

## I. Introduction

- A. We have a big audience here. Many of us were reared in church, many were not. I was. In my case, our church service was pretty formal. Most men wore suits; most ladies wore dresses. My mom usually made me wear a tie. The music was traditional, hymns from a red hymn book, and a song leader with piano and organ. Everything was slow and solemn.
- B. Nobody dared clap their hands. After a soloist sang, we just sat there. One guy in the audience always said, "Amen." The rest of us just kept quiet while the singer climbed down from the stage.
- C. I don't think they intended it, but one of the lessons I learned from all of this was that emotions were taboo. They could even be dangerous. I couldn't trust them.
- D. In fact, I was taught that we're supposed to manage our emotions. I began to think if I didn't corral my emotions, I'd wind up in a spiritual car crash. It was easy for me to conclude that Christianity was anti-emotional—Cerebral—all in our heads.
- E. There was one emotion my church was big on: guilt. Guilt was the official emotion of biblical Christianity. That's what I thought.
- F. Maybe you thought that too.
- G. I'm beginning a new series of messages today. It's called Can You Feel it? The subtitle is God's Wisdom on Human Emotions. My goal is to show you that God created us as emotional beings. Your emotions are a gift from God. God doesn't want you to suppress them, repress them, deny them, avoid them, or even manage them. Emotions are meant to be felt. Feel your feelings. That is their purpose.
- H. My goal is that you would learn from God's Word how to feel your feelings in a really healthy way. To feel them in a way that brings you inner wholeness and joy.
- I. Jesus was emotional. When He was mad, you knew it. When He was sad, He cried. When He was tired, He showed it. He took naps. When He was glad, He turned water into wine. You felt it. You never had to guess what Jesus was feeling; He felt the full range of human emotions, and He was the greatest man (the God-man) who ever lived.
- J. I have to issue three disclaimers, and then we'll look at our Bible verses for today:
  - 1. I am not advocating emotionalism, or blurting out all your emotions, or always wearing your emotions on your shirt sleeve—not at all. There is a mature expression of emotion; and a time and place for emotion. There are legitimate times to curb our emotions, so I'm not denying that. Remember Tom Hank's famous line in the movie A League of Their Own—it was about baseball. What did he say? "There's no crying in baseball!"
  - 2. I am not doing group therapy from the pulpit. My job is to communicate God's Word. We will be biblical, and we will be theological. Your job is to take it from there. You may want to discuss some issues with your family, friends, or your small group. Or even a counselor or therapist. One of the most important applications you can make from this series will be to ask somebody to pray for you. You may seek out counseling. That's great. Scripture speaks of those who are "competent to counsel" (Rom 15:14). But my task is to open God's Word with you, and discern God's Wisdom on our emotions.
  - 3. I am a fellow pilgrim, not an expert, in the arena of emotional health. Just because I can teach from God's Word doesn't mean that I've got my act together. I'm working on it, just like you are. IN other words, this might be one of those cases were you should do as I say, not as I do—just being honest here.
- K. So, let's get into God's Word now.

## II. Can You Feel It?

## A. The Source

- 1. God made you in His image, and He designed you to feel your feelings. The Bible says,
  - a) *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...' " Genesis 1:26, NKJV.*
- 2. If you ever need to check the blueprints for yourself, you have to go to the Bible. This is called Biblical Anthropology 101, the doctrine of human nature.
- 3. You are a body, soul, and spirit. Your body is pretty obvious—the physical part of you that interacts with the material world. Your spirit is an invisible part of you that interacts with God, and the realm beyond this visible one. Your soul is your personality, the real you that everybody knows.
- 4. With your soul, you think. With your soul, you decide. And with your soul you feel. When God gave you a soul, He gave you a mind, will, and emotions.
- 5. Check out how the Bible describes this:
  - a) *"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;" Colossians 3:12, NKJV.*

