

Proverbs: Emotions

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[0 : 00] Good morning. How we doing? It's great to be with you this morning. If you are visiting and you're not aware, just like SeaWorld has splash zones, we have fan zones. If you are finding the heat distracting, you can move to one of the areas on the side where you will feel a little more fan if that will help you stay awake during our time in the Word together. I want to encourage you that. And there's always water in the back as well in the water fountain. So just wanted to point that out to you. Thank you for your prayers for our families. We were away for the last four weeks. We had a good and restful time together and are glad to be back with you. My kids come back tomorrow. They've spent the week with Nan and Pappy going to Dutch Wonderland. So it's been a good week. So it's good to be back with you this morning. I'm going to go ahead and pray for us as we look into God's Word. Lord, we thank you this morning for your Word and how rich it is. Lord, how it is useful for teaching and training, for instruction, for guidance, for correction. Lord, how it is like a sharp sword that pierces to the depths of our being. Lord, I pray this morning that your Word would speak to us. Lord, I pray for your Spirit's power that I might speak your words. Lord, that what I speak would be useful to all of us, that we might know your ways more and know your Son, Jesus, and His salvation more in the midst of that. Lord, be with us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Jesus was the most complete and healthy emotional human being who has ever lived.

What do you think of that statement? You think it's true? Fascinatingly, almost 100 years ago, theologian B.B. Warfield wrote an essay published in 1912 called *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*, where he felt the need to explain and defend what the Scriptures actually said about Jesus' emotional life. And as he lays out this argument, he actually began by saying, this is the problem that we've seen all the way back from the early church to today.

in understanding what an emotional life looks like in God's creative world, and specifically in the person of Jesus. So he said, on one hand, there was a school in the early church that believed that moral perfection was found in the Greek word that we might translate apathy, the lack of feeling, suppressing or denying or rejecting our feelings as being less than divine.

And the other one, as Warfield says it, is that so that Jesus could identify with us and redeem us, there was a school in the church that would want to attribute to Jesus every human pathos, every deep feeling of our heart. He goes on and says both tendencies are still operative.

In our thoughts about Jesus, there's a tendency to, in the interest of magnifying the dignity of Jesus to minimize his emotional life, and in the interest of fully embracing his humanity, to magnify his emotional life. And he goes on to say this, The one tendency may run some risk of giving us a somewhat cold and remote Jesus, whom we can scarcely believe to be able to sympathize with us in all our infirmities.

[3 : 59] The other may possibly be in danger of offering us a Jesus so crassly human as scarcely to command our highest reverence.

It's a fascinating article. I recommend you read it. You can find it on the internet. B.B. Warfield, *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. But it provoked me this week, as we're thinking this week, about human emotions and what the Proverbs have to do with human emotions.

And in reflecting on this, I thought, not only has the church wrestled with this, but maybe you, like me, have wrestled with it as well. I don't always know what to do with my emotions and the place that they're supposed to take in my life.

There are times when I want desperately to stuff my emotions. I remember distinctly somewhere in junior high, well, not distinctly because it was vague, but somewhere in junior high or high school, realizing that when I wanted things and I didn't get them, I was disappointed and that made me sad. And I decided the best way to deal with that is to no longer want anything because then I won't ever be dismayed at that loss. I have found that to be a pattern that I continue to struggle with even in my

life today.

[5 : 20] Some of us just really desperately want to dismiss our emotions because we find them highly inconvenient. It's very inefficient to have to feel things and to process them and to deal with them.

And we just wish we didn't have to do that. There are others of us who think feelings are insignificant. The world is based on reality and reality is based on fact and feelings just get in the way.

And the funny thing is there's actually a Christian version of this as well. The Christian version of it is in the church, the truth is paramount. Okay?

That sounds right and good. And God calls us to respond to Him in belief and faith. That is, taking hold of that truth and believing that it's right and letting that define our reality.

Okay, this sounds good. But then there can be this entailment of that which says feelings don't matter. Feelings are unimportant. As a matter of fact, feelings are an impediment to godliness and to actually growing in Christian maturity.

[6 : 34] Maybe some of you have experienced that. Maybe some of you still think that today. Okay. So that's one end, one side of the road that we fall off.

The other side of the road that we fall off is that, and maybe this is more common in our culture today, but we think that emotions are everything. We glorify them.

We absolutize them. We love authenticity. He's so authentic. He just says whatever he feels. I connect with him so deeply. It's so great that I can do that.

And you know what? There's something really good about that. There's something good in that authenticity. There's something right about people being human and being able to express their emotions.

