

Emotion in Fellowship: Reading and Prayer

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[0:00] Well, as I said, this is the last week for the series Faith and Feelings. As far as I know, there is still one more book left on the table in the foyer.

And just to let you know, there is a lot more to this book than what we have been teaching. Pastor John and I have been actually taking about three chapters at a time. And of course, if you are taking three chapters at a time, that means you are going to be leaving out some good stuff.

And so it might be good for you to order that book, to pick it up off the table. But last week we talked about two ways to cultivate godly emotions.

And the first one was a theme that we have been hitting on this whole series, and that is thinking. The emotions follow the thoughts. And so when we are thinking properly, when we are thinking scripturally, that is one way that we cultivate godly emotions, that our emotions become more and more holy.

And then we talked about singing. The Christian faith is a singing faith. From the Old Testament times all the way to the early church, even down to this day, we are making hymns.

[1:16] We are making new songs. The Christian faith is a singing faith. I recently read a story about Osama bin Laden. And while he was living in Sudan in the 90s, he met with some local leaders, and they wanted to provide some entertainment for him.

And part of that entertainment was some singing. And as they started the singing, I am not sure what kind of music it was. I am sure it was something culturally appropriate for the Sudan.

As soon as they started singing, Osama bin Laden demanded that they stop. They stop singing. And he said that singing has no part, does not belong in Islam.

Now, I am not sure how far we can take that, but the biblical faith, the scripture, the faith of the Bible, is definitely a singing faith.

Singing has everything to do with what it's like to be a Christian. So we sing.

[2:26] We heard this quote last week. We sing when we are happy. And when we aren't happy, we sing until we get happy. And so we use song to express our sorrow.

We use song to express our joy. But we heard last week that singing is more than just expressing. It more than expresses our emotion.

It excites our emotion. It stirs them up. So singing has a special way of moving our feelings. And God has wired us that way. There doesn't seem to be any other reason.

That the Bible is so full of poetry and song other than to grab our emotions as it teaches us truth. And so as we sing, we stir up our emotions.

And so it's not, it shouldn't be a surprising thing for you when you come into this place on the Lord's Day and maybe you're not feeling that worshipful. But as we sing, as we sing the songs of our faith, our hearts are stirred up.

[3:34] And that isn't empty emotionalism. That isn't, you know, some sort of manipulation. That is using God's ordained means of stirring up our emotions to His praise.

And so here's the point. If you want to cultivate godly emotions, then use godly music to stir you up. Use and appreciate godly music.

Now today we're going to talk about three remaining ways to cultivate our emotions. The first is relationships. And the second and the third are the word of God and prayer.

So first, relationships. Developing godly emotions doesn't happen in a bubble. It happens in a community. Happens in a community.

In a family like this one. And this week I saw a lot of that going on here within this body.

[4:37] I think there were a lot of, I mean, I'm not accusing anyone because I'm one of these, but I think there was a lot of worried, concerned, maybe even a bit frazzled people around here this

week.

There was a major change in the wedding. The reception was supposed to be somewhere else and all of a sudden it was in a different place. That demanded a lot of change and a lot of thought and a lot of hustle. And it was hard.

And on top of that, we find out that a two-year-old died in our midst. She passed away. And that's hard. And I saw it again and again as you encouraged each other and you helped each other.

And I was thinking, where would we be if we didn't have each other? I think there would be a lot of bitter, doubting, worried, angry people coming around here.

Don't you think? If it was just up to us to manage these waters. But we had each other. And so I saw this week rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn.

[5:46] And I saw brothers and sisters encouraging each other. And I'm looking forward to seeing that more as the next couple days go along. And I saw you encouraging each other to believe even when things were hard through these difficulties.

And I think this is the key, that we can't divorce our emotions from faith. Building up our faith necessarily means that we are going to be cultivating godly emotions.

There's a distinct connection. Unbelief produces ungodly emotions. Unbelief produces ungodly emotions. Think about the sins, the ungodly emotions that come out of unbelief.

