



## 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

### **Afraid - fearing that a bad thing will happen**

Language for feeling Afraid -

“I can't look”

“I'm so nervous”

“I don't even want to think about it”

“What if?”

*I don't like to feel afraid. I want to control and plan and schedule. I don't want to have to acknowledge that really I am not in control. My fear typically comes in the form of worry for my kids. When one of my kids is struggling, whether it is with an emotional weight or a hard decision or a disagreement with one of their siblings or friends, I can feel fear pulling at my heart and mind. It's so easy to spiral out of control and talk myself into believing that I am clearly not a good mom because I don't have the answers or a step by step plan to help them through their*

*struggles. As I sit in those feelings though, I remember that this place is God's invitation to me to come and meet with Him and hear what He says of me as their mom, and in this space I feel Him reminding me that my job isn't to protect my kids from every situation or to have all the answers for them, but that instead, my job is to point them to Him, the one who loves them even more than I do. God, help me to be quick to turn to you in my fear, and to remind my kids of the fact that their struggles are always an invitation to come and meet with you for themselves.*

MY LIFE IS DRIVEN BY FEAR. I GENERALLY HAVE A COUNTER-PHOBIC PERSONALITY WHICH MEANS THAT I FEEL FEAR BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE CONTROLLED BY IT SO I GENERALLY FORCE MYSELF TO DO WHATEVER IT IS THAT I'M AFRAID OF, JUST TO PROVE THAT THE FEAR DOESN'T WIN. BUT TRUST ME, I'M AFRAID. THE BACKGROUND TO MY COMPUTER IS A PICTURE THAT SAYS, "SOMETIMES THE FEAR WON'T GO AWAY, SO YOU'LL HAVE TO DO IT AFRAID". I HAVE A MENTAL ROUTINE THAT I DO WHEN I FEEL AFRAID. I SET ASIDE JUST A COUPLE MINUTES AND TRY TO THINK OF ALL THE HORRIBLE THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN. I IMAGINE CAR WRECKS AND CANCERS... BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS AND BROKEN BONES... I TRY TO COME UP WITH ALL THE AWFUL THINGS THAT HONESTLY COULD HAPPEN AT ANY TIME. I THEN TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT I COULD DO RIGHT NOW TO PREVENT ANY OF IT. THE ANSWER IS ALMOST ALWAYS LITTLE IF ANYTHING; USUALLY NOTHING. I CAN DO NOTHING TO PREVENT HORRIBLE THINGS FROM HAPPENING. FOR SOME REASON, ONCE I REALIZE THAT I HAVE VIRTUALLY NO CONTROL OVER ALL THE TERRIBLE THINGS IN LIFE, IT MAKES IT MUCH EASIER TO HAND THEM OVER TO GOD. SO AT THE END OF THE EXERCISE, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I DO. I IMAGINE A LIGHT SWITCH IN MY HEAD THAT IS MY FEAR SWITCH AND I PRAY, "GOD, THIS IS TOO BIG FOR ME. YOU'LL HAVE TO CARRY IT", AND I MENTALLY FLIP THE SWITCH. I FEEL FEAR IN MY SKIN. IT ALMOST FEELS ITCHY LIKE I'M TRYING TO STAY ALERT AND AWARE AND ON EDGE. I DON'T LIKE IT.

BUT FEAR IS A MIRACLE. FEAR IS PROTECTIVE. IT'S A WONDER THAT GOD BUILT US WITH AN ALARM SYSTEM. OUR RATIONAL MINDS ARE FAR TOO SLOW TO PROTECT US FROM ALL THE DANGER IN OUR WORLDS BUT GOD WIRED US WITH THIS REALLY FAST, REALLY SENSITIVE SYSTEM THAT IS ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR HARM. THE PROBLEM IS, IN OUR FALLEN STATE, THIS SYSTEM CAN BE GLITCHY. WHEN SOMETHING HURTS US, OUR FEAR CENTER REMEMBERS IT AND DETERMINES TO NEVER ALLOW US TO GO THROUGH THAT AGAIN. IT WILL BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SIMILAR RISKS IN THE FUTURE. THEN, IN A FUTURE ENCOUNTER, ONE THAT IS NOT A GENUINE RISK, THE FEAR ALARM CAN BLARE FOR NO REASON. WE TEND TO CALL THESE TRIGGERS. AS INCONVENIENT AS THEY CAN BE, THEY REALLY ARE OUR WONDERFUL BODIES TRYING HARD TO PROTECT US. WHEN THE SYSTEM GETS TOO GLITCHY, WE MIGHT CALL IT A SPIRIT OF FEAR. SOMETIMES WE NEED TO REBOOT THE SYSTEM. WE NEED TO SIT WITH GOD AND EVEN WALK BACK THROUGH PAST PARTS OF OUR STORY WHERE THE ALARM WENT OFF SO THAT WE CAN REWIRE THE SYSTEM. FEAR IS OUR FRIEND IF, AND ONLY IF, IT TURNS US BACK TO OUR FATHER.