But often it falls into this logic of if I feel it, then it must be true and real, and then it defines my life.

[7 : 37] And interestingly, again, there's a Christian version of this. I know Jesus died on the cross for my sins, but I don't feel it today.

And so I don't think it's real. I don't think it's true. And I want to acknowledge there's a crisis there. Some of you may be wrestling with deep waters in terms of what happens when our feelings and the truth that we see in God's Word don't match up.

But this tendency is to make ultimately our emotional state primary and determinative and controlling in our Christian lives.

And there are whole parts of the church that say, well, you don't love Jesus if you're not feeling it today. And I think it overemphasizes the role of emotions in our lives.

And I say that partly because I think, as we'll see in the book of Proverbs, emotions are a part of how God has created human beings.

[8 : 44] It is, in fact, a part of what it means to be made in God's image. And as we've talked about before, the book of Proverbs is a book about wisdom. Wisdom being how ought we as human beings live along the grain or with the grain of God's created order.

How are we to live in line with how God has made us to be? And interestingly, Proverbs has some very profound things to say about our emotional life.

And that's what we're going to look at this morning. As we are continuing in this series, you may remember we're sort of in the topical part.

We're doing the second half of Proverbs. And so there's no passage for you to turn to this morning. You can turn to Proverbs 13.12 if you want to because that will be a good starting point for us.

But I want to affirm three things that Proverbs says about our emotional life.

[9 : 56] And then at the end of those three things, I want to help us think about how do we move towards it in Christ. The first thing that Proverbs tells us is that it affirms the emotional realities of human life.

It says these things are real. So Proverbs 13.12, hope deferred makes a heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 12.25, anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

Proverbs 15.13, a glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow the heart of a spirit is crushed.

Proverbs 17.22, a joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. And

Proverbs 14.30, a tranquil, or if you look at the footnote, a healthy, a healthy heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

This is a collection of Proverbs from this second half that is affirming the dynamics that human beings feel emotions.

[11 : 15] We feel hope and desire. We are weighed down or we are glad. We are cheerful or we are crushed. We are, again, joyful or crushed.

It uses these words over and over again. And do you see how it doesn't just affirm that they happen, but that they affect us in the depth of our being? He uses interchangeably our heart and our bones and our soul and our spirit as not technically as sometimes it's described in other parts of Scripture to try to divvy up exactly how human beings are made and that sort of thing.

But I think in the Proverbs, it's all talking about the inner life of our human existence that we all acknowledge and say, yes, that is real. And what it says is not only do these emotions exist, but they affect us.

They make a difference at the very core of our being. And this is why hope deferred, hope that you long for but you're not yet getting, can make your heart sick.

Do you know that longing? Longing for a loved one to return from a trip? Longing to hear the good news after the surgery?

[12 : 33] Longing to get that promotion, that job that you've applied for? The hopes deferred make our hearts sick.

We worry. We're anxious. We're weighed down. We're unsettled. But when a desire is fulfilled, it's a tree of life to our soul.

When things that we hope for actually become real, it puts a bounce in our step and a sparkle in our eye and a gladness as we interact with others, doesn't it?

This is what Proverbs is affirming. And it's affirming that when we feel positive emotions, it generally does good to us. When we feel negative emotions, it weighs upon us.

They're hard for us. These Proverbs are all descriptive. They're all in the category of the Proverbs that say, this is kind of how people generally work. They're not promises, nor are they prescriptions.

[13 : 35] But they're descriptive, saying this is how we usually work. And at the end of it, it's saying, emotions are important.

God sees that emotions are an important part of the human life. And the way of wisdom is thinking through what is it to walk in a way of wisdom in our emotional life.

As a thought exercise, let me post to you, what happens if we want to follow this side of the path, falling off the path, and we say, let's deny our emotions.

Have you ever been in a conflict with someone, and you said, I think you're mad. And they say, I'm not mad. You say, no, I think you are. No, I'm not.

Don't tell me I'm mad. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever done that to someone else? And what happens?

[14 : 37] Your inability to acknowledge it means that that anger gets expressed on the edges. You can't actually sit on it and not have anger. But rather than having it come out in a healthy way, in an intentional way, in a constructive way, that anger is expressed.

It leaks out the edges of our lives, doesn't it? Passive aggressiveness. Passive aggressiveness. Criticism. Withdrawal. All sorts of ways that we get angry.

When we deny it, it does great harm to us. Sometimes denial of emotions can crush the spirits of others.

