

Coronavirus and our emotions

Pastor Tim Melton

Good morning. We have now completed our first full week of quarantine with the Coronavirus, here in Madrid. Most of us have spent our time trying to figure out the new normal. The new normal of working from home. The new normal of parenting while being with our kids all day. The new normal in our marriage, being with our spouse all day. The new normal with our finances. I think for most of us there is a lot of emotion in it. Not just stress and pressure about the virus and our health concerns, but compounded by parenting, marriage, work, finance and health all coming together. It is definitely squeezing each of us. The question is, when life squeezes us, what comes out? The truth is that whatever is in us, comes out. The virus and the quarantine are the circumstances that are squeezing us, but our emotional response can only be credited or blamed on the condition of our hearts.

When we think about emotions one question that often comes to mind is, “are emotions good or are they bad?” Great things have been done in our world driven by emotions. At the same time, wicked things have been done in our world driven by emotions. In reality, emotions in themselves are not totally good or totally bad. When we look at scripture, we see that God created us with emotions. God has emotions. Jesus had emotions.

In one moment, we rejoice in the praises of God, but later our same heart will rage with anger against our mate or children. At times emotions are a mystery. They control us and at times even ruin us. If God gave them to us, then there must be a way for us to honor God with our emotions. But how? This is a really broad topic, but in these few pages we will at least gather some biblical ways of thinking about emotions.

We are all emotional beings. When studying the Bible we don't see one specific chapter that talks completely about emotions, but we do see emotions all throughout scripture. God's Word teaches us about anger, joy, worry, sadness and loneliness. Some stories in scripture show us emotions that praised God, and others show us what people felt when they rebelled against God. So how do we discern which of our emotions are righteous and which are sinful? The best place to start is by looking at the life of Jesus.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment. Jesus responds:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

In these words, we see that all the commands of scripture are applications of two commandments: Love God and love others. These are the clearest guides for us concerning whether our emotions are righteous or sinful. Let’s look at Jesus for a clearer picture of this idea.

In the life of Christ we see the full range of emotions: Anger, joy, patience, long-suffering, sorrow, humility, and peace. In Christ we see weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. We see anger as he chases the “thieves” out of the temple. We see patience with His disciples, compassion with the children, mercy with the woman caught in adultery, and joy as His reason for enduring the cross. Every emotion that was displayed in the life of Christ was an expression of loving God and loving people. His emotions were never self-serving. They were never manipulative. They were always in some way an extension of His love for us. He is our example of living life to the fullest with God-honoring emotions.

That is where the gap is between us and Him. So many times our emotions are not a loving expression for God or for the people around us. Our emotions are often self-serving and following our sinful agenda.

To know if our emotions are righteous or sinful we ask the question, “Are my emotions an expression of my love for God and for others, or are they an expression of us loving ourselves?”

Is it possible to live with holy emotions? Yes, it is, but we live in a fallen world and we were fallen. Because of that, our desires and our emotions are so easily led to the wrong place. They lead us to join the Apostle Paul in regret, when he writes that he does what he does not want to do, and that which he longs to do he does not do. Our emotions have led us badly, but in reality they were never meant to lead at all. Our emotions were meant to follow as we follow God.

If we look back to scripture, we will see that our emotions point us back to the conditions of our hearts, and our hearts are controlled by our desires.

The writer in Proverbs 4:23 instructs us in this way, ***“Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.”*** There are verses all throughout scripture that communicate this idea to us. Our words, our actions, and our emotions are all an overflow of what is in our hearts. As it stated in Luke 6, ***“a good tree will bear good fruit and a bad tree will bear bad fruit.”*** The condition of a person’s heart will determine how they will live their life and how they will express their emotions.

At times it has been said that if you are having problems with your anger, then count to 10 each time you are tempted to be angry, and that will fix the problem. The truth is that this kind of solution is like putting a Band-Aid on a heart attack. Our problem is at the heart level, and only God can transform our hearts.