## A Prayer for Feeling Afraid-

God, I am afraid. I know fear is designed to keep me safe. I also know that fear can begin to rule me. I want you to rule me, not fear. Help me listen to my fear and when it calls, to run to you. You know when I'm safe and when it's a false alarm. Even if I have to run to you 1,000 times a day, I'd rather run to you than from nothing.

## Unworthy - feeling as though you have limited value

Language for feeling unworthy -

"It's ok that this happened, I kind of asked for it"

"Don't take time out of your schedule for me"

"I'm fine"

"It's what I deserve"

*This is so often the way in which I define myself. I find it so easy to blame myself when things go wrong, or someone is upset. I examine myself and find that who I am is not pleasing. I am too much. I'm a failure. So I hide myself. I work harder and harder, wearing myself out hoping that all my efforts will lead others to love me. I spend far too much time terrified that others will see underneath my neat, clean, composed exterior to the uncertainty and chaos that lives under the surface. If others see the real me, will they love me? Will they still accept me? And then I hear God gently stopping my thoughts and reminding me that I am loved and seen and known because He loves and sees and knows me. He sees the uncertainty and the chaos and He seeks to bring peace and calm. God wants me to stop and listen for His voice when these feelings threaten to overtake me. He wants His voice to be the one I hear above even my own. God, make my heart tender and responsive to you. Help the ears of my heart to be open and waiting to hear your voice speaking of what you say that I am.*

AS I TRY TO CONTEMPLATE WHEN I FEEL UNWORTHY, I THINK MAYBE I HAVE MADE A VIRTUE OUT OF THIS EMOTION. I HAVE A LIST OF THINGS THAT MAKE ME FEEL THIS PAINFUL EMOTION BUT EVEN WHEN CONSIDERING THEM, THE FIRST THOUGHT THAT HITS MY HEAD IS THAT THIS FEELING IS APPROPRIATE BECAUSE I AM UNWORTHY. I TELL MYSELF THAT MY ONLY TRUE WORTH IS FOUND IN JESUS. I MYSELF AM AN UNWORTHY SINNER. COMPLIMENTS ARE UNCOMFORTABLE. PEOPLE EXPRESSING GRATITUDE TO ME FEELS INAPPROPRIATE. I AM NOTHING. IT'S ALL GOD... I CAN EVEN MAKE A SPIRITUAL SOUNDING CASE FOR WHY THIS IS ALL TRUE... BUT ALL OF THAT RATIONALIZING IGNORES THE INCARNATION...

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO SAVE ME. HE LIVED HIS LIFE AND SPOKE THE TRUTH TO CALL ME. HE ENDURED PUNISHMENT AND EMBRACED DEATH, TO FREE ME. HE ROSE TO LIFE TO EMPOWER ME. HE DID ALL OF THAT FOR ME. WHICH MEANS HE LOOKED DOWN FROM THE PEACE AND PERFECTION OF HEAVEN AND SAW SOMETHING THAT HAD ENOUGH INTRINSIC WORTH TO RESCUE. IF I DROPPED A PENNY ON THE GROUND, I DON'T KNOW THAT I WOULD STOP TO PICK IT UP. BUT IF I DROPPED MY WIFE'S WEDDING RING IN A LAKE, I'D PROBABLY GO THROUGH HELL, RENT SCUBA EQUIPMENT AND PUT MY LIFE ON HOLD UNTIL I FOUND IT. I WONDER AT WHAT JESUS SAW IN ME TO MAKE EVERYTHING HE WENT THROUGH WORTH IT. THIS IS WHERE FAITH COMES IN. I HAVE TO CHOOSE TO BELIEVE THAT I WAS WORTH SAVING. IT CERTAINLY WASN'T THAT GOD REALLY, REALLY NEEDED ME TO ACCOMPLISH HIS MISSION ON EARTH. IT MUST BE THAT I HAVE A VALUE THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THIS SMALL, SHRINKING FEELING OR UNWORTHINESS DRAWS ME BACK TO GOD TO FIND, ONCE AGAIN, THIS REMINDER THAT HE FEELS I'M WORTH SAVING.

### A Prayer for Feeling Unworthy-

God, I don't feel like I am enough. I don't feel worth investing in. I don't ask for help because why would anyone want to help me? I pour into those around me because I don't feel worth pouring into. But you said I'm a pearl of great price and that you would sell everything to buy me... You said you would leave the 99 to find me... You said you would turn the house over looking for me and rejoice when I'm finally recovered... You run to me when I return as a lost prodigal... To You, I am worth the cross. Whenever I feel this way, bring me back to the cross to find my worth.

## **Helpless - feeling that there's no way out**

## Language for feeling Helpless

“I don't know what I'm going to do”

“I feel paralyzed”

“Why is this happening to me?”