Well, you shouldn't be depressed. Why are you depressed? Don't be sad. Cheer up. Buck up. It's not that bad. Come on. When you're in the middle of grief.

When you're walking through loss. Those words aren't helpful. In fact, they can often be crushing. They deny the reality of your heart.

[15 : 49] Bearing the weight of the loss and the grief that you're walking through. Can be very destructive in that way too. Thirdly, denial of our emotional life will distance us from God.

Because we serve a God who has a rich, sinless, emotional life. He is angry with our sin. He is jealous for our singular devotion.

He rejoices at the return of a prodigal child. He sings over his beloved children. He is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness.

And if we think that we, as beings created in the image of God, can have a relationship with the creator God and deny emotions, we will be very poor people indeed.

And our relationship with God will be very poor because of it. So Proverbs, first of all, simply affirms the reality and importance of our emotional life.

[16:56] But it does more than that. Proverbs affirms our emotional complexity. Let me give you some of the, these are some of the ones that you wade into that are striking as you read through Proverbs.

Proverbs, first of all, just Proverbs 25, chapter 20, verse 5 says, The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

Proverbs 20, 27, the spirit or the breath of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts. Proverbs 27, 19, as water, as in water, face reflects face, so the heart of a man reflects the man.

These are pretty opaque Proverbs. But I believe that what he's getting at in the core of them is to say, human beings are deep. We're deep people. There's a lot going on in our emotional life is a critical part of it.

This life of our heart, the life of our soul is important and significant. A part of us actually being created in the image of God.

[18:09] Not only is our emotional life deep, but it's very personal. Proverbs 14, 10 says, The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

Isn't that interesting? Have you ever had someone come up to you and say, I know how you feel? This proverb says, no, no you don't.

And it's not just in sad things or hard things. It's in good things too. Both joy and bitterness. Each human heart experiences emotions in a unique way, according to this proverb.

And it points to the complexity of the emotional life that God has given us. Now the good news is that we do have a Lord who knows all things.

And we have a Lord who has this infinite emotional capacity. And so he is able to know what we feel, even when no one else does. And so I have often found it better to say, I don't know all that you're feeling, but I care about you.

[19:23] That's usually enough. Sometimes there's shared loss, and there's a deep understanding. But you know, that takes us back to the first ones, about how deep our emotional life is.

You often don't have to say it, because there's just an understanding. It's fascinating to me that the scriptures tell us to mourn with those who mourn, and rejoice with those who rejoice.

What a wonderful thing it is. Maybe you've had people who come. Without words, they well up with tears as they look at you in your pain, in your loss and sorrow.

Or on the other side, something good happens, and your friend breaks out with the widest grin you've ever seen, and gives whoops of joy.

Because of the good thing that's happened to you. It is a wonderful thing that we have this depth of ability to connect, and yet we always need to be dangerous.

[20:36] We have to be aware of the danger that we don't always understand, and we don't always know the complexity of what someone else is feeling.

And so we have Proverbs 25, 20. Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.

When you have a friend who has a heavy heart that day, to sing them songs of joy is like taking off their winter parka when it's 25 degrees out.

It makes them colder. Or, like vinegar and soda, it creates a reaction that explodes. Maybe you've stepped on that landmine.

Maybe you've been the landmine. Proverbs affirms, it's complicated. It's difficult. And with great compassion and care, and probably with imperfection, we need to recognize how complex our emotional life is.

[21:51] And this leads us to the last proverb in this section. Proverbs 14, 13. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.

So even when you think you're seeing what someone is feeling, according to this proverb, there may be something else alongside of it that's actually the opposite.

Maybe you've experienced that. Joy and sorrow mixed together. It's far more common than we tend to want or think.

So our emotional life is complex and multilayered. Joy can include sorrow. Grief can include laughter.

So what do we do with this? How do we understand? How do we respond to this? Well, I think one of the things to recognize is that our emotional life is shaped just like all of the rest of our created world and order is shaped.

[22 : 58] It's shaped by a framework that I hope you guys have in your mind of sort of the created redemption, the redemptive history arc of the Bible, right?

So we have creation, fall, redemption, and glory. And everything we experience in life maps onto this huge arc of what God is doing in the world.

And our emotions are like that too. When God created the world, He had an emotional life. He created us with an emotional life. Yet there was no sin.

And I will venture to say that we really don't understand what that looks like very well. That that is far, far, far further from our experience than we ever dare admit.

And then the fall came in. And with the fall came two things. One, the emotions that we have become corrupted. And secondly, there are new kinds of emotions like sorrow.

