



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 February 23, 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

Happiness

Curious - desiring to explore

Language for feeling Curious -

“I wonder”

“I'd love to know”

“Unable to rest until you know”

“I'm excited to figure this out”

I love learning new things so feeling curious is a familiar feeling to me. I often dive down rabbit holes of information that will have no bearing in my everyday life simply because my curiosity is sparked. When we vacation, I seek to know and learn all about the place we are visiting. During this year's Super Bowl I watched many of the past Super Bowl half-time shows while learning about the evolution of this ritual. It was fascinating to me. I often can be found researching and

trying to learn about the ways in which God created our bodies. I love learning about the ways in which we can better steward our bodies and the earth he gave us to care for. This feeling is one of wonder and excitement. I can feel the way my mind begins to race as I start to put pieces together. I love the way my heart seems to open in gratitude as I learn of the beauty and intricacy with which God designed all of his creation to work together in ways that bring glory to Him.

Sometimes though I also find myself hiding when I feel this feeling afraid that if I try to express my excitement I'll be ignored or criticized. Recently, God has been speaking to me that curiosity and learning are vital to our relationship with Him. We cannot truly know him unless we allow our curiosity to begin to draw us closer to Him, the one who knows ALL things. Often when I find myself stuck I find that I have allowed my natural curiosity to draw me too deeply into things that would seek to take His place in my heart and mind. And so, I've begun to pray often that God would use this feeling to draw me to Him rather than simply to information. As I seek to do this, I've become amazed at the places in which I can find His voice speaking, and this makes my heart so happy. He is truly all around me!

CURIOSITY IS TRICKY FOR ME. THOUGH I LOVE LEARNING AND FEELING CURIOUS, I TEND TOWARDS HYPERFOCUS AND CURIOSITY CAN BECOME OBSSIVE. IT'S LIKE AN ITCH AND I CAN'T REST UNTIL I SCRATCH IT. I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT UNBRIDLED CURIOSITY WOULD FEEL LIKE BECAUSE I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO REIGN MINE IN. I WONDER ABOUT EVERYTHING. I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT. BUT I CAN IGNORE ALL MY RESPONSIBILITIES IF I GIVE IN TOO DEEPLY TO THIS FEELING.

Playful - fun-loving

Language for feeling Playful -

“I feel honery ”

“Let's do something fun”

“Vibrating”

“I feel so good”

I think I have a difficult relationship with this emotion. As a child I have many memories of being unable to play and run. So many things seemed to make my lungs tighten and struggle for air. I watched from windows and sidelines while others played. As I grew older I found things I could do, ways I could play and join in, but I still often struggled with feeling like I somehow was watching from the outside. This emotion was one not to be explored or embraced. Chris and the kids often accuse me of being too serious, and maybe I am. God, I need you to examine my heart and show me where you are in this feeling so that I can come to you as a child does with playfulness and unbridled joy.

I TEND TOWARD PLAYFULNESS. I LOVE HAVING FUN AND MAKING THINGS THAT AREN'T NATURALLY FUN, MORE FUN. I THINK EVERYTHING CAN BE A JOKE. I AM TOLD BY ESTHER AND MY KIDS THAT I HAVE A TWINKLE THAT I GET IN MY EYES WHEN I AM IN A PLAYFUL MOOD AND ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING INAPPROPRIATE. MY PLAYFULNESS CAN OF COURSE GET ME INTO TROUBLE. I OFTEN FIND THAT WHEN I AM TRYING TO BE PLAYFUL, I HURT SOMEONE'S FEELINGS. I'VE LEARNED AND AM STILL LEARNING TO PROPERLY OPEN MYSELF UP TO THIS EMOTION. I THINK I OFTEN RETREAT HERE TO KEEP FROM HAVING TO FEEL OTHER, IMPORTANT EMOTIONS.

