

"You can't be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature." – Peter Scazzero

Emotional damage from our past affects how we view ourselves, how we respond to others, how we treat others, how we respond to others who touch our pain, and how we view God. It is important that we resolve the emotional areas of pain so that our present relationships will not be negatively affected. Unresolved emotional damage causes us to build walls to protect our heart from further hurt. We do not allow others to get too close lest they hurt us like we have been damaged in the past. Neither can we give love if we have been too emotionally damaged. – John Regier

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" Jesus replied, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."
Matthew 22:36-40

Jesus spoke to the core of people, to their hearts. He connected with the hearts of his audience, and that was relieving for some and threatening for others. He cared about actions, of course, but primarily because actions spring from the heart.

The heart is where we store our pain. We're also told to love God with our whole hearts, and people too. The trouble is, in order to love God (or people) from our hearts, we have to spend some time down in our own hearts, and that can be scary, especially if we've buried and stored a lot of pain down in there.

Our hearts are where we store our pain AND it's where we experience joy and the deepest form of healing. Jesus doesn't want us to paint a thin veneer over our hearts, saying "It's all in the past and I'm pressing on now!" In reality, that's often just fake, and it's a way to NOT deal with our deep pain. Like a wound, if you just cover it up with a bandage and say it's all better, you might feel better for a bit, and others might think you're fine, but the wound is still there. And it will probably get worse. It needs to be gently exposed and treated.

The great news is that Jesus is the great Healer. He can take care of our pain, our past hurts. He can handle it all, and in fact he wants to. He doesn't want us living with bitterness and fear and anger and pain.

Practically Speaking

Keep in mind, always, that the most important thing required to help someone connect with their own heart is that YOU are connected to YOURS.

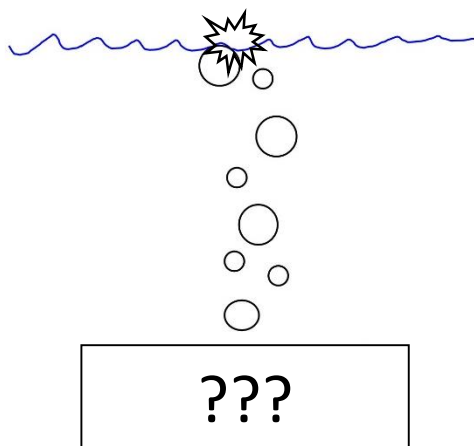
Even if people don't have the words to describe it, they know if you're just talking from your head. They know if it's just your mind conveying information. And they can tell when it shifts and you're speaking from your heart.

Before teaching these ideas, it would probably be a good idea for you to pause and ask yourself, "Why am I doing this? Is it important? What if this impacted this disciple? And then their children? Their community and nation? How would Jesus feel about the disciple sitting in front of me? What would his vision be for their life? Would Jesus want to see them connecting to the heart of the Father, experiencing the comfort of the Spirit, and feeling the presence of the Son?"

These questions should help you connect with your own heart. This is not just about teaching content – this is about watching Jesus heal people through the love of the Father, the power of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Jesus.

These ideas are all somewhat esoteric. Here are some visual aids to help convey these truths. These are designed to set the stage for Adding What's Missing, and I believe they could be taught to Cambodians who could then teach them to others, and so on.

BUBBLES



The bubbles represent our feelings/emotions. When they reach the surface and pop, we see them as actions. Sometimes, what we see is an angry outburst or a lustful act, or simple crying. We often try to stop the bubbles from surfacing, either because we don't want others to know, or maybe because our actions when the bubbles pop are wrong. However, just trying to catch them before they get to the surface doesn't work very well. We need to ask, Where are they coming from?

What causes me to get angry like this?

What causes me to want to sin like this?

What makes me sad and cry like this?

A big goal here is to be brave enough to trace the actions we see (bursting bubbles on the surface) to the feelings/emotions that cause them (the bubbles) to the box (historical event or pain) that produces them.

Of course, it might be as simple as the person's sin nature. However, I believe that the general brokenness of our world, plus the specific pain (abuse, neglect, etc.) experienced, exacerbates the effects of our sin nature. For example, looking at porn is wrong and stems from a basic lust of the flesh. However, there are emotional and historical components that can't be ignored. Jesus didn't just tell people to "stop sinning." He cared about their stories too. He cared about their hearts.

