



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 January 26@ 6:30, 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

Anger

Angry- a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility

Language for feeling angry -

“I'm about to lose it”

“I'm about to blow my top”

“*Gritting teeth - Heavy breathing - growl*”

“Don't mess with me right now”

I have a bit of a weird relationship with this emotion. I learned early on that emotions were a bad thing. You were supposed to control them, not feel them. If you felt any emotion at all you were supposed to take it captive, and declare the truth of the Bible over it. I learned the verse, “Be angry and don't sin,” as though it meant you weren't supposed to get angry, ever. Except I did get angry sometimes, quite a lot, if I'm honest. But I was also a good Christian girl, so what was I to do with my anger? I became an expert at burying it, suppressing it, pretending it didn't exist until it would inevitably explode on someone I loved. I carry anger in my body like a spring that refuses to unwind or relax. I lived this way for far too many years until one day, as Chris and I were trying to learn to talk about emotions, He confronted me and said, “You know it's ok for you to be angry with me, right?” I tried to deflect and convince him (and myself) that I really wasn't angry, but I knew that underneath it all I was. I wanted things to change. I wanted him to change. But, I knew this would mean I would have to change. I would have to start to feel things rather than stuffing them inside me, and that was scary. To feel anger went against everything I thought I knew about God and myself.

FOR ME, ANGER IS SIMILAR. I'VE NEVER BEEN AFRAID TO FEEL IT, BUT I KEEP A VERY CLOSE REIGN ON IT. WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER I GOT ANGRY AND PUNCHED ANOTHER GUY. I HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THAT HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF A FEMALE FRIEND AND I FLEW INTO A RAGE. I BASICALLY SUCKER PUNCHED HIM. I LATER LEARNED THAT I DIDN'T HAVE THE FULL STORY AND I REALIZED HOW BLINDED I HAD BEEN BY THIS EMOTION. I HAVE FEARED GIVING ANGER ANY CONTROL SINCE. ANGER FEELS TO ME

LIKE A FIRE IN MY CHEST. MY BREATHING GETS SHORT AND WHEN I GIVE IT VOICE, IT TENDS TO GROW AND THERE'S A POINT WHEN IT FEELS LIKE IT'S GETTING TOO BIG AND I'M NO LONGER IN CONTROL. BUT LIKE A FIRE, WHEN I STOP FEEDING IT, IT PRETTY QUICKLY DIES.

As I began to pray and ask God how to feel angry in ways that weren't destructive or harmful, I found him asking me to be honest with myself and with Him. I found him asking me to sit with him in the pain I felt at being angry, to allow myself to feel my anger without lying to myself or trying to push the pain away. I've begun the process of asking God to meet me in my anger, to use it as a place where I can come and meet with Him, to use it as a place where I begin to know him in new ways that can bring life and health rather than the destruction and loneliness I fear. I've begun to find that God can use my anger to help me find his wisdom and direction in places where I feel stuck, and I pray that I will see him using this emotion I'm so afraid of to connect me more to him and to his body.

ANGER IS ONE OF THE EMOTIONS I HAVE TO LISTEN TO. YEARS AGO, I WAS ANGRY WITH ONE OF MY SONS. RATHER THAN PROCESSING MY ANGER, I STUFFED IT. TO KEEP THE PEACE, I IGNORED MY EMOTIONS. AT A PARTY, THIS SON MADE A SILLY, MEANINGLESS COMMENT AND I SNAPPED. I MADE A FOOL OF MYSELF AND SCARED PEOPLE I LOVE. IT WAS AWFUL. I LEARNED THAT I CAN NOT AFFORD TO IGNORE THIS EMOTION. WHEN I FEEL IT, I HAVE TO TAKE IT TO GOD AND DEAL WITH IT. BECAUSE OF THIS, MY PRAYER LIFE (ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M ANGRY) HAS GROWN CONSIDERABLY MORE REAL AND RAW. THIS EMOTION IS TOO BIG FOR ME TO HANDLE ALONE.

Agitated - feeling repeatedly bothered

Language for feeling agitated -

“you are getting on my last nerve”

“I'm about to snap”

“Gritting teeth”

“I have had enough”

I like to think of this state as the state of being overstimulated. Usually when I feel agitated it feels as though the world and everyone in it is moving at a pace far faster than I can take in or comprehend. I feel as though I cannot think fast enough or like every noise and movement brings

with it a threat I will need to respond to. I wish I didn't feel this so often. I wish I was better at slowing things down so that I can breathe and respond thoughtfully and carefully, but too often I find myself snapping at the ones I love most simply because I am feeling agitated. This place, this feeling isn't an attack on my senses. It is an invitation to slow down, a reminder that God did not create me to be a human "doing" but rather as a human "being," created in His image and likeness. It is ok for me to recognize my weakness and need for rest and connection with God and His people. This agitation is His reminder to me that my soul needs care that only relationship and connection can provide. God, help me to remind my easily overwhelmed heart that you are always inviting me to come and meet with you, to reach out to my people and there find your strength sufficient in my weakness.

AGITATION IS USUALLY A SIGN THAT MY PRIORITIES ARE OFF. WHEN I AM LIVING IN MY HEAD, IN THE WORLD OF IDEAS AND CONCEPTS, THEOLOGIES AND IDEOLOGIES, I AM EASILY AGITATED WITH THE REAL WORLD. WHEN I'M TOO CONSUMED WITH MY OWN PROBLEMS AND DESIRES, THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE I TRULY CARE ABOUT, WIND UP ANNOYING ME. WHEN MY KIDS ASKING FOR HELP OR SOMEONE TEXTING ME FOR ADVICE LEAVES ME FEELING AGITATED, I KNOW THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY HEART. THIS FEELING HAS BECOME AN INVITATION TO REEVALUATE WHAT I'M DOING AND REORGANIZE MY PRIORITIES. WHEN I'M AGITATED I FEEL LIKE A BOTTLE OF SODA THAT HAS BEEN SHAKEN. I'M CONSTANTLY TRYING TO SLOWLY TWIST THE TOP TO LET OFF PRESSURE WITHOUT SPEWING MEANINGLESS FROTH ALL OVER INNOCENT BYSTANDERS WHO JUST WANT TO ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION.