Content - being at peace with my circumstances

Language for feeling Content -

“I feel like I can rest”

“I feel good doing nothing”

“Deep easy breathing”

“I'm home”

It might seem odd, but I associate contentment most with my garden. I can go to this place and put my hands in the dirt and there find myself at peace. It really doesn't matter what I'm doing in the garden, planting seeds, watering, mulching, weeding, harvesting... it all brings a sense of contentment. (Well, maybe not when the chickens or goats are eating and digging up the fruits of my labor) In my garden I always hear God speak. “See that flower. I brought it up through the dirt and protected it as it grew. I caused it to bloom and bring beauty, and I will use it to nourish

your body or the bodies of animals. I care for it, just as I care for you.” These are the types of conversations I relish, reminders that I am deeply loved and cared for. They always lead to this feeling that everything will be ok, that I am seen, known and loved. This feeling often makes me feel light and relaxed in my body despite the fact that I am often physically working. I often forget these little lessons from the garden too easily and pray that God will find other ways of speaking through the noise of life to remind me that I can rest in this place allowing him to bring me this feeling because He does truly care for me as his daughter.

I STRUGGLE WITH CONTENTMENT. I AM CURRENTLY ASKING GOD TO HELP ME SORT OUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONTENTMENT AND COMPLACENCY. I THINK I OFTEN CALL MY COMPLACENCY CONTENTMENT SO THAT I TURN A VICE INTO A VIRTUE. I AM NOT CONTENT ENOUGH. I DO FEEL CONTENTMENT; USUALLY WHEN I’M GETTING IN BED AT NIGHT AND I’M GRATEFUL THAT I HAVE A HOME AND A WIFE AND A BED. I USUALLY HAVE A “HOME” FEELING WHEN I GET IN BED THAT FEELS LIKE CONTENTMENT. BUT OFTENTIMES, I SEEM CONTENT... I ACT CONTENT... BUT REALLY I’M UNHAPPY ABOUT WHERE I AM BUT I FEEL HELPLESS SO I GROW COMPLACENT. I’M TRYING TO FIGHT MY WAY OUT OF COMPLACENCY WITHOUT GROWING DISCONTENT. PRAY FOR ME.

Courageous - comfortable with stepping into hard things

Language for feeling Courageous -

“I could tackle the world”

“Let me at them”

“*Excited tension*”

“I am ready”

When I think of this feeling, my first instinct is to ignore it all together. I don’t want to say or do hard things. I tend to fight God and will often ask Him to find any other way than to ask me to do or say something hard. I am very aware that if I do or say something wrong I would mess things up, and I hate that. Often, by the time I decide to go ahead and embrace this feeling and do or say the hard thing, it comes out abrasive or over the top. I’ve found myself asking God recently to learn better how to respond to this feeling. I’m praying specifically that He will help me to learn when to speak or act and when to be silent or wait. More than anything I want this feeling to become an invitation from Him that I recognize as one that can bring repair and healing rather than living in the fear that it only brings damage and brokenness.

I WANT TO COMMENT ON ESTHER'S THOUGHTS BECAUSE I THINK THEY BEAR ON THIS EMOTION. COURAGE IS DOING SOMETHING THAT SCARES YOU. IT CONFUSES ME AS AN EMOTION BECAUSE WHEN YOU FEEL COURAGEOUS, I'M NOT SURE IF THE ACTION ATTACHED IS ACTUALLY COURAGEOUS. I THINK REAL COURAGE IS DOING SOMETHING WHEN YOU ARE TERRIFIED. I KNOW ESTHER FEELS VERY LITTLE COURAGE WHEN SHE'S AT HER MOST COURAGEOUS. THE EMOTION OF COURAGE OFTENTIMES TURNS OUT TO BE FOOLHEARTY. BUT REAL COURAGE IS DOING WHAT GOD CALLED YOU TO DO EVEN WHEN THE EMOTION YOU FEEL IS FEAR. ESTHER SO RARELY FEELS COURAGEOUS THAT WHEN SHE RESISTS DOING WHAT GOD ASKS HER TO DO FOR A SHORT TIME, BY THE TIME SHE OBEYS, SHE'S BUILT A GREAT DEAL OF PRESSURE INTO THE OBEDIENCE AND THAT CAN CAUSE EMOTIONS AND REACTIONS TO RUN A LITTLE HOT. I THINK IT'S COMPLETELY POSSIBLE TO LACK THE EMOTION OF COURAGE AND STILL BE A REMARKABLY COURAGEOUS PERSON. ESTHER IS.

