

Emotions: The Voice of the Soul

How Life Feels – part 4

Book of Psalms

May 3, 2020

How are we to think about emotions? There is a very strong current in our culture that makes emotions “everything.” “Follow your heart.” If you feel a certain way, to be “true to yourself” you are to act on the basis of your emotions. On the other hand there is a strong current to not let emotions “rule you.” You are to be ruled by truth not feelings.

DAY 1: How do you deal with painful emotions?

1. As you read this psalm ask yourself: (1) What emotions does the psalmist feel? (2) How does he deal with his emotions?

Psalms 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

³ *My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.*

⁵ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and* ⁶ *my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"* ¹¹ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

2. What specific words and phrases strike you about the psalmist's emotional distress?

3. How is the psalmist dealing with his emotions?

4. When difficult emotions come to you, how do you normally deal with them?

DAY 2: Wrong responses to emotions #1: Heighten your emotions.

1. One of the mistakes we make regarding emotions is to heighten them. We turn up the volume too high. We believe them too much.

2. In our western secular culture, the pendulum has swung very far in this direction. You see this in statements, beliefs and experiences like these:

- a. "Follow your heart."
- b. Love is thought of almost exclusively as the feeling of love.
- c. If you don't feel like doing something, don't do it. That is not being "authentic."
- d. To do something when you don't feel like it is not "being true to yourself."
- e. "It is hypocritical do something and act in ways that are contrary to your feelings."
- f. When there is relational conflict it's just better to sever the relationship. It is "not healthy" to stay in a relationship that requires "work."
- g. If you no longer feel in love with your spouse, it is "wrong for both of you to stay together."

3. Read Psalm 42 again. Is the psalmist putting too much attention to his feelings?

Psalms 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

³ *My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.*

⁵ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and* ⁶ *my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"* ¹¹ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

4. How do you think the psalmist is dealing with his emotions? Is he "heightening" them? Is he turning up the volume too loudly?

5. What do you like about how he is handling the painful emotions that are in him?

DAY 3: Wrong responses to emotions #2: Harden your emotions.

1. We hate to feel bad. Our knee jerk reaction is to do what we can to stop feeling bad and start feeling good. One of the ways is denial. We usually say, “Oh, I’m fine.”

2. Another way we deaden our emotions is to assume we just need a P.M.A. (Positive Mental Attitude) to get us going again.

3. As Christians we deaden our “negative” emotions for what we think are good reasons:

- a. We don’t want others to think we’re spiritually immature.
- b. We believe we are giving God “a bad name,” or “bad press,” that perhaps God is not holding up “His end of the bargain.” We don’t want to give the impression that God is unfaithful.
- c. We simply look at “negative” emotions as problems to be solved.
- d. We simply look at “negative” emotions as sins to be confessed.

4. What else can be done with “negative” emotions? Emotions serve as early warning signs of the soul. There is something in our souls that needs our attention. Let’s look at the example of anger.

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

5. Obviously, we are not to respond in anger. But, notice that Paul assumes that not all anger is sin. When we *feel* angry besides not responding in anger what does Paul hint at doing?

Psalms 4:4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

6. What does David mean by “search your heart?”

Psalms 139:23 (NIV) Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

7. For each of the underlined phrase, put in your own words what David is telling us to do.

a. “Search me” -

b. “Know my heart” -

c. “Any offensive way in me” –

d. “Lead me in the way everlasting.” -

8. What is your take away from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: The “honesty” of emotions

1. Emotion serves as a window to the heart, a clearer view of our soul. To lower the voice of emotion doesn't help us see what we need to see.

2. Read Psalm 42 again. What strikes you about how he is handling his emotions?

Psalms 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

³ *My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

⁴ *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.*

⁵ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and* ⁶ *my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"* ¹¹ *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

3. Some observations:

- a. He has circumstances outside himself that cause him great distress.
- b. He puts words to what is going on in his soul (how he feels).
- c. He compares his current state to several visual images (desert heat, flood waters)
- d. He asks God some very difficult questions about what God is doing and seemingly not doing.
- e. He asks God to help him see what is going on inside him.
- f. In one sense he is doing what's called verbally processing. He is speaking out loud the conflicting things and ideas in an attempt to understand what is going on, both outside him and inside him.

4. What strikes you from the list in question 3? Is there one or more of these that would help you in trying situations?

DAY 5: Emotions, an invitation to know God and pursue Him more deeply.

“If we view difficult emotions as problems to be solved, we will end up looking for answers that will work rather than pursuing relationship with God, regardless of immediate outcome.”

- Dan Allender

1. Midway in the psalm we have verse 5.

Psalm 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

2. David has turned his eyes from the dysfunction going on around him to the dysfunction going on within him.

3. Additionally, David is engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation between his “head,” his soul, and God.

4. A few more observations. What surfaces out of his heart? What is exposed in his heart that he had not seen before?

- a. Part of his struggle is with God.
- b. He sees he has a demanding heart.
- c. He has expectations of what God “ought” to be doing.
- d. There is confusion in trying to understand all that is going on.

5. Psalm 42:11 is the conclusion of the psalm. It is also a repeat of verse 5.

Psalm 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God.

Psalm 42:11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God.

6. There are some fascinating contrasts between the beginning and emotionally “heated” parts of the psalm and how it ends. Let’s break this down into a “before” and “after.”

Before:

- a. David questioned God’s silence.
- b. David questioned God’s inaction.

After:

David questions his own ugly heart.
David understands God’s mercy and forgiveness, in spite of his ugliness.

7. What strikes you as we finish Psalm 42?