



## 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

Insecure - not being confident or assured, uncertain

Language for feeling insecure -

“Don't look at me”

“Is it ok? Did I do ok?”

“You hate it (me) don't you?”

“I'm sorry (I'm not enough)”

*Have I done enough? Am I good enough? Am I even loved? I have asked these questions deep in my soul on far more occasions than I am comfortable admitting. This feeling is present when I work, inspecting my effort and finding it lacking. It is present when I witness the inconsistencies in myself played out in the lives of my children. And insecurity always ends in the glaring question of, “Am I even loved?” I know that God's love for me is steadfast and unchanging. I am confident in His love, and yet I still doubt the love of others. I want to know they love and approve of me. Wanting to be loved feels so vulnerable. Can't His love for me be enough? Why do I even need others? And then I realize He created me to be a part of something more. He created me to live in community with others, not to find my value and worth there like my wandering heart so often wants, but to see Him at work both in my life and in theirs. When I am insecure, when my palms sweat and are cold all at the same time, when my stomach feels full of butterflies and nervousness, He is there with me, encouraging me to walk through my insecurity and find not only Him but His people through my willingness to be vulnerable, insecure and brave. God, Help me to find my worth in you, while still allowing myself to feel the insecurity that comes with being human.*

I'M ALMOST ALWAYS INSECURE. EVERY NEW LITTLE FLAVOR OF THE CORE EMOTION "FEAR" SEEMS TO HIT ME IN THE GUT BECAUSE I REALIZE HOW MUCH I EXPERIENCE FEAR. INSECURITY IS ESPECIALLY FRUSTRATING BECAUSE IT ALWAYS INVOLVES OTHER PEOPLE. I DON'T MIND BEING AFRAID OF BEARS OR HEIGHTS OR THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT. THOSE FEARS INVOLVE SURVIVAL AND MY LIMBIC CORTEX IS ONLY TRYING TO KEEP ME ALIVE AND SAFE. INSECURITY IS BEING AFRAID OF THINGS I DON'T WANT TO BE AFRAID OF. IT'S BEING AFRAID YOU WON'T LIKE ME. IT'S BEING AFRAID I WILL MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF. IT'S BEING AFRAID THAT I WILL ONCE AGAIN DISAPPOINT. FOR ME INSECURITY FEELS LIKE A TIGHTNESS VERY HIGH IN MY CHEST, NOT WHERE IT AFFECTS MY BREATHING, BUT WHERE IT PULLS ON MY NECK MUSCLES. THE WORST PART OF THIS EMOTION IS THAT IT TRIES TO KEEP ME FROM THINGS THAT I REALLY WANT, AND EVEN NEED. INSECURITY TRIES TO KEEP ME FROM CONNECTING WITH OTHERS. THIS FORM OF FEAR TELLS ME THAT IT'S SAFER TO STAY ALONE. WHEN I FEEL THIS EMOTION I KNOW THAT GOD IS REMINDING ME THAT THIS SELF-PROTECTIVE RESPONSE IS PRIDE... THE BAD KIND. FOR ME TO AVOID HUMAN CONNECTION BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO BE EMBARRASSED, IS TO THINK FAR TOO MUCH OF MYSELF.

**Anxious - the general feeling of avoiding other important emotions**

**Language for feeling Anxious -**

"I'm so nervous"

"I can't seem to relax"

"I'm so tense"

"What if..."

*I feel this in the tightness of my muscles, in the pit that forms in my stomach usually because I know there is something uncomfortable to be said or done. There is a conflict that needs to be met or a problem that needs to be addressed. I need to open my mouth and say something. I don't want to do that. I want to keep quiet. I want someone else to have to say the hard thing. I even often pray that God will speak through someone or something else. I want this feeling to go away and yet it sits in my body, heavy enough to make me physically sore and achy. As I begin to acknowledge this feeling I realize I want to obey God. Still, my desire to obey wars against my desire for comfort and peace at all costs. God, come and meet me in this place. Come and find me here crying out for you to make me brave enough to walk through this feeling and not push it aside or under the surface. Help me to learn to use this feeling not only as an invitation to come and meet with you, but also as a signal to me that you are at work in an area I would rather avoid.*