There's wrath. There's malice, envy, jealousy, hatred, all emotions. And they all have at their core, at their root, unbelief. But on the other hand, faith, it produces love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and gentleness.

So faith encourages godly emotions. And so if we want to kind of put this picture all out there, it's because faith and our emotions are connected that community is so important because community is so important for encouraging our faith.

[7:13] So you see, community, faith, and then through faith, emotions. So let's think about the relationship between faith and community.

Faith is personal, isn't it? I have to believe. But faith is not private. I believe, but I need you to help me to believe.

Think of Hebrews chapter 3. We're going to turn to some other passages later, but I'm going to read a couple passages here. Hebrews chapter 3, 12 and 13. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. So unbelief is a poison.

And it's a poison that can cause someone to turn away from God. And apostasy, this turning away, generally isn't a purely intellectual apostasy.

[8:19] There's not very many people that just purely intellectually leave the faith. Usually the emotions get involved in this. And when the emotions get involved in wrong thinking, then people fall away.

So, as most of you know, the end of the world was supposed to happen yesterday. It's not the first time that something like that has been predicted, obviously, and it's not the first time that something like that has been predicted and it's wrong.

In the 70s, the Jehovah Witnesses predicted that the end was coming. And when it didn't happen in the 70s, a million people left that faith.

Okay? Was that a purely intellectual leaving? I know they're a false religion, but I'm just drawing an analogy here. It wasn't, because their hopes were raised, their thinking was, their emotions were involved in wrong thinking, and then when they were disappointed, they left.

And the same thing can happen to the true faith. So, the Israelites are in the desert and God is leading them out and the spies go in and ten of them come back with a fearful report and fear gripped the people.

[9:35] They saw the giants in the land. They saw the great high walls and their faith wavered and then they rebelled against the Lord. And so, unbelief is a poison that leads to sinful, ungodly emotions.

So, it was unbelief and fear that led to that apostasy. And so, what is the author of the Hebrews saying?

So, unbelief is the poison. What's the antidote? And the antidote, he says, is community. It's you and I as we hold each other up. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart

and then he goes on, but encourage one another daily.

What's going to keep us from wavering in our faith? It's going to be each other. And so, the bottom line is that we need each other in this battle against unbelief that we all have.

And we need each other, therefore, to cultivate godly emotions. So, how do we cultivate godly emotions in community? We encourage each other. We need each other to do this.

[10:46] I need you to encourage me. And you need me to encourage you. So, encouragement strengthens faith, which in turn cultivates these godly emotions that we're talking about.

Now, another passage in Hebrews supports this idea. Hebrews 10, 24, and 25. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love.

That's an emotion. It's not just an emotion, but it is an emotion. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

So, we need to just be with each other. We need to meet together. And we need to do that so that we can spur each other on towards love.

We need to meet with each other and be together to encourage each other. And so, so community is the way that we can encourage each other to godly emotions.

[11:50] And community also provides the environment, the forum, where we can exercise godly emotions. So, practice, makes perfect, right?

Practice makes perfect. And as we have the opportunity to express godly emotions in this community, we become better and better at expressing these godly emotions.

So, let me ask you, this is for your, your, for you to answer, what, what godly emotions do we need a community to express?

What godly emotions do we need a community like this one to express? Love. Love. Okay. Love. Why love? Let the person know that God loves us and we need to show our love to them.

Okay. You can love ideas, but generally in the Bible we're talking about loving people. And if there aren't people there to love, you're really not loving them.

[12:54] It's really easy to love the brothers and sisters that you never meet with, isn't it? It's really easy to love the people that you're never around with. You know, if all you do is sit and watch the TV and watch the, you know, but you're safe and sound in your, in your living room watching the church service on TV, well, it's really easy to love all the brothers and sisters.

But when you actually get around them, then it becomes an exercise, doesn't it? What other, someone over here said something, what other emotions? Hope.

Okay, why? Why hope? Why do we need a community to hope? Okay, very good. Okay, go ahead. That's a plural, isn't it?