Hopeful - anticipating the future

Language for feeling Hopeful -

“Let's do this”

“I can't wait to see what tomorrow brings”

“Peace and excitement mixed”

“The future looks good”

In 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 Paul tells us this, “Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” When I think of this feeling I am reminded of this verse. I want to know God's love. I want to be an instrument of his love. I want his love to flow from within me, but there are two other things here, faith and hope. I only really need faith and hope because I don't know or understand completely. But, God does know and understand me completely. I want to find myself in this feeling of hopefulness. I want to speak it out and remind others that when we find ourselves in Him we can have this feeling as a bedrock on which we can stand when all else is falling apart. I believe this feeling is one that not only happens to us, but is one that we can ask God to give us through the power of his Holy Spirit. I think Satan often tries to counterfeit this feeling, telling us if we

only try this, or take this, or move here, or do this we'll find hope. The truth is though that true hope is only found in one thing, relationship with Jesus. God, lead us all deeper into relationship with you so that we can be beacons of your faith, hope and love.

I FEAR THIS EMOTION. I LOVE IT WHEN I FEEL IT. EMILY DICKINSON SAID "HOPE IS THE THING WITH WINGS". IT FEELS LIKE THAT; ALL FLUTTERY IN MY STOMACH. I FEAR HOPE BECAUSE IT FEELS LIKE A FISHING LURE. IT FEELS SHINY BUT I FEAR THERE'S A HOOK IN IT SOMEWHERE AND WHAT I THOUGHT WAS HOPE WILL TURN OUT TO BE DISAPPOINTMENT. I'M TRYING TO OPEN MYSELF UP TO THIS EMOTION. NOT TO CHASE IT, BUT TO NOT ALLOW IT TO RUN AWAY WITH ME WHEN IT DOES COME. JUST TO LET MYSELF FEEL IT AND TO THANK GOD FOR IT WHEN IT'S HERE.

Nostalgic - a tender feeling of homesickness

Language for feeling Nostalgic -

"Remember when?"

"I miss those days"

"Low ache in stomach"

Often it seems our culture either yearns for this feeling of nostalgia, or they are pushing it away in hope of finding something better. Sometimes we even find ways of making something new look old. But, wherever we find ourselves at any particular moment, I think this feeling is always an invitation from God to look to the past to inform our future. Many times this feeling comes with other feelings of pain, regret, fear, shame or on the flip side it might come with sheer joy at remembering what once was. I find it interesting that all throughout the Bible God commanded His people to commemorate certain events and with each of those events came a story, a hearkening to remember the past, a call to remember the past, good and bad so that through their nostalgia they could find God. In the stories and memories of the past we find Him in all of his kindness and goodness and faithfulness and above all we find His love. As I think of this feeling, I am suddenly drawn to remember the act of communion, this act, this story that Jesus gave us as a way to be drawn back to all He has done for us so that we can once again find ourselves immersed in His love for us. I think I will begin asking Him to remind me of this feeling,

this story, each time I wander down the halls of memory lane in my own life. He gave me this feeling as a gift not just to remember the past, but to also remind me of who He is.

I THINK ESTHER HITS ON A GOOD POINT. I THINK WE ALL LOVE NOSTALGIA. IT'S SUCH A REWARDING FEELING WHEN IT COMES. WE MIGHT FEEL CHILDISH OR PEACEFUL OR PLAYFUL, ALL WRAPPED UP IN A MEMORY THAT DOESN'T JUST COME FROM OUR STORAGE BANKS IN OUR BRAIN, BUT RATHER COMES FROM THE DEEP EMOTIONAL CENTER OF US AND WE DON'T JUST RECALL, WE RELIVE HAPPY MOMENTS. BUT BECAUSE WE LOVE THIS FEELING, I THINK WE TRY TO MANUFACTURE IT. WE TRADE TRUE NOSTALGIA FOR "RETRO". IN THE SCRIPTURE, GOD COMMANDS THE ISRAELITES TO CONSTANTLY TELL THE STORIES. I DON'T THINK THERE IS ANYTHING MORE NOSTALGIC THAN GOD, STORYTELLING. WE NEED TO TELL OUR STORIES, WITH ALL THE GORY DETAILS AND ALL THE EMOTIONS, AND OF COURSE WE NEED TO INVITE GOD TO SHOW US WHERE HE WAS IN THE STORY.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.

A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.

A time to search and a time to quit searching.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace.

What do people really get for all their hard work? I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has

planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.