FOR ME ANXIETY IS LIKE A GNAT. I KNOW IT'S THERE AND IT'S DEFINITELY BUGGING ME, BUT WHEN I ACTUALLY TRY TO LOOK AT IT OR SWAT IT AWAY, I CAN'T FIND IT. I'M A PROBLEM SOLVER AND WHEN I CAN IDENTIFY THE SITUATION AND THE POSSIBLE ROADS FORWARD, I'M PRETTY GOOD AT ANALYSIS AND DECISION-MAKING. BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THINGS ARE "OFF" ... TIMES WHEN SOMETHING IS OUT OF PLACE AND I EITHER DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT IT IS, OR I DO KNOW AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. IN THOSE MOMENTS I'M PRETTY GOOD AT PLUGGING ALONG OR EVEN FINDING DISTRACTIONS, BUT ANXIETY IS LURKING IN THE BACKGROUND. IT FEELS LIKE A FOCUS PROBLEM. LIKE TRYING TO HOLD WATER IN MY HANDS. IT FEELS LIKE EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING WANTS TO BE DOING SOMETHING BUT THERE'S NOTHING TO DO SO I JUST VIBRATE.

Stressed - having too much to do

Language for feeling stressed -

"I'm overwhelmed"

"I can't slow down or everything will fall apart"

"I have to do everything"

"We are so far behind"

"I'm just tired"

*In my life busyness and time pressure are hallmarks. At times I express to Chris that I feel like I have to be the brain for too many people and it is too big a job for me. I feel overwhelmed and yet when I look at everything on my plate I find nothing I can remove. The thought of not doing it all, and letting people down, feels even more stressful than just muscling through somehow. I am stressed, and I know this is never good. I feel like a caged animal. Chris can tell from my body language and the way in which I am unable to meet his gaze. When he tries to help, I often snap at him, telling him there is nothing he can do. This feeling is scary for me. I feel weak and amped up at the same time. I don't have what I need to navigate this in a healthy way. Why do I allow myself to feel this? Recently though, I've been reminding myself that I didn't choose to feel this way. It simply happened and now I am left with the choice of what to do with this feeling. I've been reminding myself that even in this place where I feel stressed and out of control, God is there inviting me to come and meet with him. Though at times it feels counterproductive to stop and allow myself to feel this feeling, I'm trying to do just that. I'm trying to stop and meet God right there, and in that place to invite him to show off his strength in this place where I don't have the*

*ability to navigate life in a way that honors him. More than anything that is my desire, to honor and bring glory to the God who loves me and knows me even in the places where I am weak.*

I HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WITH THIS FEELING, IT'S SNEAKY. GENERALLY, I LIKE STRESS. I LIKE BITING OFF MORE THAN I CAN CHEW. I LIKE TAKING RISKS. I TEND TO FEAR FEAR SO I COPE BY DIVING IN AND FACING IT HEAD ON WHICH MEANS I'M OFTEN IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS. IF I'M NOT CAREFUL, I START TO THINK I'M AT MY BEST WHEN I'M BEING SQUEEZED A LITTLE. BUT THAT'S PHYSICAL STRESS... ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS... OCCUPATIONAL STRESS... I THINK I LIKE STRESS UNTIL I FEEL RELATIONAL STRESS. I HATE EMOTIONAL, RELATIONAL STRESS. WHEN THERE'S STRESS IN ESTHER AND MY RELATIONSHIP, I HAVE A HARD TIME CONCENTRATING ON ANYTHING ELSE. IT'S ALL CONSUMING. IT'S LIKE BEING TRAPPED UNDER WATER KNOWING I NEED TO BREATHE BUT ALSO KNOWING THERE'S NO AIR. PANIC. I'VE STARTED LEARNING OVER THE PAST COUPLE YEARS THAT GIVING INTO THE PANIC ONLY MAKES IT WORSE. JUST LIKE THRASHING ABOUT IF YOU WERE STUCK UNDER WATER WOULD JUST USE UP YOUR OXYGEN FASTER, IF I STOP, FOCUS MY ATTENTION ON GOD, AND BREATHE... I CAN ENDURE EMOTIONAL STRESS MUCH BETTER AND THE PRESSURE ON MY CHEST IS LIGHTER. THESE FEELINGS ARE AN INVITATION TO SEEK GOD AND FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

### **A Prayer for feeling Insecure, Anxious, and Stressed...**

God, this week I pray as I navigate fear in all its forms that you would make your voice loud enough to remind me that this fear is simply your invitation to come and meet with you. My fear of all the "what ifs" is your way of reminding me that you are strong and steady where I am insecure and anxious and stressed. You are not helpless even when I feel I am. You are the strong tower that I can run to in each moment of my day. Meet me here in my body, your temple and lead me closer to your heart.

### **Psalm 46**

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.