LANDMINES

Even if you can't see a mine, it can still hurt you. Even if it's been buried and out of sight a long time, it can still injure you and others. God wants to "de-mine" our hearts, healing us, and making that land usable again.

What happens to land that has mines? It's dangerous. You're afraid to go there. Other people are afraid to go there. What can the land be used for? What happens when the mines have been removed? It's good for farming or planting or building a house. It's good for so much! What would a landowner feel like after being told that his land has been completely cleared of mines? Would his behavior change?



So, what can be done? First, you have to recognize that there is danger there. Are there things you don't want to talk about because it hurts too much? Are there emotions or feelings that you often begin to feel and then force yourself to stop feeling? Why? Is it because of fear? If so, that's very normal and understandable. Jesus wants to give you a safe place to go when you are afraid. And he wants to heal the hurting places.

Have you ever heard someone say, "We don't talk about what's in the past"? Why do you think they said that? Maybe they were afraid of the pain. Maybe they didn't want you to talk about it because that would be like stepping on a mine. So, we don't ever want to force anyone

to talk about something they don't want to talk about. If a person is not ready, if they do not feel safe even with Jesus, that is their decision. It is wrong to try to force a person to remember something that is painful. If they don't want to talk about it, that is their decision.

Even so, we can teach that when we bury our pain, it's like we're burying landmines. We might not be able to see it anymore, but years from now, it could still hurt us or someone we love.

Jesus wants to bring safety. He wants to locate the mines and remove them so we can live free from fear, with hope and a future. If a person does not feel safe enough to “go there,” it might be good to step back and do some teaching on the heart and character and presence of Jesus. His presence is healing, and understanding how he cares about our fear and pain can be transformational.

More Resources:

For further reading, see <http://trotters41.com/resources-for-emotional-health/>

I’m including the following article in its entirety because I believe the points are well-reasoned and highly applicable here. The article can be accessed here:

http://www.theocentric.com/spirituality/prayer/songs_from_the_heart_emotions.html

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### **Songs from the Heart**

#### **The Fullness of Emotional Expression in the Psalms**

Evangelicals have a love/hate relationship with emotions. For some evangelicals, emotional bliss is the sum and substance of true religion. For others, emotions are unnecessary to authentic Christian living. The mind and will matter most. The emotions are simply the "caboose" on the train. They do nothing to actually keep the train moving and are thus disposable; they are enjoyable on occasion and in their proper place, but most of the time, they are a bothersome nuisance.

#### **Two Extremes**

Should we indulge our emotions by pursuing ecstatic experiences? Or should we ignore our emotions by seeking to direct our lives solely by logic, reason, and sheer will-power?

Evangelicals tend to hold to one of these two extreme positions: emotionalism or stoicism. According to the dictionary, emotionalism is "the tendency to place too much value on emotion." For the emotionalist, experience is its own authentication. The emotionalist loves the popular cliché "A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with only an argument." His representative song is Debby Boone's *You Light Up My Life*; specifically the words, "It can't be wrong, when it feels so right."

The stoic, on the other hand, is indifferent to pleasure or pain and seeks to remain detached and unmoved through emotional self-control. While the emotionalist places too much value on emotion, the stoic places too much value on reason. This stoic's song is *Feelings*: "Feelings. Nothing more than feelings. Trying to forget my feelings."

Put simply, the emotionalist indulges his emotions and the stoic ignores her emotions. Neither extreme is right.

God made us to think. God created the mind, renews it in Christ, and uses it in the process of spiritual transformation. For this reason, the Apostle Paul calls us to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:1). True spirituality is not irrationality. God calls us to love him with our whole being - emotions, will, and mind. Only in this way can we carry out the first and greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

God also made us to feel. God does not intend for us to be unfeeling stoics who are unaffected by the triumphs and tragedies of life. The inability to feel is not a strength but a weakness. It is the mark of a psychopath and not the mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ. One of the common characteristics of psychopaths is that they have no capacity to sympathize with their victims-in other words, they feel nothing for them! This is the reason they treat others so cruelly. God forbid that we would become spiritual psychopaths.

Those who overvalue the mind reduce human nature to the intellectual ability to reason. But we are much more than "thinking beings." "We are thinking, feeling and acting beings. Descartes got it wrong when he stated, "I think; therefore I am." What a distorted, one-dimensional view of the human person! (Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer, and the Witness of the Spirit*, 57)

Those who ignore emotions and exalt the intellect fail to recognize that the mind can be just as deceptive as the emotions.