We need a heart transplant. That is what the gospel is. We were spiritually dead in sin, but now those who have repented of their sin and put their faith in Jesus have been given the heart of Christ. From that we now have the resources to walk in holiness, even in the area of our emotions. We now must submit, surrender and ask for God's transforming work in our lives. When we sin against our spouses, our roommates, our children or our coworkers, we must confess our sin and beg for God's transforming work in our hearts, that we may love others through our emotions.

The resulting humility will drive us back to God's Word, back to His people and back to prayer. As we delight in God He will change the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4) and our emotions will follow. He will give us new desires and affections, and we will begin to long for the things that God longs for. We must admit that the problem starts with us and the solution is found in Him.

Our emotions are determined by the condition of our hearts, but we are also affected by the level of our faith. Our emotions are affected by what we believe about ourselves, what we believe about the world around us, and what we believe about God. We see examples about this throughout scripture.

For example, we see David, the shepherd boy who faced the giant Goliath. We would expect that David would be afraid, but there was no fear in him. As time passed David was blessed, victorious and became well known. King Saul became jealous and chased David around the country trying to kill him. At two different times, David found himself in a place where he could easily strike King Saul down, dead. But both times David refused. We see no hint of revenge in David.

David's emotions seem to totally ignore his situation. It is as if he was living in a different reality. His emotions often did the unexpected. The unseen realities of God were more real to him than the seen situations that he found himself in. This was because one's emotions are affected by one's faith in God. As we walk near to God He becomes our dominant reality, and our emotions respond accordingly. David had experienced the faithfulness of God so many times, that God, His Word and His faithfulness were more real to David than anything else.

We see this type of behavior in various stories in the Bible. In the book of Acts, the disciples were beaten when meeting with the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem. As they were leaving, scripture says that they *"rejoiced because they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ."* We would expect anger or fear, but they rejoiced. We see another example in the life of Paul. Paul wrote about how he had been beaten, whipped, shipwrecked, hungry, without sleep, and almost stoned to death. After coming through these experiences, we would expect fear, anger, bitterness or lack of faith, but instead Paul tells how he had found contentment in all things.

When those in scripture trusted in God and walked with Him through obedience, they came to know God through life experience. They no longer just knew about Him, they now had come to know Him personally. Time and again we read how it affected not only their lives, but also their emotions.

We cannot know the truth of a situation until we have heard God's perspective about it. In all of these cases the people in the Bible were viewing their situation from God's perspective. They recognized His wisdom, His power and His faithfulness, and their emotions followed. Even in the midst of this

Coronavirus, may we beg God to reveal to us His perspective. May our emotions not be like those who have no God, but may our emotions be submitted to the fact that we belong to a sovereign God who is eternally faithful and works all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purpose.

As we begin to love rightly and believe rightly, we will see our emotions begin to change and bring glory to God as we become more like Jesus.

In closing, may we ask for forgiveness of those we have sinned against with our emotions. May we share with them our heart of repentance and invite them to walk with us as we seek to be better. May we read God's Word as we grow in our faith. May we turn to prayer as we humbly ask for God's help to transform our hearts and emotions. May we seek to spend time with other Christian brothers and sisters, even if it needs to be online during these days of quarantine.

In these days of quarantine, may our extended time with our families provide us with ample opportunity to be transformed in the area of our emotions, as we humble ourselves before God.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Did you come from an emotional family/culture?
- 2) How would you say this Coronavirus situation has affected your emotions?
- 3) In your life, which emotion is most likely to tempt you to sin?
- 4) What in this sermon did you find most interesting or meaningful?
- 5) Based on this lesson and Matthew 22:37-40, what question can we ask ourselves to evaluate if our emotions are good or bad?
- 6) What experiences in your life have strengthened your faith with God?
- 7) Any emotional sin comes from the condition of our hearts. What steps has God given us to draw near to Him so that He can transform our hearts?
- 8) What do you think God wants you to remember and apply from this sermon?
- 9) How can we pray for you?