



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

Free - unrestrained

Language for feeling Free -

“I feel so good I could shout”

“I don't care who's watching”

“Vibrating with a desire to go!”

“I feel good”

For me the feeling of freedom always comes after speaking hard truths. I tend to avoid conflict at all costs, and often God has to make me incredibly uncomfortable before I will use my voice to speak out when something is wrong or causing harm. The freedom that comes from using my

words is often followed closely with shame or fear that I have said or done something wrong, something that has hurt another person I love or value. The world would have us to believe that freedom is always a bright, shiny thing that makes us feel good, but as I sit in this feeling, I am reminded that Jesus came to set us free. In fact, Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:1 that "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." Often freedom can only be found and felt on the other side of hard things. Jesus did the ultimate hard thing by laying down his life so that we could find true freedom. Often, we too have to allow God to make us uncomfortable so that we will be moved to action SO that we can feel and find freedom. May we always find our freedom in what He has done for us and not in the cheap imitations that the world would try to sell us.

THOUGH I LOVE ESTHER'S EXPERIENCE OF FREEDOM, FOR ME, FREEDOM FEELS LIKE AN ABSENCE OF FEAR. I'VE SAID BEFORE THAT FEAR IS MY DOMINANT EMOTION. FEAR IS SO PREVALENT IN MY LIFE, (EVEN THOUGH I GENERALLY DO THE THING I'M AFRAID OF JUST BECAUSE I AM AFRAID OF BEING RULED BY FEAR), THAT I ABSOLUTELY RECOGNIZE WHEN IT IS GONE. WHEN I AM FEELING NO FEAR, I FEEL FREE. I FEEL LIKE I CAN FLY. IT'S LIKE A WEIGHT HAS BEEN LIFTED FROM MY SHOULDERS. THOUGH MANY THINGS HAPPEN THAT GIVE ME THIS LIGHT FEELING, IT MOST OFTEN COMES WHEN I HAVE A CLEAR WORD FROM GOD WITH CLEAR DIRECTION ON WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO NEXT. THE CLARITY OF KNOWING WHAT GOD WANTS AND WHAT MY PART IS, IS INCREDIBLY FREEING. I LOVE THAT FEELING.

Grateful - experiencing thankful acceptance

Language for feeling Grateful -

"I don't know how to thank you"

"I don't know what to say"

"Impulsive feelings of love desire to hug"

"Thank you"

One of the definitions of grateful is- a thankful acceptance. Chris has this thing he does for me when I am feeling discouraged and overwhelmed. In the moment, it always feels annoying and frustrating, but it does always help. When he can sense I'm stuck, he will make me stop and name things I'm grateful for. Usually we each try to name 5 things. He's always way better than I am at this. But, this exercise of naming things I'm grateful for in a moment where I am feeling anything but grateful changes me. For some reason naming things I'm thankful for helps me remember how fleeting my feelings are, and it's also funny how naming things I'm grateful for is usually followed by this feeling and the recognition of other things for which I can be grateful. It's also amazing how quickly this exercise can help my body to relax and rest or focus on the tasks that lay directly in front of me. I love that God has given us this feeling that can connect us to him and also help us to put things into a perspective that can glorify God and all He has done for us, in us and through us.

I READ ONCE THAT THE PART OF YOUR BRAIN THAT FEELS ANXIETY AND THE PART OF YOUR BRAIN THAT FEELS GRATITUDE CAN NOT WORK AT THE SAME TIME. I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S TRUE, BUT EVER SINCE READING, I TAKE GRATITUDE MORE SERIOUSLY. I HAVE A LIST OF THINGS I'M GRATEFUL FOR AND I ADD TO IT WHENEVER I CAN. IT'S IN MY PHONE WHERE I CAN ALWAYS ACCESS IT. WHEN I'M STRESSED OR FEARFUL OR FEELING DEFEATED... I GET OUT THE LIST AND I JUST READ IT. AT FIRST, I DON'T USUALLY FEEL GRATEFUL. IT ACTUALLY FEELS STUPID TO READ THE LIST AND I EVEN OCCASIONALLY MAKE FUN OF MYSELF FOR HOW SILLY THINGS LIKE GRATITUDE LISTS ARE IN THE FACE OF REAL LIFE TROUBLES. THEN I REMIND MYSELF THAT SOMETHING ABOUT EACH THING ON THIS LIST GRABBED MY HEART WITH SUCH A FORCE OF GRATITUDE THAT I WROTE IT DOWN. SO I TELL MYSELF THAT EVEN IF I DON'T FEEL IT... I'M GRATEFUL FOR THESE THINGS. THEN I SAY IT... "GOD, I'M GRATEFUL FOR MY WIFE AND THE IMMENSE JOY SHE BRINGS INTO MY LIFE... I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE WAY THE SUN HITS OUR BACK PORCH IN THE MORNING..." AND AS I EXPRESS GRATITUDE FOR THINGS ON MY LIST, I ALWAYS FEEL MY HEART SLOWLY CATCH UP. AND SURE ENOUGH, AS IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH BRAIN POWER TO SUSTAIN BOTH MY GRATITUDE AND MY ANXIETY, GRATITUDE WINS.