[24 : 01] I haven't quite worked this out biblically. Did God grieve before the fall? If He's outside of time, He did. But did Adam and Eve grieve before the fall?

Doesn't seem like it. There are some right emotions that came after the fall that are part of a fallen world. In redemption, then, God comes and gives us a new life in Christ whereby our emotions can be redeemed out of the sinful patterns that we tend to express them in.

And glory promises us a day where our emotions will find their greatest fulfillment and expression without sin. And interestingly, there will be no more tears.

God will wipe away every tear. And there will be no more sickness or sorrow. So run this through something like jealousy.

If I asked you if jealousy was a good emotion, would you say it was good or bad? Bad, right?

Commonly, it's bad. You know why? Because humanly, it's almost always bad.

[25 : 10] It's almost always selfish. I am jealous because you have something that I want or you are taking something that I think is mine and I didn't choose to share it.

And so I am jealous. I am jealous. I am jealous that you have something that I want or you have taken something that I want. And it's all about us.

Right? So that's how we often experience in our fallen reality. But then Deuteronomy 4 comes in and says to us that God is a jealous God.

And we think, because we've read Greek mythology, what, is the God of the Bible just like all like Zeus and Hera who just, you know, really were no better than the rest of us and weren't really worth our worship?

Is that what the God of the Bible is like? And we realize, no, that's not true at all. That God has a right jealousy. That He has a jealousy that His creation would respond to Him properly as their creator.

[26 : 16] That we, as His creation, would respond to Him with love and devotion and worship.

Because that is the, that is the reality of our relationship with Him. And He is jealous out of His love for us to relate to us rightly.

He is jealous that we might not run and give that love and devotion to anything else. It is a right, by analogy, in the human life, it is a right analogy for a husband to be jealous for his wife's affection.

For a wife to be jealous for her husband's affection. That they don't run off and go sleep with other people and have, and run off and spend their emotional loyalties and energies in other directions.

It is right for a parent to be jealous for the protection of their kids and to not simply entrust them to others who may harm them. There are places in human emotion where there is a right jealousy.

Then we can taste it and see what a redeemed jealousy might look like in our human life. So all that to say, this framework can be very helpful as we run other things through it.

[27 : 36] What about anger? Is anger good or bad? What about love? Is love good or bad? What about joy and pleasure? Is that good or bad? If you think about it, it is complex and in all of these things there is potential for both good and bad in the way that we humanly express it.

So let's make sure that we embrace that in our lives and in our understanding of it. Christianity is not a flat, happy, happy, Pollyanna, we should all be happy every day because Jesus loves us and died for our sins.

The truth is true but the response is insufficient to reflect our human reality and the dynamics of redemption.

So Proverbs affirms the reality of our emotional life. It affirms the complexity of our emotional life and then thirdly, Proverbs highly values self-control in our emotional life.

I know when Pastor Nick preached on anger a couple of weeks ago, he touched on this but it's such a strong theme in Proverbs I thought it was worth coming back to again.

[28 : 59] There are great Proverbs about this. Proverbs 16, 32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Proverbs 17, 27 Whoever restrains his words have knowledge and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. This one I think is profound and scary to us.

A man without Proverbs 25, 28 A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. What means by that is he is defenseless and vulnerable because he lacks self-control.

Proverbs 29, 11 probably summarizes the proverbial viewpoint on control and spirits and our emotions by saying this 29, 11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit but a wise man quietly holds it back.

The other week I confess I was watching You've Got Mail. If you haven't seen You've Got Mail it's an oldie but it's a decent goodie. Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan and one of the interesting things is so Tom Hanks is this powerful book broker and she's this little shop owner and they have this complex relationship but when she first meets him and finds out who he is she hates him and she wants and she watches him be really arrogant at a dinner party and she so much wants to zing him.

[30 : 42] She so much wants to just give full vent to what she's feeling about what a terrible human being he is and then later on she actually is able to do that and she's actually able to do it and she regrets it immediately.

She finds out that being able to just let it go is actually destructive which brings me to the other thing I want to talk about let it go let it go can't hold it back anymore let it go let it go turn away and slam the door I don't care what they're going to say let the storm range on the cold never bothered me anyway.