We are comfortable with principles and propositions, and we know how to memorize Bible verses. But we are insecure when it comes to experience... We have been warned that feelings can be deceptive. But at the same time, have we been warned that logic and reason also can be deceptive? Postmodernists know that potential deception lies everywhere. (Chuck Smith, Jr., *The End of the World as We Know It*, 104)

Oftentimes, those who overvalue the mind are simply trying to counter our culture's superficial perspective on love. Our culture often reduces love to a mere emotion, a transient feeling that one falls in and out of based on one's mood for the day.

Certainly, love is not *just* a feeling. Love is *more* than a feeling, but it not *less* than a feeling. By emphasizing the intellectual and volitional aspects of love, we may unintentionally ignore the authentic emotional dimensions of love. How can we say that we truly love others if we "feel" nothing for them? Is this mental act the essence of love? Shouldn't our love for God and others include a strong emotional dimension?

## **Uniting Heart and Head**

The two extremes of emotionalism and stoicism demonstrate the confusion evangelicals experience in regard to the proper relationship between mind, will, and emotions. What are we to do with our emotions? Should we indulge them - giving ourselves over to our experience? Should we ignore them - denying them, giving prominence to the intellect? Or, is there another option?

Instead of indulging or ignoring our emotions, we are called to integrate our emotions into the totality of our lives. We are to embrace our emotions - just as we embrace the intellect and the will - as authentic elements of genuine human experience.

It is hard for us to unite "heart" with "head"! (Indeed, the simple fact that we talk in this way demonstrates how fragmented our view of humanity really is.) The separation of heart (emotions) from head (mind) is an unnatural division. It should not be perpetuated by our tendency to extremes. We must find a way to integrate heart with head.

The Psalms point us in the right direction. The Psalms call us to worship God wholly. They address the whole person (mind, will, emotions, desires) and call for a holistic response from one's whole being. The Psalms address the

- mind - calling us to remember, reflect, meditate on God, God's commands, and God's salvation
- emotions/affections - calling us to delight in God and desire more of God. Expressing every emotion possible
- will - calling us to trust, obey, serve, and worship (ex. 4:5; 100:2)

The Psalms are a collection of songs and prayers used regularly by the people of Israel in their corporate worship. These songs, primarily through their repetition, shaped Israel's faith more than any other sacred document.

For God's people, these songs of the heart are the music of heaven. These songs integrate heart, head, and hand. They embrace emotions, thought, and action as authentic elements of genuine human experience. These things are brought into the presence of God and are regularly expressed to God. Most importantly, all varieties of emotions and emotional experiences are embraced and expressed honestly to God. In this way, even our most "uncontrollable" and overwhelming emotions are brought into service to the living God through worship. In the process, they become worship!

This is the way charted by the Psalms - our model for prayer, praise and piety. We are called to the integration of head, heart, and hand. Through worship, we are made whole. By embracing all of life with all we are and expressing all our experiences to God, we become living sacrifices.

This integration of emotions, mind, and will is summarized in "the heart." Contrary to contemporary use, in the Old and New Testament the "heart" represents the entire being - body, soul, mind, emotions, spirit, and actions. The heart is the integral center of all we are. And all we are is to be completely given to God. God wants our heart. God wants all we are to

respond to all God is for us. This whole-hearted response is expressed in many ways in the Psalms:

- "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart" (Ps. 9:1)
  - The possession of a "pure heart" - the undivided, whole-hearted integrity of one's entire being turned toward God (Ps. 24:3-4a; 15; 73:1; 119:9)
  - "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name." (Ps. 103:1-2)
- Our whole being is to respond to God. Our goal is not to be unfeeling stoics or irrational emotionalists, but to be fully human - integrating heart, head, and hand. Through prayer, praise, and piety our whole person addresses and engages God.

The Psalms call us to hear and respond to the challenge: "Lift up your heart to God." We are invited to respond holistically instead of partially or half-heartedly. God wants us to be fully human in God's presence - muddy emotions, confused thinking and all!

### **The Emotional Element of the Psalms**

Put quite simply (and perhaps too simplistically, but for the sake of discussion we continue) there are four main emotions: glad, sad, mad, and fearful (which some label "bad"). Each one of these emotions is expressed in the Psalms.