Peaceful - being at ease relationally with God, yourself, and others

Language for feeling Peaceful -

“Everything is right with the world”

“Shalom”

“Deep easy breaths”

“ahhhhhhhh”

There is a famous quote from Albert Schweitzer that says, “Sometimes peace can only be found on the other side of war.” In my life this is often the case. I often cannot experience peace until I have experienced the turmoil of the other side, whether it is fear, or anger, or unforgiveness, or pain, or conflict. It is almost as if I can’t recognize this feeling until I struggle against something. Yet, when it comes it is the most wonderful feeling. I can feel how light and loose my body feels, as though I am sinking into the softest, most comfortable bed or floating like a cloud above the earth, outside of the stress and demands of life. I wish I could stay in this place, with this feeling. As I look deeper though, I find that at times I try to settle for a cheap substitute for this so that I don’t have to do the hard work of walking through my feelings of fear, or anger, or unforgiveness or some other conflict or uncomfortable thing. Why, when I love this feeling so much do I settle for cheap substitutes. Jesus reminded his disciples in John 14 that He was leaving His peace, not a cheap substitute, but his peace that overcomes fear and anger and all the other things that stand in the way of that perfect peace. God, help me to remember how your peace feels and to not be fooled by the substitutes that the world would offer to me. Help me to fight through the battles that are in my path so that I can walk in your peace and bring glory to you.

MY BRAIN IS OFTEN TOO ACTIVE FOR PEACE. EVEN WHEN THINGS ARE CALM, MY BRAIN IS MOVING AT AN UNPEACEFUL PACE. BUT I'M CHEESY. WHEN I COME HOME FROM A CHAOTIC DAY AND I DIVE IN TO HELP WITH A CHAOTIC EVENING, AND IT'S FINALLY BED TIME, I LOVE LAYING DOWN IN BED WITH MY WIFE. THERE IS A "COMING HOME", "EVERYTHING IS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD" FEELING THAT I CAN ONLY DESCRIBE AS PEACE. I LOVE THIS FEELING AND IT'S STRANGE HOW SUCH A SHORT-LIVED, MOMENTARY EMOTION CAN MOTIVATE AND DRIVE SO MUCH OF WHAT I DO. I WILL DO ALMOST ANYTHING TO BE ABLE TO CLIMB INTO BED AT NIGHT AND FEEL PEACE.

Soft - feeling tenderness

Language for feeling Soft -

"I love you so much"

"I want this forever"

"melting"

"My heart is too big for my chest"

In my life the place where I think I have most experienced this feeling of softness is just after giving birth. I have always been shocked at the power and strength that God gives to a woman in order for her to bring life into the world. I once heard a midwife say that birth is the closest we get to heaven here on earth. It's as if the veil that somehow exists between earth and heaven is so thin in those moments of labor and birth. Just after birth when my body was flooded with all the different hormones that come, I have always felt this incredible softness, this love and awe and wonder that I wish would stay forever. It's as though I had put on rose colored glasses and the world looks beautiful and safe and everything is as it should be, snuggled up with the tiny baby God had just used my body to create. There are other times I've felt this same feeling, but never as strong as those sacred moments holding one of my babies. I think Satan would have us believe

that this feeling of softness is somehow weak and that we should want to always feel powerful and in control, but I would argue that in the moments where I feel soft, I also feel so very close to God and so very loved. What a beautiful gift that the God who created all of creation would allow me to feel this same feeling of closeness and wonder at something I created.

I FIGHT AGAINST THIS ONE. I WAS RAISED IN A WORLD WHERE GUYS WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE SOFT. I THINK I NATURALLY TEND TOWARD THIS FEELING, I CRY EASILY... I LOVE BABIES AND PUPPIES AND ALL THE SMALL, SOFT THINGS... I THINK I FEEL SOFTNESS BUT I THEN FEEL SHAME AND EMBARRASSMENT THAT I FELT SOFT AND I TRY TO IMMEDIATELY TOUGHEN UP. I PRAY FOR A TENDER HEART ALL THE TIME. . I WANT TO SEE PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S TENDER EYES AND LOVE THEM WITH HIS HEART, BUT I THINK I'M AFRAID OF BEING SOFT SO I DON'T ALLOW MYSELF TO FEEL SOFT. I DO WANT GOD TO HEAL THIS. I DON'T WANT TO FEEL SHAME JUST BECAUSE I FELT SOFT. I NEED TO ACCEPT GOD'S INVITATION TO MEET HIM IN THIS FEELING.

Psalm 139:13-18

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you

when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts,[a] God!

How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them,

they would outnumber the grains of sand—

when I awake, I am still with you.