They're doing it together. Anyone else? What other emotions do we need each other to exercise? Right. We're going to exercise those kind of emotions. There needs to be other people to cause that, to be the catalyst of those, those emotions.

What else? Okay, Cindy? Yes, why compassion? Yeah.

[14:18] Remember, two weeks ago, we talked about Jesus having compassion on the widow of name. If she, if he wasn't involved, if he wasn't there, he couldn't have exercised that compassion.

And if we don't have each other, when we're hurting, then there's no opportunity for that, for our brother or sister to show compassion to us. And it's as we, we see one of our brothers and sisters hurting, and we have compassion on them, that our compassion muscle, so to speak, is exercised, and we begin to cultivate this godly emotion of compassion.

Jeanette, did you have something? Okay. Yeah.

I'm just, I'm sure this whole week of getting this wedding together and all those sorts of things, it demanded a lot of patience from each other, didn't it? You, you have to have people who are fallible, who are just like you, who make mistakes, who don't know things, who mess up, if you're going to show patience, who sin against you, if you're going to show patience.

And so it's as we are together that we can have patience. There's another thing, sort of related to patience, I'm thinking of. Roger. I'm thinking of somebody.

[15:42] I, I, I, I, I had a couple of experiences with, I, people with young kids who, you can see their home, their parents are paying attention to them, their, their, their, their that position in the family where, their, it's, you know, they're, they've got big sisters, another brother, everybody else get more attention than they are.

How all of a sudden, you hear, and they just unload on you, and they're obviously unloading. I mean, you ask them one simple question, and they take off with it, and they talk forever. And, you see, there's been a release there that, and all of a sudden, you know, I, I just had a couple of times, but by the end of, you know, your community with them, they're, they've come out of themselves, they're, they're brightened up, they're full of joy, thinking that you're the greatest thing that ever happened to them.

All you did was give them a lesson. Hmm. So, yeah, I think related to compassion is, I think what you're talking about is empathy of where we're putting ourselves in that person's shoes, and we're listening, and that is a, is a godly emotion.

I think that's, Jesus did that a lot. You go through the Gospels, and you watch how many times he sees people, and, you know, that seeing people is more than just viewing them with his eyes.

[17:03] He's going into their situation, and he's, he's understanding and recognizing because whenever he saw someone, he had a, an emotional response to them.

He, he wasn't left just hardened. How about forgiveness? We've talked about forgiveness being more than just a promise, it's a feeling, and, if, I mean, we're going to be sinned against, and we're going to be sinned against among our brothers and sisters, and you know that, and you've all experienced that, you've, you've been sinned against in one way or another, and if, it's in that context of being sinned against in a community, in a faith, in a family, in a church, that we learn to exercise forgiveness, and so we, we do need to be around each other, because we, we give each other opportunities to stretch and to grow godly emotions, and so, well, before we move on to the next topic, let me just encourage you then to make this church a priority for you, a priority, and by that,

I don't mean this or that ministry necessarily, ministries are a good way to serve each other, but I'm talking about even more simply, I mean the people, make the, the body of believers that you have agreed to, to be a part of, make that a priority, and when you come into the body, you say certain vows to each other about, you know, getting to know each other, loving each other, disciplining each other, there's a lot of one anothering that you have agreed to, and so I just want to remind you of that, and whatever else is going on in your life, and whatever other relationships you have, the church is eternal, the church is eternal, our families aren't, our marriages aren't, but our church, the church of Christ is, and so make it a priority,

