sitting at your feet, like Mary, soaking in your presence, where I am freed to feel knowing that you won't leave me stuck there, but will instead give me grace to rise up and be all that you have called me to be.

WHEN I'M DESPERATE, IT FEELS LIKE BEING TRAPPED. IT FEELS CLAUSTROPHOBIC. IT USUALLY HAPPENS WHEN I GET CORNERED AND SOMEONE WANTS TO KNOW HOW I'M GOING TO FIX SOMETHING OR MAKE EVERYTHING WORK OUT AND I HONESTLY HAVE NO IDEA... I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE HOW EVERYTHING MIGHT WORK OUT OK. IN THOSE MOMENTS, WHEN HOPE IS HARD TO FIND, DESPERATION CREEPS IN. THOUGH I DESPISE THIS FEELING, I'VE HAD SOME OF MY MOST MEMORABLE AND HONEST PRAYERS FROM THIS PLACE. THESE ARE THE PRAYERS THAT TRULY ANCHOR MY FAITH WHICH MEANS I ACTIVELY SEEK TO AVOID A STATE OF MIND AND EMOTION THAT GENERALLY DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD. SPOOKY REALITY.

Worry - concerned over a specific area of your life (money, health, work, relationships, time)

Language for feeling Worry -

“I just can't stop thinking about it”

“I can't get my mind to shut down”

“I wish there was something I could do”

“So many things could go wrong”

This one is an easy one for me. It's not that I don't feel worry. It's that from the moment I answered the phone April 16th, 2004 and heard the words, “They're dead. They're all dead,” I've known beyond a shadow of a doubt that sometimes the things we worry about actually happen. People we love die, relationships end, jobs disappear, our bodies age and begin to fail. We can not only survive these scenarios and so many more, and we can walk out the other side. We will bear scars and marks, and we will mess up and not do everything perfectly, but when the worst happens we can choose to allow God to make beauty where we see only death, destruction and ashes.

I WORRY ALL THE TIME. I TEND TO THINK THIS EMOTION AIDS ME WELL. I GENERALLY RUN TO GOD WHEN I'M WORRIED. IT DOESN'T FEEL AS DEEP AND PAINFUL AS OTHER FORMS OF FEAR. WORRY FEELS LIKE THE EMOTION OF CONCERN. I CONSIDER IT AN HONOR TO WORRY ABOUT MY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CHURCH. IT'S NOT NECESSARILY COMFORTABLE TO HAVE THAT GNAWING FEELING IN MY GUT, BUT I THINK IT'S HEALTHY.

I often lean into this feeling and ask God, "How do I walk through this well? How do I not follow in the footsteps of the Israelites in the wilderness? How do I learn what you are teaching me here?" I know that worry is God's invitation to me to come and meet with him, and I don't want to miss out on what you have for me here. God, help me to follow in the path Jesus set for me of doing things even when they cause me fear and worry knowing that you will meet me and create beauty.

Guilty - fearing that punishment awaits you for a crime or wrongdoing you have committed

Language for feeling guilty -

"I ruined everything"

"I can't believe I messed up again"

"I'm such a failure"

"I deserve all the bad things that happen to me"

Sometimes I think I might wear this one like a coat. Am I doing enough for my kids? Do they know how loved they are? Am I being a good enough wife? How do I learn to be a better friend? Where am I supposed to be giving more of my time? Is there a way I can save more money so that we can give more?You get the picture. I feel guilt very easily. Chris tells me I have an internal pressure at all times telling me I could be doing better/more. Apparently not everyone has this same pressure, but this is how I feel guilt. Always present, always driving me to do more, be more, do better.

GUILTY IS MY DEFAULT MODE. I MESS UP A LOT. I'M ALMOST NEVER EVERYTHING I SHOULD BE, AND THIS IS NOT NEW FOR ME. I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE TYPE WHO HAS TO APOLOGIZE OFTEN. IN FACT, I FAIL ENOUGH THAT PEOPLE RARELY TAKE MY GUILT SERIOUSLY. I AM ALMOST ALWAYS LATE. PEOPLE TEND TO THINK, IF I TRULY FELT GUILTY, I WOULD STOP BEING LATE. I AGREE,

BUT I'M STILL ALWAYS LATE. I KNOW IT BOTHERS PEOPLE AND THIS MAKES ME FEEL GUILTY. AND THAT'S JUST ONE OF MY CONSTANT FAILURES. THERE ARE HUNDREDS. MY GUILTY FEELINGS ARE ONE OF THE REASONS I CLING TO JESUS. HIS PRESENCE IS THE ONLY PLACE I DON'T FEEL WEIGHED DOWN BY GUILT. I REALLY DO FEEL AT PEACE WITH GOD. THE GUILT THAT COMES FROM CONSTANTLY DISAPPOINTING PEOPLE, I'LL JUST HAVE TO USE TO KEEP TRYING TO GET BETTER.

All the guilt and the pressure it brings makes me far too self focused, but what I'm starting to learn is that the guilt I feel isn't supposed to be a pressure to do more and be more. It's supposed to be a place where I take my heart and lay it before God asking him to perform surgery on it. I need him to refocus my attention on Him rather than where I feel my inadequacies lie. As I meet Him in this feeling of guilt I find that He has the power to change not just my focus but ultimately to change my heart. I don't always have to do or be more. I can find in this place where I feel like my best is doing nothing more than making things worse that His strength is made perfect in my weakness. He can meet the needs of my husband, children, and friends better than I can, and he can use me more effectively when I meet with him in this feeling than if I spend all my time trying to do more and be more in my own strength. God, help me to remember to come and meet with you first in this place, asking you to make your strength perfect in my weaknesses.

Luke 12:22-32

22 Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. **23** For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. **24** Look at the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! **25** Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? **26** And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?

27 "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they

are. **28** And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

29 “And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. **30** These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. **31** Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.

32 “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.