



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

Surprise

Surprised - reaction to an unexpected or astonishing event, fact, or thing.

Language for feeling surprised -

“It's fine, I was caught off guard”

“Not a big deal, I just wasn't prepared for that”

“Wow, did not see that coming”

“I just need minute to catch my breath”

I don't really like surprises. I mean, in theory, they're great and all that, and I do love to surprise Chris or my kids, but please don't surprise me. It makes me feel out of control and unable to think. I don't like the way surprise feels in my body. It can make me feel panicky and cause my heart to speed up, which always makes my mind go completely blank as I try to figure out what is the proper way to respond.

SOME CRAZY BRAIN STUFF HAPPENS WHEN WE GET SURPRISED. THE AMYGDALA, WHICH CAN PROCESS THINGS INFINITELY FASTER THAN OUR MUCH SLOWER CEREBRAL CORTEX (WHERE ALL OF OUR CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS COME FROM) LITERALLY TAKES OVER THE BODY. IN AN INSTANT, THE TINY LITTLE MIDDLE SECTION OF THE BRAIN RECEIVES STIMULI THAT IT INTERPRETS AS A POTENTIAL THREAT AND IT SENDS ALL THE NECESSARY HORMONES THROUGH THE BODY SO YOU CAN DEFEND YOURSELF OR RUN FOR YOUR LIFE. I THINK THIS IS WHERE THE "OUT OF CONTROL" FEELING COMES FROM. IT'S NOT SO MUCH THAT WE AREN'T IN CONTROL OF OUR SURROUNDINGS, IT'S THAT WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL OF OURSELVES. WE REALIZE, ALL OF THE SUDDEN, THAT THIS BODY WE RIDE AROUND IN HAS AN AUTOPILOT THAT CAN TAKE OVER WITHOUT OUR CONSENT AND THIS IS SCARY. WE DON'T LIKE KNOWING THAT WE AREN'T NECESSARILY STEERING THE SHIP.

If I dig deeper and ask God to come and meet me in this feeling of surprise, I can remember times in my life where I tried to surprise someone and instead hurt their feelings or made them angry. It was confusing and embarrassing. I also remember not responding to other peoples' attempts to have fun by surprising me and seeing the hurt in their faces. But as I sit in those uncomfortable memories, I realize that God is not surprised in any of those moments, nor is he angry when I don't respond in the "right" way. Instead, he meets me there and invites me to allow him to soothe the places where my desire for control creates discomfort. As he comforts me, I realize that He can better use me to speak life and love to those around me.

ABOUT 90 SECONDS... IT TAKES ABOUT 90 SECONDS FOR THE HORMONES EXCRETED WHEN WE ARE SURPRISED TO GET PROCESSED OUT OF THE BODY. IF OUR LIVER ISN'T FUNCTIONING AT 100%, IT CAN TAKE LONGER. USUALLY THAT'S LONG ENOUGH FOR OUR CONSCIOUS MIND TO REALIZE THAT WE ARE NOT IN ANY DANGER AND OUR HEART RATE CAN BEGIN TO SLOW BACK DOWN... OFTENTIMES, WHILE I'M ALLOWING THESE HORMONES TO LEAVE MY BLOODSTREAM, I WILL THINK ABOUT HOW INCREDIBLE OUR BODIES ARE. I'M A FAIRLY SLOW DECISION MAKER. I LIKE TO WEIGH THE OPTIONS AND PRAY THROUGH MY DECISIONS. I EVEN SUFFER FROM ANALYSIS PARALYSIS AT TIMES. I'M REALLY GLAD THAT MY BODY HAS AN AUTOPILOT JUST IN CASE I NEED IT. . I'M

GLAD FOR EVERYTHING THAT FIRES WHEN I'M SURPRISED. I DON'T LIKE THE WAY IT FEELS, BUT I'M GLAD IT'S THERE. I THINK THIS IS A PRETTY GOOD WAY TO APPROACH MANY OF OUR MORE UNCOMFORTABLE EMOTIONS.