The song is often sung on YouTube at least by preteen girls as a song of empowerment and a song of feeling finally free to be to be who I really am but the interesting thing about it is that in the story all she does is destruction when she lets it go she destroys her family she destroys her kingdom and interestingly and surprisingly for Disney there's actually a redemptive theme where she is saved by the self-sacrifice of her sister that's another story it's a cool thing but the point here is that we live in a culture today where we think that self-control is repression where we think that self-control is lacking authenticity and the Bible is very clear that that is not true because we are human beings made in the image of God and yet corrupted by the fall and even for Christians as we have the Holy Spirit in us we are not able to express our emotions perfectly in every circumstance that's not a newflash

I'm sure you're surprised about and so the Apostle Paul tells us that one of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control it is something that we are able to grow in so that we can feel the emotions that are real in our heart and in our circumstances and yet at the end of the day let the truth of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit shape and control how we respond so that our feelings are driven by truth so that we need to seek to know the Word of God so that they can shape how we understand our emotions our emotions should be governed by love so that as we express our emotions we are not simply thinking of how do I express myself but how do I care about the other person in the process of my expression my emotions need to be expressed most fundamentally with a view towards pleasing God and governed by a desire for godliness

God may my emotional life grow in increasingly in increasing way to reflect you and your emotions so joy in a godly pattern of this a godly expression is not selfish pleasure seeking but enjoying but receiving from God good things and responding right sorrow is not self-pity but an honest recognition of loss in the world anger is not an uncontrolled outburst but a focused rejection of evil and wrong hope is not wishful optimism but trust in the future work of a good God and so on and so forth temper long man whose commentary on proverbs is I highly recommend to you says this about this topic it is not that the wise are emotionless or that they don't express anger or disappointment but they do so in a way that is appropriate to the context they don't blow up in anger though they may get very angry moderate expressions of emotions allow the wise to think and strategize emotions don't cloud their thinking another way to put this is that the wise are patient whereas fools are impatient

[35 : 26] I found that a very insightful quote to think through so proverbs says these things it doesn't we haven't covered everything about our emotional life this morning about what it means to

be a Christian in our emotional life but proverbs says these things they are real they are deep and complex and they ought to be subject to healthy self-control so that their expressions are constructive and positive rather than destructive and negative and so the writer of proverbs says this I found this if you remember proverbs is a series of one of the frameworks and the literary forms that they use is a father talking to his son about how to walk in the way of wisdom and he says this my son if your heart is wise my heart too will be glad my innermost being will exult when your lips speak what is right let not your heart envy sinners but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day and I just thought it was interesting because in this little passage you see the complexity of emotions he's exhorting his son follow the way of wisdom because it will be good don't fall into envy but fear the Lord affirming even in that this is how the emotions are going to affect your life in pursuing godliness but then he also says but your godliness is going to affect me your response is going to do things in my emotional life it's going to bring me joy my innermost being will exult when I see you doing these things and so it leaves us with the final question which is how do we pursue this what is it what is it that we can do to pursue growth and understanding a healthy emotional life and friends it is not rocket science it is the answer we have seen over and over again in Proverbs and in fact is the answer over and over again in the scriptures we need to look to Jesus

Christ because Jesus Christ embodied the fullness of perfect humanity and so when we look to Jesus what do we find we find one who looked with compassion said woman does no one condemn you we see him who with holy rage made a whip and drove the merchants out of the temple we see him wearily lamenting about his best friends have I been with you so long we still don't understand he who wept with his friends at the tomb of their brother and shook with anger against the ravages of death he who was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief who for the joy set before him endured the cross despising the shame if we want to know how we walk in wisdom we look to Jesus who is the embodiment of wisdom himself we look to him to see his complexity and the reality of his emotions we see that in his humanity he identified with us we see in his perfection an example of how to do it well and most amazingly we see that in him doing these things for us we see his emotions expressed uniquely at times in his redemptive work for us my God my God my God why have you forsaken me father forgive them they don't know what they're doing the God of the Bible shows us what emotions look like because he's created us to know him and that our emotions would be a part of our of our life and our glorifying of him and when we behold Jesus and when we believe that what Jesus has done can redeem us out of all of our petty and broken and fallen and foolish emotion all of our denial of it all of our selfish expression of it when we behold him and when we believe and trust in him this is where we find then the life that God has for us the way of wisdom the way of godliness let's pray together lord we have touched on many things this morning and lord we acknowledge that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and that you have knit us together lord we pray that you will help us to grow mind and body and soul and emotion and will and affection and knowledge and understanding lord in all of the complexity of how you have made us as human beings lord may we reflect and know you more and specifically lord may we know how to lord live out our emotional life in a way that brings glory to you lord help us to be more like Jesus help us to reflect Jesus in how we live and lord help us to depend on Jesus to exercise self-control and see transformation where we cannot do it ourselves we pray all these things in Jesus name amen amen