

INSIDE OUT - SERIES STUDY GUIDE

Our summer series is going to look at our inner-person, and help us interact with emotions. As I was growing up I heard my mother often say, "Emotions are neither right or wrong, they just are." That statement had a big impact on me, but one day I began evaluating this statement through the lense of Scripture, and what I found was that the Bible is full of emotion, and it addresses the breadth human emotion. The fullness of emotion we have was given to us by God as part of the Imago Dei, and often a reflection of the expression of values that flow from God. The Bible teaches us that God is angry at sin, but full of joy. The Bible teaches that God was ashamed that he made humanity at the time of the flood, and that He is full of contempt for the injustice in the world. Jesus wept, but He also attended parties. Most importantly, we learn that God's glory is expressed in His pleasure and joy. Our emotions are a gift that are part of the wonderful image of God placed within us, but these emotions are also deeply marred by the Fall.

My mom's statement is partially true. Emotions are a gift from God. But they are also deeply broken as a result of the Fall, and expressed sinfully because of our tendency to base our emotions on a self-centered view, which leaves us with strong feelings when things are done to us, and incorrect feelings when things are done by us. We too feel anger, joy, sadness, disgust, and fear. But the truth is that our emotions are often wrong. We often sin in our emotions by having the wrong expression of emotion, or express emotions in ways that are harmful, self-centered, and destructive. Puritan pastor Thomas Boston said:

The natural man's affections (emotions) are wretchedly misplaced; he is a spiritual monster. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth; his heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on. His face is towards hell, his back towards heaven; and therefore God calls to him to turn. He loves what he should hate, and hates what he should love; joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor.

The recent movie Inside Out gave a creative glimpse into the reality of human emotions. It showed us that people are wired differently, and that emotions are very difficult (say impossible) to control. These beauty of our emotions need to be affirmed in us, but we also need to apply the Gospel to our emotions. We need the cross of Christ properly applied to bring redemption and restoration to our souls, and to show us the reordering of our lives around the glory of God rather than exaltation of self. Our goal in this series is to help people interact with their emotions, to affirm their feelings as a gift, but also to help them apply the Gospel to their feelings.

To do this we are going to look at the Psalms. One of the amazing things about this book of the Old Testament is that we have the expression of just about every possible human emotion, but in each case the emotion is taken upward in

prayer. In other words, the beginning point of our properly interacting with our emotions is that we take them to God, and trust Him with the outcome. So the Psalms show us how to have emotions rightly by feeling them for the right things, and how to rightly express those emotions in trust and hope in God through the Gospel. The Psalms are incredibly helpful here because they show us several things about our emotions. First, they give us permission to feel. So often we are advised to suppress our emotions, as if we can read a few verses and flip a switch. What we will find is that the writers of the Psalms feel deeply, and find great freedom in expressing their feelings. For our study we are going to intentionally choose the Psalms where the writer is expressing these emotions rather than the ones writing about the emotion. For example, David wrote Psalms that says, "When you are afraid..." and Psalms that are cry out of deep fear where David expresses anguish out of a situation that has left him in terror. We will deal with the second one, but find some hope from the first type. Psalms also teach us that God has given us permission to express our emotions honestly to Him, as long as the posture of our heart is worship. Being honest with depression, anger, fear, resentment is a healthy thing as long as we take this vertically to God and do this with a heart of awe, trust, repentance, and obedience. Otherwise we will begin making false gods of our own making who will justify our emotions rather than redeeming them. Furthermore, the Psalms remind us that every emotion we have is actually a theological statement, revealing what we genuinely believe about God, the Gospel, our idols, and ourselves. When we go vertical with our feelings and end with trust in God's providence it shows a Gospelsed heart. But when we run from God or seek to manipulate Him our idolatry is revealed which shows us our need for the Gospel.

Our hope is that the tone of this series will be gracious and redemptive, especially for those who have deep feelings as a result of hurt, brokenness, resentment, and struggle. I also do not want to neglect the reality that the depth of the Fall as expressed in our emotions results in a complex problem that involves our minds, our hearts, and even our bodies. So there are healthy responses to unhealthy emotions that includes seeing a Christian counselor, and may involve other means including medication. Our goal is to give people a Gospel framework, not simple solutions to deep and complex problems. Furthermore, the Gospel rejects a performance model, so we must be careful not to subtly tell people to buck it up and get stronger. Rather, we should help people rejoice in their helplessness, but also repent by turning to Christ in their weakness so that the power of Christ might be evident. So we need to remind people weekly that pastoral counseling is a good option, and that they are free to make appointments with our Elders, and that seeing a good Christian counselor on a regular basis is a very good thing.