- b) *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;” Colossians 3:12, KJV.*
6. Where do you feel your emotions? In your gut, so ancient people figured that your emotions came from there, and they used words like bowels and kidneys to talk about them.
  7. The word reins is an old fashioned word for kidneys. Here’s one more verse, two different ways:
    - a) *“Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.” Psalms 26:2, NKJV.*
    - b) *“Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.” Psalms 26:2, KJV.*
  8. The psalmist prayed that God would examine his mind and his emotions. Why? Because the choices you make flow out from your mind and your emotions. Your emotions are a super-important part of your decision-making apparatus. If your emotions are messed up, your choices will be messed up. And if your choices are messed up, your life will be messed up. That’s why it’s so important to learn God’s wisdom on human emotion.
  9. Emotional problems are spiritual problems, and spiritual problems are emotional problems.
  10. God made you in His image, and He designed you to feel your feelings.
  11. Now this is really amazing. God could have made us all emotionless robots. Or like Spock on Star Trek—brainiacs without emotions.
  12. But God had a purpose in giving us our feelings. What was that?
- B. The Purpose
1. I want you to notice something in Galatians 5.
    - a) *“The acts of the [flesh/Inner Mess] are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21, NIV.*
  2. Look at all the emotionally charged spiritual malfunctions in this list: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfishness, dissensions (arguing), factions (taking sides in other people’s fights), and envy—when your Inner Mess takes control you become an emotional basket case. If you have deep rooted emotional problems, they flow out of deep rooted spiritual problems (the exception is mental/emotional illness, which can be helped through medication or other therapies).
  3. Your flesh—your inner dark side—sees your emotions as its personal playground. Your flesh is dedicated to making you an emotional wreck.
  4. But thank God there’s another force at work inside you. The Holy Spirit came into you when you received Jesus. And He uses His power to counteract your flesh. And when you unleash the Spirit’s power in your life, what is the result? The result is a healthy life emotionally. Look at this list:
    - a) *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22, 23, NIV.*
  5. The Bible has a whole lot to say about your emotions, because your emotional health is an amazing barometer of your life with God. The idea is that when God is working in you, and you’re using the Spirit’s power, you are free to live an emotionally healthy life.
  6. That doesn’t mean that if you feel sad or scared or mad, you’re messed up with God—not at all. The most mature Christian still feels the full range of emotion. The most holy Christian still feels the full range of emotion. The most Spirit-filled Christian still feels the full range of emotion. Jesus wept right? He got angry? He felt deeply. You can be very strong with God, and still have difficult emotions.
  7. But you will have true emotions. Clean emotions. Emotions connected with reality. You’re angry at real injustice, and you fear real threats, and you sorrow at real losses.
  8. You will also have true joy. Complete happiness.
  9. Jesus promised,
    - a) *“I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10, NKJV.*
  10. And this is the reason God gave you your feelings. Healthy emotions create capacity for life.
  11. The average pair of human lungs holds about six quarts of air. You don’t breathe that much in an out with each breath, but that’s what’s in there.
  12. If you grew up in the mountains, you have a slightly larger lung capacity than if you grew up at sea level. Your body builds bigger lungs to make up for less-oxygenated atmosphere.
  13. I’m saying this because I want to illustrate an important principle that can change your life.
  14. God gave you emotions to increase your capacity for life. Capacity for life, that’s the important principle here. How much you can engage with life, with people, with culture, with the world. How much you can enjoy the good things God surrounds you with.

15. Put two Christians in identical life settings: same town, same personality types, same preferences, same income, same home—two Christians in identical settings, and one will experience a full, happy, joyful, meaningful life, and the other will experience an empty, broken, miserable, pointless life.
16. What's the difference?
17. Capacity: capacity for life. What is your capacity for life? How much joy can you handle? You can either love life, or hate life—or live in some kind of half-numb zombie middle and it's not the environment that makes the difference. The abundant life Jesus promised has to happen in you long before it happens around you. It's not about your environment, or bank accounts, or the size of your house. It's about your capacity for life.
18. And that capacity depends on healthy emotions. Healthy emotions create capacity for life. That's their purpose.
19. So God created you as an emotional person—that's the source of emotions. And He did this so you could have a very big capacity for life. That's their purpose.
20. Now what exactly do emotions do? What is their function?