A Prayer for Feeling Surprised-

God, I was caught off guard. It's so easy for me to feel like I'm in control of my life. I even tend to want to feel like I have some control over the world around me... even the people around me. When I get surprised, it reminds me that there is a great deal that I don't have control of and that makes me feel untethered... It makes me feel insecure.

I meet you in these feelings. I ask you to help me remember that the only thing truly secure is You. Help me to control what I can control and trust you with the rest. Let these short moments of surprise, that can often cause anxiety, instead bring me back to you.

Amazed

Amazed - full of great wonder mixed with slight fear and awe.

Language for feeling amazed -

“Woah”

“I feel like I need to catch my breath”

(speechless)

Another way we experience surprise is through amazement. This one feels easy for me. Any time I walk in nature, sit under the stars, walk through the mountains, or sit on the beach looking out at

the ocean, I find myself amazed. The enormity of nature always draws me to this feeling of amazement.

I LOVE THIS FEELING. I LOVE WHEN SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL MAKES ME CATCH MY BREATH. MY MIND IS VERY ACTIVE, OFTENTIMES PAINFULLY SO. I LOVE WHEN SOMETHING SO BIG AND ALL ENCOMPASSING GRABS 100% OF MY ATTENTION AND SILENCES THE CHAOS AS ALL THE VOICES IN MY HEAD STOP TO WONDER. GOD SEEMS VERY ACCESSIBLE IN THESE MOMENTS AND I'M ALMOST EMBARRASSED THAT I HAD BEEN MISSING HIM. "THE LORD WAS HERE AND I DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE." THE ONLY TRICKY THING ABOUT THIS FEELING IS THAT YOU CAN'T FAKE IT. IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE YOU CAN'T EVEN LOOK FOR IT. IT HAS TO SNEAK UP ON YOU. GOD SEND MORE AMAZEMENT.

I can remember being a little girl, riding in the back seat of my parent's Plymouth Valiant, coming home from church one Sunday evening. As we drove past a drive-in movie theater I can remember how bright it all seemed compared to the night sky, and as we moved further away from the bright lights of the movie screen, I could suddenly see the stars winking down at me. At that moment I suddenly felt very small, but somehow very loved. How could the God who created the stars and the vast universe know and love me, and yet somehow in my mind I knew that He did. To this day I still feel those same feelings every time I allow myself to slow down and meet with him in His creation. I pray that this week each of you can slow down and experience His love through the very real feelings of surprise and amazement and that there you can find him writing a story with your life that speaks of his love and faithfulness.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME THAT I WENT TO THE MOUNTAINS. I HAD BEEN TOLD THAT IT WAS QUITE THE EXPERIENCE AND I WAS READY. I HAD LOOKED AT LOTS OF PICTURES SO I WOULDN'T BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD. WHEN WE HIT THE POINT IN DENVER WHERE YOU CAN REALLY SEE THE MOUNTAINS, IT FELT LIKE THE AIR WAS SUCKED OUT OF THE VEHICLE. I WAS LITERALLY SURPRISED OUT OF

MY BREATH. MY CHEST FELT FLUTTERY... I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO THINK ABOUT THAT KIND OF SIZE AND WILDNESS... ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS THE AUDACITY OF HUMANS TO THINK THAT WE COULD MAKE A HOME THERE. I STILL HAVE THOSE FEELINGS WHEN I VISIT THE MOUNTAINS.

A Prayer for Feeling Amazed-

God, I am so sorry for forgetting your grandeur... Please open the door for me to experience amazing things. Never let me lose my wonder. In a world where the miraculous almost seems ordinary, let me regularly marvel at your greatness and the way your splendor is on display in the world around me. Open my eyes to your greatness and let that awareness steal my breath.

Psalm 8

LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory
in the heavens.

Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:

all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,

the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!