**Glad.** Gladness is primarily a positive emotion. It involves feeling alive, peaceful, happy, hopeful, optimistic, delighted, and content. It is usually associated with singing, laughing, and dancing. The experience and expression of gladness is common in the Psalms.

#### *Gladness*

- "You have put gladness in my heart" (4:7a)
- "I will be glad and exult in You;  
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High." (9:2)

#### *Blessedness / Joy*

- "For you make him most blessed forever;  
You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence" (21:6)
- "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones,  
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart." (32:11)

- "Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;  
And let those who love Your salvation say continually,  
'Let God be magnified.'" (70:4)

Contemporary Christian worship music is replete with expressions of praise, joy, and delight. Countless songs could be put forward that coincide with these verses from the book of Psalms. Indeed, our songs are dominated by gladness. Sadly, this is often to the exclusion of the vast breadth of other authentic emotional experiences, namely, sorrow, anger, and fear.

**Sad.** The book of Psalms is filled with sad songs. Over one-third of the Psalms are categorized as "lament songs" - songs that express struggles, sufferings, and disappointments to God. Much of Israel's worship consisted in embracing the "dark side" of life and expressing deep hurt to God. Brokenheartedness, rejection, hopelessness, and loneliness are common themes of the Psalms. They are not antithetical to true and living faith in God. Tears of sorrow are more common than tears of joy. The sad songs of the Psalter hold nothing back in their expressions of deep grief, pain, despair, and feelings of abandonment.

#### *Deep grief and pain*

- "I am weary with my sighing;  
Every night I make my bed swim,  
I dissolve my couch with my tears.  
My eye has wasted away with grief" (6:6-7a)
- "Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also." (31:9)
- "I am bent over and greatly bowed down;  
I go mourning all day long...  
I am benumbed and badly crushed;  
I groan because of the agitation of my heart." (38:6, 8)

#### *Despair*

- "Why are you in despair, O my soul?  
And why have you become disturbed within me?" (42:5)
- "In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness;  
My soul refused to be comforted.  
When I remember God, then I am disturbed;  
When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint." (Ps. 77:2-3)



- "The cords of death encompassed me,  
And the terrors of Sheol came upon me;  
I found distress and sorrow." (116:3)

### *Abandonment and Betrayal*

- How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?  
How long will You hide Your face from me?  
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,  
Having sorrow in my heart all the day?" (13:1-2)
- "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (22:1a)
- "Even my close friend, in whom I trusted,  
Who ate my bread,  
Has lifted up his heel against me." (41:9; cf. 55:12-14)

What contemporary Christian worship music expresses these emotions? Songs like this are the exception and not the norm. Yet in the Psalter, they are the norm and not the exception. God's people learned how to express their sorrows to their compassionate God. Even more, we should express our sorrows to Jesus, who, because of his incarnation and sufferings, is able to fully sympathize with all our weaknesses (cf. Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15).

**Mad.** The world is full of injustice. When we feel that we are offended or the object of mistreatment or abuse, we naturally become angry. Anger is an appropriate response to injustice. The Psalms embrace anger and express this emotion to God in all its various forms - annoyance, frustration, irritation, hatred, and outrage.

- "O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes;  
Make Your way straight before me.  
There is nothing reliable in what they say;  
Their inward part is destruction itself;  
Their throat is an open grave;  
They flatter with their tongue.  
Hold them guilty, O God;  
By their own devices let them fall!  
In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out,  
For they are rebellious against Thee." (5:8-10)
- "Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?  
I hate them with the utmost hatred;  
They have become my enemies." (139:21-22)

Sometimes the explosion of outrage is so intense - for example, in the psalms of imprecation that call down violent curses upon one's enemies (ex. Psalm 69, 109) - that we have a hard time understanding why they are in the Psalter at all. How could these violent outpourings of rage harmonize with God's faithfulness, goodness, and love? But God would rather have us express our anger to him than express our anger toward others. God alone has the right of vengeance. We do not deny anger, but express it to God, in order to keep from expressing it to our enemies.

What contemporary Christian worship music expresses these emotions? Songs like this are rare. Yet in the Psalter, they are commonplace.

**Fear.** "No fear" is a common saying in our culture. Fear is considered a negative emotion. It manifests itself in anxiety, guilt, shame, and panic. It is usually associated with conflict, confusion, and insecurity. The Psalms regularly express fear to God and toward God.