### c. The Nature

1. Appreciators: Your emotions let you appreciate beauty and goodness wherever you find it. When the sun hits snow-covered Mt Shasta just right, when the 8-pound bass breaks the surface leaping a foot into the air trying to shake out the lure, when you feel the downy soft hair on your newborn's head—you appreciate life. You appreciate beauty and goodness. Wouldn't life be cold and barren without emotions?
  - a) *"Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." Psalms 29:2, NKJV.*
2. Bonders: Your emotions also create bonds of affection. We are natural bonders. We feel attached to certain people and that attachment is good and healthy. The Bible calls love the "bond of maturity" (Col 3:14). Mature Christians form healthy attachments to other people. You care for them. You feel for them in your gut. Not quite a year ago, our then 5-year-old son underwent a 3 hour surgery to remove a lump from his throat. Maybe you've gone through something horrible with your kids, or your husband or wife or parent or someone in your life. You feel it, sometimes harder than they feel it. Why? Because you are an emotional person who forms attachments. That's a good thing. Without emotions, we'd all float through life isolated, and robotic. Or maybe we'd form alliances just for self-preservation. But God is a Trinity, and though He is singular, He is never alone and He is never lonely. And when He made us, He gave us this amazing ability to feel and care and sympathize and bond.
  - a) So emotions are appreciators and bonders. They are also:
3. Motivators: On Friday, I went to Safeway, and as I was going in the door, I saw this guy assaulting a woman. I was pretty far away in the parking lot, but I did two things: I ran in that direction, and I called 911. I felt angry and confused and scared all at once. I was really relieved to see other guys running toward the scene too. This woman was screaming, "Help me! Make him give me back my money." And I'm talking to the 911 operator, and giving details, and this woman is on the ground, and this guy is on top of her, and my heart was racing. Now, before I tell you the end of the story, let me make one point: emotions are called emotions because they evoke motion. It is emotion that gets you off your rear end and gets you moving. As much as we like to think that we are motivated by truth and Bible doctrine—and you know I think that's the most important gift a church can give its people—it is not truth that motivates directly, it is the emotion that responds to the truth.
  - a) Think of Jesus going into the temple, and getting furious, and dumping over the money-changer's table, and driving out the salvation-merchandisers with a whip. He was furious. He was red-hot mad.
  - b) The Bible says that zeal for the Lord's house consumed Him (John 2:17). Translation: Jesus was red hot passionate about God and His glory, and pity the poor fool that tarnished that glory.
  - c) Emotions evoke motion. They are motivators.
  - d) Oh yeah, the man who was assaulting the woman turned out to be store security, and by the time I got there, he was slapping handcuffs on her while his partner called the cops.
4. Responders: God designed your emotions to respond to truth. I received an email from someone who's been reading the Inner Mess book. She said she laughed a lot, and also that she cried a lot while reading the book—especially when I talked about Jesus dying on the Cross. She wanted to know if I made people cry a lot when I preached. I wrote back that I probably didn't make people cry a lot, but I have a hard time not getting choked up when I teach about the Crucifixion. That monumental truth of the Cross is the North Star for our emotions. The way emotions work is this: there's a reality out there, a truth, an event, a person, a danger, an opportunity. There's a reality out there, outside you, in front of you. Your

mind analyzes that reality. Your emotions respond to that reality. You feel whatever you feel—mad, sad, glad, sacred, tender, excited. You feel your feelings. You have a built in radar screen warning you, motivating you, or confusing you. Emotions respond to truth and reality.

5. But sometimes we're messed up. And instead of responding to truth or reality, we respond to deception or false evaluations.
6. And that's when emotions can really mess up our lives.

#### D. The Breakdown

1. The Fall has damaged our emotions. We have this little problem called SIN, and it's like sand in our emotional gearbox. Don't take this personally. I'm not saying that you are a basket case because you've sinned—though that might be true. I'm saying that all of us have the capacity to be emotional basket cases because we are messed up with God. We are fallen members of a fallen race. We are taken captive by a hostile force, and that force toys with our emotions like a cat with a crippled mouse.
  - a) *"Oh, what a miserable [wretched] person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?" Romans 7:24, NLT.*
2. There is a sin-dominated force in our hearts that the Bible calls the flesh. The flesh is like an eighth grade bully in an elementary school play ground. It trips you up every way possible; it distorts the truth, and it distorts your emotions.
3. When the human race fell into sin, we all became a bunch of basket cases. And that's why we hate, envy, lust, gossip, worry, fret, panic, turn bitter, hold grudges, get vengeful, judgmental, seething, fighting each other—we turn selfish and inward and concerned only for ourselves.
4. The pure joy that God made you for is marred by sin. So the question:
  - a) *"Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?" Romans 7:24, NLT.*
5. And the answer returns:
  - a) *"Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord..." Romans 7:25, NLT.*
6. The Fall has damaged our emotions, that's true. But the Cross reverses its effects. The Cross undoes the Fall. When Jesus died on the Cross, and when He rose again, He didn't just save you from sin—He saved you from emotional wreckage. He made it possible for you to be whole again—for you to find peace that passes understanding and joy unspeakable and full of glory.
7. He created a new capacity for you to be...
  - a) Angry, but not violent
  - b) Sad, but not suicidal
  - c) Fearful, but not fretful
  - d) Disappointed, but not disgusted
8. Jesus brings into you a new potential to extinguish your toxic emotions, and to live a healthy, clean, straight, honest, simple emotional life—without creating all kinds of needless drama.

#### III. Conclusion

- A. And for the next seven weeks, we're going to see how God can heal damaged emotions.
- B. Let's not call it group therapy. Let's call it group bonding to God. We live in crazy times. We don't have the luxury of being crazy people. Life's too short. Your kids need you to get your head together and your heart too. Let's get whole. Let's get healed. Let's get strong.
- C. You can be more like Jesus than you are today. You really can. You can get past some weird emotional stuff that's held you back for years. You can rise above your past—even if it was terrible. You can find the love and approval you're seeking. You can find your identity in Jesus instead of from negative voices from your past. You can feel your feelings. You can laugh again.
- D. You can be happy. You can be healthy. You can be free. You can be whole.
- E. I know you can, because the power God is ready to make it happen.
- F. In the coming weeks, we'll see how.