I think Matthew Elliott, he's an author that's written a lot on emotions and Christianity, listen to what he said, I think he has it exactly right, in an era of churches focusing on professional stage presentations and great music, perhaps some of our churches need to revive the potluck dinner, family night, and the church picnic, the church family has the most wonderful reasons to rejoice, and joy, and laughter should characterize our fellowship together, we are called to enjoy one another's company, just as Jesus made best friends, it is only in loving and enjoying one another up close, that we will be prepared to bear one another's burdens when the pain and crisis of this world, crises of this world come rushing down upon us, and so brothers and sisters, you excel in many areas, excel in community, excel in fellowship with each other, this world is falling apart, our culture, our families, our society is being fractured, and by God's grace, let's make grace fellowship different, where we actually show genuine love, where we show genuine commitment to one another, and as we do, we're going to cultivate godly emotions, so the second way that we cultivate godly emotions is the word of God, and so these last two, the word of God, taking in the word of God in prayer, are the twin pillars of the Christian life, aren't they?

in many respects, a consistent life in these spiritual disciplines will, in a great way, cultivate godly emotions, and it's really impossible for us to go into all the different ways that prayer and taking in the word of God does this.

[21:14] It's a very wide open field, but we're going to talk just about a few things. And so the word of God, the word of God helps us to cultivate godly emotions because it doesn't just speak to our minds, it speaks to us as whole people, speaks to us as whole people.

Tremper Longman wrote this, the Bible is a book that feeds our intellect, but it does far, far more than that. It arouses our emotions, stimulates our imagination, and appeals to our will.

The Bible addresses us as whole people. And so the Bible doesn't leave us emotionally where it finds us. And that's one reason the book of Psalms is so powerful in so many of your lives because just how many times have you gone to the Psalms and you're depressed, you're sad, you're worried, you're in these emotional states of sin and you've left confident, you're left believing.

Why is that? It's not because, it's because two things are coming together. The Psalms are telling us truth that we need to hear in that situation.

But more than that, the Psalms reaches, the Psalms reach our emotions. The Psalms are poetry. They're poetry. They don't talk prosaically about pain and hurting.

[22 : 52] They take us into the Psalmist's pain and hurting and worry and sin. And it takes us there so that we can understand and experience their pain and their joy.

joy. And so the Bible as a whole, not just the Psalms and not just certain other parts, are designed to reach our emotions and to sanctify them.

It reaches them. But more than that, the Bible by the Spirit gives us the very joy of Jesus in our hearts.

and so I would ask you to turn in your Bibles to John chapter 15. John chapter 15 verse 11. So this is in the middle of the upper room discourse.

John 15, 11. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

[23 : 59] Now the Lord Jesus had spoken many things to his disciples in just the last couple hours or the last several minutes or however long this whole section took.

He had predicted his betrayal. He had commanded them to love one another. He had given them an example of how to love one another. He had comforted them with teaching on prayer and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

and he challenged them to abide in him and abide in him and bear fruit. And in John 15, 11 he tells them why he's been telling him these things.

I've told you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Jesus wanted them to have joy.

He wanted them to have emotional godliness. And so what's the joy that Jesus is talking about?

Look up at verse 10 and this tells us if you obey my commands you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love.

[25 : 15] So where did Jesus' joy come from? Jesus' joy was the joy that came from obeying his father and remaining in his love. And so as he obeyed he was in the circle of God's love and favor and blessing.

And Jesus lived in that circle and so all this time Jesus is having the pleasure of obeying God and also at the same time receiving God's love for him.

So as Jesus obeyed the father he experienced the love of God and that produced joy. And so do you understand what Jesus is saying? He's saying I've told you all these things so that you could have the joy that I have.

So that you can obey and experience God's love too. And he says what kind of joy am I giving you? I'm giving you complete joy. There's no greater joy than obeying God and having God's love showered on you as you abide in him.

[26 : 25] And so Jesus isn't giving us some hand-me-down joy. He's not giving us seconds. He's giving us the greatest joy that a human can possibly have.

Complete joy. So the question is how do we experience that joy? Well, it's through the word of God.

It's through the word of God. As we hear it and we obey it, as we remain in the word, as we're listening in Jesus' words to us, as we're taking in his words about prayer and abiding and obeying and loving and serving one another, it's as we take those words in, as we take in the scripture and believe them and put them into practice, that we have joy.

joy. And so the Bible, as we relate to it, as we live in it and abide in it and believe it, it becomes the greatest source of our joy.