#### *Fear*

- "My heart is in anguish within me,  
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me;  
And horror has overwhelmed me." (55:5)
- "God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea." (46:1-2)

#### *Anxiety*

- "For I confess my iniquity;  
I am full of anxiety because of my sin." (38:18)
- "When my anxious thoughts multiply within me,  
Your consolations delight my soul." (94:19)
- "Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts" (139:23)

#### *Guilt and Shame*

- "O my God, in Thee I trust,  
Do not let me be ashamed;  
Do not let my enemies exult over me." (25:2)

- "All day long my dishonor is before me,  
And my humiliation has overwhelmed me," (44:15)
- "For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
Against You, You only, I have sinned,  
And done what is evil in Your sight" (51:3-4)

### *Reverence / Trembling*

- "But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house,  
At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You." (5:7)
- "Establish Your word to Your servant,  
As that which produces reverence for You." (119:38)
- "Worship the LORD in holy attire;  
Tremble before Him, all the earth." (96:9)
- "The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble;  
He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!" (99:1)
- "My flesh trembles for fear of You,  
And I am afraid of Your judgments." (119:120; cf. Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pe. 1:17)

What contemporary Christian worship music expresses these emotions? When we compare our current canon of praise and worship songs to the ancient canon of songs and prayers in the Psalter, we begin to see how shallow and superficial our songs really are. We simply deny whole dimensions of human experience and reduce the Christian life to "and now I am happy all the day."

### **Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi**

There is an ancient saying: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Literally, the law of prayer is the law of belief. In other words, the way a person worships reveals what he or she really believes! If we consider our beliefs, not in light of our doctrines, but in regard to our canon of Christian worship songs, we begin to realize that we "believe" that gladness is the best and only appropriate emotional expression in public worship. Thus, our times together are always "celebrations." Our call is always to "put on a big smile and warmly greet the person next to you." We make it appear that the only thing God wants to hear from us is "You are good," "I love you," and "I'm really happy!"

Of the four main emotions (glad, mad, sad, and fearful), only one is really enjoyable to experience - gladness. The others demand much more out of us. Gladness only calls us to smile. Sadness calls us to tears, madness to clenched fists, and fear to knocking knees. No wonder we only want to be happy! And no wonder most of our worship songs simply extol delight in enjoying God!

If the Psalms are our guide, then we must embrace and express not only gladness, but also anger, sorrow, and fear. Christianity is not about denying real pain, suffering, or sorrow. These are real feelings of faith that we must not ignore but embrace and express! We cannot minimize these emotions. Our times together in worship should not be an attempt to ignore or neglect reality. There is no comfort in denial. We must not use religion as just another anesthetic - along with shopping, drugs, sex, etc. - to numb the pain of our lives.

It is no wonder that the church has intuitively avoided these psalms. They lead us into dangerous acknowledgment of how life really is. They lead us into the presence of God where everything is not polite and civil. They cause us to think unthinkable thoughts and utter unutterable words. Perhaps worst, they lead us away from the comfortable religious claims of 'modernity' in which everything is managed and controlled. In our modern experience, but probably also in every successful and affluent culture, it is believed that enough power and knowledge can tame the terror and eliminate the darkness.... But our honest experience, both personal and public, attests to the resilience of the darkness, in spite of us. The remarkable thing about Israel is that it did not banish or deny the darkness from its religious enterprise. It embraces the darkness as the very stuff of new life. Indeed, Israel seems to know that new life comes nowhere else." (Walter Brueggeman, *The Message of the Psalms*, 51-53)

## Conclusion

The Psalms challenge our shallow experience of God. How deficient we are in expressing everything to God - our joys, sorrows, frustrations, and fears. God wants us to tell him everything. Every emotion and every experience can be the context of worship when expressed to God.

The Psalms are the prayers of Christ. As a faithful Jew, Jesus would have prayed these regularly. The Psalms would shape his faith and practice. Even more, every Psalm speaks of Jesus. In his humanity, he fully experienced every one of these emotions-complete identification with humanity. What greater reason could we have to make these prayers our own-patterning our prayers after them!

The Psalms teach us what it means to experience God with our whole being in every circumstance. We discover that true prayer involves speaking to God in every situation and with every emotional expression. To close part of ourselves to God is to fail to worship God truly and fully. God wants the expression of all our heart - mind, will, and emotions - in every situation to be an act of worship. Only when we fully embrace all we know, feel, and do and express everything to God - the good, bad, and the ugly - do we truly worship!