Resources for the series

I want to recommend three books that you might read along with us as we work through the series. These will be primary sources along with the study of the Psalms.

The Cry of the Soul: How our Deepest Emotions Reveal our Deepest Questions about God, by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III

Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life, by Brian Borgman

You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions, by Tim Chester

June 19 - Fear - Psalm 55

I loved Bill Hader's character in Inside Out, Fear. Again, as an emotion, fear is a gift from God. A fallen world where death is real is dangerous, so healthy fear is vital to good decision making. We know that teenagers can lack healthy fear and feel invincible because the area of the brain that leads to healthy fear has not matured. So we fear for our kids because they are not afraid of the things they should fear. But fear can also become unhealthy and irrational. Studies show over and over that our greatest fear is public speaking, which means people would rather fall off a cliff than give a speech to a crowd of people. One of the things the Gospel produces in our lives is courage in the face of fear. This courage is not produced by will power, but by learning the fear of the Lord, which puts our other fear in proper perspective. David cries out to God. His life is in danger, he is hiding and has been betrayed by a close friend. He is panic stricken, crying out, "Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me." This is real, and we all have moments when life takes us to this point. But as we learn how to process the Gospel we will learn to fear the Lord, and cast our anxiety on the Lord because He cares for us. It will help us find hope in God's sovereign goodness rather than in our ability to control outcomes.

June 26 - Depression - Psalm 42

The Inside Out movie actually gave us a really good picture of what can happen to us when we deny the reality of sadness. Oh that it was just a simple switch we could flip and the gloom would go away. We are broken people in a broken world, and everywhere we turn the news is bad and our lives are hurting. Sometimes the call to joy can add weight to the struggle, because we think we should learn to "Don't worry, be happy." Yet, we can't make ourselves stop feeling sad. For some of us, sadness turns into depression that can overtake us for longer seasons of life. And way too many times our response within Christianity is to "fix" the problem rather than processing our sadness and depression through the lens of the Gospel. We will fail people when we think a few simple steps to happiness can lead

to the overcoming of deep seasons of despair and depression. But all we have to do is look in the Scriptures and church history and we will find some amazing people who dealt with deep bouts of melancholy and depression. In the Bible we see Elijah, David, Jeremiah, and Paul demonstrating deep sadness. Jesus also is designated as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 26:38). In church history men such as Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon struggled with depression. We should not find shame in the dark night of the soul, rather we should help people find their hope where the Bible roots it, in the goodness of God, the grace of the Gospel, and the hope of resurrection. We also need to affirm the common grace of medication when needed, and the importance of counseling and Biblical community. The Psalmist in Psalm 42 cries out from despair and depression, wondering why his soul is downcast. He realizes he should hope in God, which is a good thing. But this hope in God is not a switch, rather it is a rock. He can't turn his depression on and off, but he does have a place of anchor when the waves are crashing in.

July 3 - Abandoned - Psalm 22

Loneliness is a powerful thing that often can result in deep sadness, anxiety, and pain. There are all kinds of life-situations that can trigger loneliness. On one level, being abandoned can be very real, sometimes coming from disagreements, and being left by people in key life situations. We may have been abandoned by friends or family members when standing for something we believe was right. Or it may happen because we were offensive and pushed people away. It may happen as a result of life situations like the death of a spouse or the loss of friends who move away. Others of us can feel incredibly lonely and abandoned even when we are sitting at a table full of friends and family. If we have life situations where we have been deeply wounded and left by key people in our lives we can struggle with trust which will cause us to withdraw and then feel alone. Feelings of loneliness often grow as sadness gains control of our emotional panel, pushing us into deeper despair which only heightens feelings of loneliness. The good news for those feeling lonely is that the Bible engages this struggle and offers real hope. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David wrote Psalm 22, which begins by asking God why He has forsaken David.. He feels alone, abandoned my friends, attacked by foes, and feeling left by God. But his response is to cry out and write a prayer. Yet in this prayer God offers the real hope in abandonment, as David paints a clear picture of the cross of Christ. On the cross Jesus cries the words of this ancient song, a prayer on His lips. The truth is that David was never really abandoned, God did not leave Him. God has promised to never leave or forsake us. But God did turn His back on Jesus as He poured out His wrath on the Son of God so that we would never be abandoned. Furthermore, God has given us a community of faith, a place to run toward when we feel alone.