So the word revives our hearts. When we're all dried up, the word revives our hearts. Psalm 19 7, we'll memorize this in a few weeks.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The word comforts us in our afflictions then. Psalm 119 50, my comfort in my suffering is this, your promise preserves my life.

[27 : 52] What was the psalmist comfort? It was the promise of God. The word provides hope in times of despair. Psalm 119 verse 116 sustain me according to your promise and I will live.

Do not let my hopes be dashed. It's really hard to know what the psalmist is going through in Psalm 119, but we do know that there are enemies around, there's sin in his heart.

And so as the psalmist looks around, he's looking for a place to find hope, to find sustenance. And the place he turns is the word of God.

As God speaks to him, it gives him comfort, it gives him strength. And that's Psalm 119 28, the word provides strength in the middle of grief.

My soul is weary with sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. So where else can we go as broken, hurting people? We turn to the word of God.

[28 : 58] And as we turn to it and live in it and believe it, the spirit of God encourages us and builds up our faith. And so the word of God is just full of life-giving, faith-building promises.

And that's why it's absolutely necessary if we're going to cultivate godly emotions. If we're going to be the kind of emotionally godly people that are just like Jesus, remember?

on every occasion he knew exactly how to feel and his heart responded in just the right way and it was never too much and it was never too little and he was never angry at the wrong times and he was never compassionate or he was always compassionate when there was a reason to be compassionate.

We have to have the word of God abiding in us just like it was abiding in him and so when we believe like we ought we feel like we should and it's that word of God that builds our faith it calls out faith the word of it's from the preaching of the gospel that faith comes.

Now the other spiritual discipline that is crucial to cultivating godly emotions is prayer prayer and this is the third and last point you still have your bibles hopefully open to john turn over to john 16:24 16:24 and this is still in the middle of this discourse until now you have asked you have not asked for anything in my name ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete so prayer cultivates joy now let me ask you based on this passage what what's the obvious reason that prayer produces joy what's the obvious reason we ask and he hears and he not only hears he answers he gives this is a promise that god will hear our prayers and will answer us and i don't think i need to tell you but this isn't a free for all it's not a proof text for name it and claim it verse 23 says you should ask in jesus name and and that's more than just a few words tacked on to the end of a prayer that means you're really trusting in jesus you are really asking for christ's glory and when your commitment finally is to christ and his glory god will answer that because he's committed to the same thing but when the qualifications are met this promise stands absolutely true and that means that prayer opens the door for god fulfilling our every need and every kind of desire that we have that is in accord with christ and his glory for the expansion of jesus kingdom and so it's a strong it's a good promise and when we're praying and when we're receiving there's an obvious reason to be happy i mean we should be happy when god answers our prayers and we are happy and we do rejoice now let me ask you besides answered prayer how does praying cultivate godly emotions besides just because we get what we're looking for how does praying cultivate godly emotions there's a couple other ways yes dare right philippians four don't be anxious about anything but in prayer and thanksgiving present your request to god we move from anxiety to faith in prayer as we give thanksgiving what else dave i think that that goes back as we're calling on him and we find him to come through for us he becomes our strong tower and he rescues us our hearts are lifted out of fear and we're lifted into worship what else roger yeah when when you pray it opens the doors well it opens your eyes so that you can see god working you get to see it in the past and you get to see it in the present and that brings you joy there's something about prayer that makes us awake that wakes us up to god's work and i know a lot of you have prayed a lot this week right for this wedding and all that stuff and for a