“I wish I could help”

*I remember this feeling too well. I remember the loneliness and the trapped feeling. I can remember wanting to blame Chris or the kids, anyone that might keep me from looking inside my own heart. I remember the long walks or drives, hiding in closets or basements, tears running down my face as I am overrun by this feeling. There seems to be no escape, no way to outrun this feeling. Once again I didn't plan enough. I didn't communicate well enough. I feel the strain in my muscles and the way my stomach churns. I don't want to be in this place and yet here I am. Maybe if I figure out how to do things better, I won't end up here ever again. I remember the day God stopped me and reminded me that this place too, is an invitation from Him. He loves me even here. He doesn't expect me to plan everything so well that I never have to feel this feeling. This place is where He wants me to come and meet Him so that I can know Him here and so that I can be known in this place. He is here with me. He says to me that I don't have to be a victim in this place, but that I can be here and learn to know Him more. That is what I really want. I want to know Him. God, I want to find you in this place. I want the light of your love to shine on me and then through me. I want my kids to see you in me. God, lead me to you even in this place.*

I SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN MY HEAD. WHEN I LOSE SOMETHING, I USUALLY FIND IT WITH MY MIND. I VERY ACTIVELY TRACE MY STEPS AND EVEN MY MOTIVATIONS BACK THROUGH ALL THE PLACES I'VE BEEN. I IMAGINE ALL THE POSSIBLE THINGS THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO MOVE OR HIDE THE LOST OBJECT. IT'S AMAZING HOW MANY TIMES I'VE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE LOGICAL PLACE IT COULD BE, JUST TO LOOK IN THAT SPOT AND FIND IT. WHEN I CAN'T FIGURE SOMETHING OUT, I REMIND MYSELF THAT I AM ACTUALLY REALLY INTELLIGENT AND WHATEVER IT IS THAT I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT, ISN'T ACTUALLY THAT COMPLICATED. I HAVE A WEIRD CONFIDENCE THAT I CAN FIGURE IT OUT. WHEN I HIT AN OBSTACLE AT WORK, I ACTUALLY GET EXCITED BECAUSE IT'S FUN TO FIGURE OUT HOW I'M GOING TO DEAL WITH THAT OBSTACLE. I RARELY FEEL HELPLESS.

BECAUSE OF ALL OF THIS, WHEN I DO FEEL HELPLESS, IT'S CRIPPLING. IT FEELS CLAUSTROPHOBIC. EVERYTHING IN ME IS HUNTING FOR THE EXIT, THE EXPLANATION, THE NEXT STEP. WHEN I CAN'T FIND IT, I CAN'T BREATHE. THERE ARE TOO MANY TIMES THAT I FEEL HELPLESS AND I DON'T LIKE IT. BUT I DO KNOW THAT GOD IS NEVER HELPLESS. I HAVE LOST COUNT HOW MANY TIMES I HAVE BEEN TRULY HELPLESS ONLY TO HAVE HIM SWEEP IN WITH WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND SO MUCH MORE... USUALLY AT THE LAST MOMENT. HELPLESSNESS IS USUALLY A REMINDER THAT I'M TRYING TO DO IT IN MY OWN POWER. I NEVER FEEL HELPLESS WHEN I ACTUALLY LEAVE THINGS IN GOD'S HANDS. WHEN I FEEL HELPLESS, I NEED TO TURN IMMEDIATELY TO THE ONE WHO IS AN EVER PRESENT HELP IN TIMES OF NEED.

## A Prayer for Feeling Helpless-

God, HELP!!!

### **Psalm 27**

The LORD is my light and my salvation—  
so why should I be afraid?

The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger,  
so why should I tremble?

When evil people come to devour me,  
when my enemies and foes attack me,  
they will stumble and fall.

Though a mighty army surrounds me,  
my heart will not be afraid.

Even if I am attacked,  
I will remain confident.

The one thing I ask of the LORD—  
the thing I seek most—  
is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
delighting in the LORD's perfections  
and meditating in his Temple.

For he will conceal me there when troubles come;  
he will hide me in his sanctuary.  
He will place me out of reach on a high rock.

Then I will hold my head high  
above my enemies who surround me.  
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,  
singing and praising the LORD with music.

Hear me as I pray, O LORD.  
Be merciful and answer me!

My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."  
And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming."

Do not turn your back on me.  
Do not reject your servant in anger.  
You have always been my helper.  
Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,  
O God of my salvation!

Even if my father and mother abandon me,  
the LORD will hold me close.

Teach me how to live, O LORD.  
Lead me along the right path,  
for my enemies are waiting for me.

Do not let me fall into their hands.  
For they accuse me of things I've never done;  
with every breath they threaten me with violence.

Yet I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness  
while I am here in the land of the living.

Wait patiently for the LORD.  
Be brave and courageous.  
Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.