July 10 - Disappointment - Psalm 77

What should we do when our dreams die? We have all had times of disappointment, those moments when our reality does not match our

expectations. We are told to aim for the stars, whatever we believe we can achieve, that we have it in us to do anything we want. But the reality is that life after high school generally doesn't go this way. Relationships we pursue may not work out, or they may work out only to find the person you married is not the person you hoped for. You may not get the job of your dreams, or you may get it and find out that it is terrible and unfulfilling. Add to this the American dream version of spirituality that tells you that if you go to church, believe the right things, and live a good life then God will give you everything you want. We need to know that all of us will have moments where Psalm 77 will speak to our soul, as we cry out to God wondering why our actual experience does not meet our expectations and what we believe we deserve. For some, these are moments in our lives, but for others among us, this is the driving force as our lives are difficult, dreams are unmet, and hopes unrealized. We feel God has abandoned us and not kept His promises, because our experience is vastly different from our dreams. How do we respond. Anger at God? Give up? Stop dreaming and believing for great things? The psalmist gives us a model to follow when dealing with disappointment in life. First, he is honest. He asks God why cries in the day of trouble seem to be met with silence. But the psalmist also remembers God's acts in the past, His redemptive work in his life and the life of his people. In our disappointment we can quickly lose sight of the story of God in our lives. The psalmist also deals with a false assumption, that he deserves better than what he has received. When we believe God owes us anything and that we deserve something from God we will cut ourselves off from grace. It is only when we realize that God does not deal with us based on what we deserve in salvation, rather He gives grace to the undeserving. What I deserve was the cross. What I get was God and his goodness. As a result, God gives Himself to us, and even when we cannot trace his steps, He is walking us through the great waters.

July 17 - Shame - Psalm 44, with Psalm 32 as the answer

Shame is a significant weight. Often rooted in sin and life failures, shame can help us process repentance and seek forgiveness. The Scriptures warn us that failure to feel shame and forgetting how to blush in response to our sin and the sin of our culture can leave us in the path of God's judgment (Jeremiah 8:12). But if we are not careful, shame can become a crippling response to our failures that can drive us to penance, self-affliction, and unreleased guilt rather than to repentance and trust in the Gospel. In other words, when our response to shame turns us inward and seeks to repay God for our sin rather than trusting in the finished work of Christ for our forgiveness we are subtly seeking a path of self-salvation where we think we are redeemed through the depth of our depression and sadness over failure. That being said, proper shame and sadness over the depth of our sin is healthy if it is taken to the cross. Yet, for many, the depth and the deep consequences of our sin can make it incredibly tough to move beyond shame and into redemptive forgiveness. We will never figure out how to find a way to forgive ourselves until we understand the depth of the Gospel and the beauty of the cross. God did not forgive and forget, He paid a huge price to secure the cleansing and

redemption from our sin. The Psalmist recognizes Israel's redemption as a beautifully rich gift, but also cries out to God in shame over his own and their national rejection of the God who saved them. He realizes that their current condition is self-inflicted, and the only hope is the redemptive work of God. So he cries out in shame for restoration and forgiveness. Psalm 32 though, shows us the depth of God's forgiveness and helps us live as forgiven people.

July 24 - Joy - Psalm 126

My tendency is to see negative emotions as, well, negative, and see joy and happiness as nothing but pure goodness. I was for the character Joy in Inside Out. While I have times of doubt, fear, depression, and all the other emotions, I do tend to have this emotion more at the controls, being a glass-half-full sort of guy. So like most people, I tend to see myself as the good person and others as the confused ones. The movie really got me on this one. Joy is a good thing, and is actually a promise for the redeemed. But joy and happiness are not always the same thing. Joy is rooted in my confidence in God, and thankfulness for His redemptive plan. When my joy is rooted in other things my happiness is often a way I can put my idolatry on display for the world to see. When my team wins, I am happy. When they don't, nobody in the house is happy because I am ticked. When I get shiny new things I am happy. When the car breaks down, not so much. See, the emotion of joy can actually be a deeply sinful thing showing the nature and object of my worship. As Americans we believe this is our right and the ultimate goal, to be happy. But the pursuits we take just so we can be happy generally do not lead to happiness. On the other hand, when our hope is in the covenant faithfulness of our God and in His redemptive acts, true joy is a byproduct. This is not the lack of tears or the end of grief (at least while on earth), but the joy experience grace in the midst of pain which will bring shouts of joy. And this joy is preparing us for heaven, where the tears will be wiped from our eyes one last time and the joy of the Lord will be our strength because we will be in the presence of the One who has the fullness of joy in His right hand.