[34 : 12] lot of other things for the pools now you know god might have made that wedding go off without a hitch without you praying that's a possibility but without with but let me ask you would you be as thankful if you hadn't prayed no i don't think so everything might have gone as smooth as can be but would you have seen god so god's hand so evident and working out details and working in people and helping if you hadn't prayed when you pray it opens up your eyes and prepares you to see god at work and when we see god in action when we see him providing when we see him working in details and when we see him protecting when we see him working sovereignly and giving grace and all sorts of things it helps us to we're more thankful we're more holy we're more loving we're more joyful and we sing it there's a place where jesus sheds the oil of gladness on our heads a place that all besides more sweet it is the bloodstained mercy seat when we go there and when we see god forgiving sinners and forgiving us it provokes joy in us yes roger there's another one great expectation i mean like you said already when you lay that at feet and you see there's a problem ahead and you can't imagine how he's going to get you out of the state to be able to say boy this is going to be amazing it's going to be a wonder to see how right yes jim god delivered now

is there any other way that prayer cultivates godliness can you think of just one very basic way about just praying itself dale yeah i think we could go into a lot of that humility is absolutely key to emotional godliness pride is malice and anger and envy and all sorts of things or leads to all those things mom exactly i think that relates perfectly to where i want to conclude when we pray we commune with god we draw close to god and god has said at his right hand there's pleasures there's joy forevermore at his right hand when we are with god we as creatures are where we were meant to be and we're communing with him and we're experiencing his love we're understanding more than just on an intellectual level his power and his grace and his mercy and we enjoy his presence and just being with god it just it paves the road to cultivate godly emotions when we're with god our emotions are sanctified now those two disciplines taking in the word of god and prayer they're not surprising

I'm sure this isn't earth shattering to any of you but don't let familiarity breed contempt these things are familiar but they are valuable beyond words we could god could take everything from us and if we had the bible and prayer we would be rich i mean we would be so rich we would have everything we need well we just have a minute or two i want to wrap up the study there's basically two tragedies to avoid in this whole topic of emotions and one i think is one that we lean towards and i'm not saying that we do this all the time but just sort of as a church or as a movement or whatever you want to call us we lean this way and that's to become suspicious of emotions and i hope in a lot of ways the Sunday school lesson has opened up our eyes to the validity of emotions the need to develop really godly emotions it's not just good enough to obey and to believe god commands us to feel many things and sometimes i think sometimes we can become suspicious of those things one time i heard someone talking about another church and they said something like this oh that's a feel good church and i know what that was trying to say you know i do but i hope we aren't enemies to exuberant joy here feeling good is is not the problem empty emotionalism is okay the gospel is good news you know we sing that song we've heard a joyful sound jesus saves jesus saves we should be exuberant in our joy and so feeling good is not the problem it's not the enemy empty emotionalism is so that's one thing we want i want to put sort of a bulwark on that side a wall here let's not go over that way and then on the other side is the second tragedy many evangelical churches are just you know stuck on a feeling you know that sort of thing and they have this minimal doctrinal whatever you know there's minimal doctrine theology and truth why would you want that that just sort of divides people and so they want to dim the lights and just sing and sing and sing again is singing the problem no is singing with emotion the problem no is using songs and music that stirs our emotions the problem no there's nothing godly about having music that you don't like that you can't sing to it's not the problem it's the lack of truth that is the tragedy and the glorious reality is that truth and emotions faith and feelings theology and experience they aren't enemies they're best friends it reminds me of what Spurgeon said about when someone asked well how do you reconcile man's free will and man's will and god's sovereignty and his answer was you don't need to reconcile best friends they go together and we don't need to reconcile faith and feelings they're best friends so we don't discount either one we don't discount feelings we don't discount truth one without the other is worthless god has revealed himself gloriously in this world and we are meant to emotionally experience it we are meant to have that penetrate our minds and go into our hearts and draw out worship and so where is all this going well you probably don't remember where we ended the last sunday school series it was on psalm and the psalms remember well we ended up on psalm 8 or i did psalm 8 verse 1 oh lord our lord how majestic is your name in all the earth where is all this going where is all all this emotions and theology going it's going here the end of everything is god's glory the end of feelings is god's glory god created us to feel reverence and to feel awe and to feel joy before him and so brothers let's cultivate godly emotions to the glory of god why because oh lord our lord how majestic is your name in all the earth well we are dismissed may may