Frustrated - anger when obstacles interfere with what you need or want

Language for feeling frustrated -

“why doesn't anything ever go my way?”

“I just can't right now”

“groan/'ugh'/scream”

“I give up”

Who hasn't felt frustrated? Who hasn't recognized that their needs and wants are not being met or are being ignored? This feeling for me often follows asking our kids to do something repeatedly with zero results. I often feel it in my throat as I struggle with whether to yell and scream to hopefully get some desired action or to close my mouth in order to keep a false “peace.”

As I feel this though, I am beginning to learn that this frustrated feeling is a reminder to me that I do have needs and wants.

God, you have called us all to be more than robots simply existing and pretending to have no needs. You have called us to be connected to you and to others, and this feeling is a reminder that things are not as they should be. They are a reminder that there are more places for you to work and heal, more ways to come and meet with you in the places where we are weak, vulnerable and too easily overwhelmed. Help us to come and find you when we feel overwhelmed and frustrated.

WHEN I FEEL FRUSTRATED, IT'S USUALLY AT MYSELF. WHEN YOU HAVE ADHD, YOU LEARN PRETTY QUICKLY THAT YOU ARE THE CAUSE OF A LOT OF PEOPLE'S FRUSTRATION. IF YOU DON'T LIKE HURTING PEOPLE, THIS CAN CAUSE MAJOR STRUGGLES WITH SELF. YOU QUICKLY LEARN THAT MANY OF THE "BASIC" RULES OF LIFE ARE VERY HARD FOR YOU. THINGS THAT ARE NOT ONLY EXPECTED BUT QUITE EASY FOR OTHER PEOPLE ARE INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT FOR YOU. THE WORST PART IS, I KNOW THESE THINGS SHOULD BE EASY. I KNOW I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO BETTER. I KNOW ADHD IS NOT AN EXCUSE AND I HAVE TO FUNCTION IN THE WORLD AND NOT LET PEOPLE DOWN NO MATTER HOW MY BRAIN WORKS OR DOESN'T WORK. SO WHEN I STRUGGLE TO DO THINGS THAT SHOULD BE EASY, I GET REALLY FRUSTRATED WITH MYSELF. I AM A CRAZY CAPABLE PERSON IN SO MANY AREAS, IT FEELS RIDICULOUS THAT I STRUGGLE IN SO MANY RUDIMENTARY TASKS. I'M JUST STARTING DOWN THE ROAD OF TURNING TO GOD WITH THIS EMOTION. GENERALLY, THIS IS THE FEELING THAT CAUSES ME TO HIDE FROM GOD. I DON'T LIKE THIS FEELING. THIS ONE MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A LITTLE KID WHO WANTS TO THROW A TEMPER TANTRUM.

Resentful - feeling ill-will from being mistreated

Language for feeling resentful -

"I forgive them, I just don't want to see them?"

"I had to cut them off"

"*silent treatment*"

"I learned my lesson. I won't trust them again."

I don't like to admit I feel this. It seems petty and self-centered. I feel like I am being mistreated, and I am unwilling to look at things from the point of view of the other. I allow myself to fall victim to the lies of Satan that I am somehow unable to affect change because the other person clearly doesn't care that they are hurting me. This feeling is so easy to become trapped within.

Jesus though reminded us to bless those who hurt us. He told us we were blessed when others mistreat or abuse us. I don't have to be a victim to the schemes of Satan or others. I can choose to look for ways that I can be a blessing to my enemy, whoever it may be. This place is meant for me to come and meet with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to change and grow me. We can learn to be honest with God about our hurts and resentments, and allow him to move us through them in ways that draw us closer to him and to those who hurt us. Isn't that what He has done for us?

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO WITH THIS FEELING. I'M AFRAID OF IT. JESUS MAKES IT SO CLEAR IN BOTH HIS PARABLES AND HIS TEACHINGS THAT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED GRACE, THIS EMOTION IS OF LIMITS. AND YET THE PSALMS ARE SO FULL OF SONGWRITERS POURING OUT THEIR RESENTMENT TO GOD. SOMETIMES THEY EVEN POUR OUT THEIR RESENTMENT AT GOD OUT TO GOD. I HAVE TO ASSUME THE RESENTMENT THAT JESUS TALKS OF IS DIFFERENT THAN THE EMOTION OF RESENTMENT. EMOTIONS AREN'T IN OUR CONTROL. THEY ARE SIMPLY WHAT WE FEEL. SO I HAVE TO ASSUME THE PROCESS THE PSALMISTS GO THROUGH TO TAKE THIS FEELING TO GOD, IS ESSENTIAL TO LIVE THE WAY THAT JESUS CALLS US TO LIVE. THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP FROM EMBRACING RESENTMENT AND STIFLING GRACE IS TO CONTINUALLY PROCESS THIS FEELING WITH GOD.

Psalm 55:12-23

If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were rising against me,
I could hide.

But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,

with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
at the house of God,
as we walked about
among the worshipers.

Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the realm of the dead,
for evil finds lodging among them

As for me, I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.

Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.

He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.

God, who is enthroned from of old,
who does not change—
he will hear them and humble them,
because they have no fear of God.

My companion attacks his friends;
he violates his covenant.

His talk is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords

Cast your cares on the LORD
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.

But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.

But as for me, I trust in you.