July 31 - Anger - Psalm 79

The idea of righteous anger is expressed multiple times in the Scriptures. Paul reminds us that we can be angry without sinning, but we should not let the sun go down on our anger. The depiction of Anger in Inside Out is a fiery red guy who is always blowing his top. Anger is one of our core emotions, but we differ in how that anger is often expressed. Some blow up, others build up inner resentment. The Bible often describes the anger and indignation of God, as He is settled in His wrath against sin and injustice. The Psalmist looks at the world around him and recognizes that things are not as they should be. The unrighteous prosper which entices their wickedness. The result are that the people of God are oppressed and the poor and helpless suffer. Anger for the right causes and that seeks its solution in the justice of God is a godly emotion given as an expression of the image of God. But our anger is always mixed with our sinfulness, and we tend to get angry about the wrong things, or express that anger in unhealthy and sinful ways, which causes

angry responses. This struggle can be more evident if anger is the one sitting at the control panel of our emotional command center. Gospel application will help us honor God in our anger by making sure it is expressed at the right things and in the right ways. The outcome of righteous anger will be involvement and advance of causes of justice.

August 7 - Jealous - Psalm 37

We tend to think of jealousy as a purely evil emotion, which is why it may catch us off guard when we read passages that declare God to be a jealous God (Exodus 20:5, 34:14). Now, God's jealousy is not the expression of an immature emotion like a middle school girl whose boyfriend just left her for another girls. God's jealousy is rooted in His glory and the knowledge that we are made by Him, for Him, and to His glory. God knows that when we pursue other things and replace God with our idols they will destroy us. So God is not jealous of us, but He is jealous for us. In marriage, this kind of jealousy is actually healthy. But most of the time our jealousy is not flowing from a righteous love, but from unholy passions and comparisons. We get jealous of other people, wishing we had what they have and desiring to switch lives. In these cases, our jealousy reveals our deep need for the Gospel. Think about it, how often do we look at others accomplishments, possessions, children, personalities, or physical traits ("I wish I had her hair") and long for those things. Often, at that point we no longer see these other people as God's image bearers in need of redemption, rather we quickly objectify them and create excuses explaining their success against our perceived failures.

Furthermore, how often has our jealousy had us wishing to change places with a person who does not know God and is living under His wrath? The Psalmist reminds us to not be envious of wrongdoers, but rather to wait for the Lord and commit ourselves to Him. He is good, and will give us what we need in this life, but will ultimately bring total restoration and the fulfillment of His promises. We need the Gospel to remind us that Christ is better than everything in this world that can make us jealous. And we need the Gospel to help us remember that true riches are the ones stored up for eternity, Christ is preparing our place and it is better than anything that make you jealous now.

August 14 - Disgust - Psalm 10

Most likely, the first time you showed this emotion involved your parents force-feeding some kind of green vegetable, and you responded by spitting it out and instantly showing the universal facial expression of disgust, with eyes squinted and tongue out. Disgust is an emotion that responds to something we find revolting (like country music). It is often an expression of preferences, which in some cases are value neutral (IE-brüssel sprouts), but in other cases are not (IE- politics). On one level we are responding to things experienced by our senses. But as we mature disgust and contempt grows toward certain people and types of people. Many times disgust and contempt are ingrained into us by our culture and people group. In other words, we all have a tendency to express disgust toward people who are not like us, or cultural things that are different from what we grew up

with. The emotion of disgust was given to us by God to express both likes and dislikes, but also to demonstrate a posture of contempt toward moral wickedness, oppression, and injustice. In Psalm 10, the psalmist holds nothing back as he expresses contempt for the wicked and unjust. His prayer is direct, calling on God to break the arm of the wicked and evildoer. Not gentle language, and a reflection of a type of Psalm called imprecatory Psalms, which are prayers for the destruction of the wicked and oppressor. These Psalms show us that disgust and contempt can be a righteous emotion. But the Gospel will challenge our disgust on several levels. First, it will force us to look at the root of our disgust, as we are called to determine if it is rooted in righteousness or our own preferences and culture. Second, Gospel-oriented disgust will push us to examine our own sin honestly, as opposed to religious based disgust that can see other's sin so clearly, but miss the plank in our own eye. Third, Gospel-oriented disgust will push us toward God as the righteous judge rather than toward vengeance. Finally, the Gospel will push us to God's grace and the hope of redemption, both for ourselves and our enemies, and therefore we will not act like Jonah when God chooses to save people who disgust us.