

The Role of Emotion in Our Faith

Introduction

- We live in an overly emotional culture
 - We love feelings.
 - American Idol backstories.
- Very emotionally driven religion (think about worship services)
 - Emphasis on feelings — feelings = super spirituality
 - Disparaging of obedience — focusing on actions = empty religion
- Or complete disregard of emotion
 - Boring, stale, ritual.
 - Going through the motions.
 - Lacking passion.
- It's important for us to understand the role emotions play in our faith.

Understanding Emotions

- Definition:
 - Dictionary definition:
 - A natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.
 - Instinctive or intuitive feeling as distinguished from reasoning or knowledge.
 - Explanation of emotions:
 - My definition — Emotions are instinctual feelings that come as a reaction to what you know, understand, and experience.
 - Break down:
 - Reaction — something that happens to you
 - Feeling — a sensation we experience physically experience.
- How emotions work
 1. Emotions are impacted by our experiences
 - Something happens to us that incites certain feelings.
 - Examples:
 - Excitement when your team wins
 - Sadness when a loved one passes
 2. Emotions are shaped by our understanding
 - Shaped by thinking
 - What we think of or how we understanding something will impact what emotions we will feel after the experience.
 - Examples:

- What you understand about dogs based on your experiences, thoughts, and preferences means you could experience fear, happiness, or indifference upon being approached by one.
 - What emotions you will feel after the Boston Redsox win the World Series will depend on what you think about them.
- In opposition with our thinking
 - However, our emotions can also operate apart from, or even in opposition with our understanding.
 - We can feel fear even when we know there is nothing hiding in the dark.
 - Or bitterness can persist even when we desire to forgive.
 - However, this is still due to a battle of our contrasting inner thinking and understanding.
- 3. Emotions influence our actions
 - Emotions make us more inclined to act in some particular way — even if this is not how we would normally choose to act.
 - We might be more generous when moved by compassion, or we might shout out of frustration.
- Can our emotions be controlled? Yes and no
 - No
 - We will have automatic initial emotional responses.
 - These aren't choices, automatic feelings that can be at odds with logic and reasoning.
 - Yes
 - Before: our thinking and understanding prior will impact how we respond emotionally — if we are arrogant and self centered, we will get angry more frequently and more often.
 - After: after experiencing something, will we reinforce a particular emotion with our thinking? Or try to reverse or alter our emotions with our thinking? — continue to whine, or count your blessings?
- Our emotions are directly affected by our thinking, so there are actions we can take that will heavily impact what emotions we feel, how intensely, and how prolonged — so yes, we can impact and shape our emotions.
- Do our emotions control us?
 - Only if we let them.
 - Emotions heavily influence your actions — but your emotions never control your actions.
 - Regardless what emotion we feel, we are always able to choose how to act.
 - We can, and often need to, act opposite of how our emotions want us to act.
- Are emotions good or bad?
 - Depends on how they feel *AND* how they influence us
 - Desirable emotions feel good *and* influence us to good actions — hope
 - Undesirable actions feel bad and influence us to bad actions — depression
 - But just because an emotion feels good does *not* mean it will influence us to good actions and vice versa.
 - Romantic love — do stupid things
 - Guilt — seek to right the wrong
- God can use emotions for good, and Satan can use them for evil.

The Bible and Emotion

- The Bible is an emotional book
 - Examples:
 - Full of human emotion — Job 6:2: *Oh that my grief were actually weighed And laid in the balances together with my calamity!*
 - God is presented as an emotional being — Isa 62:5: *and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.*
 - So emotion is significant, but what is emotion's role?
- What does God command concerning our emotions?
 - Does God command us to *feel* this or ... *not feel* that?
 - It might seem like an obvious “yes”, but really we see that many of God's commands and expectations relating to our emotions have more to do with our actions.

Negative Emotions

- Anger
 - Verse: Eph 4:26: *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger*
 - Commentary
 - God allows for the initial emotional reaction.
 - He commands for us to not allow that emotion to negatively influence our actions and lead us to sin.
 - He commands us to take proper action to remove this emotion.
 - But we are also commanded are also commanded to take action to make sure our understanding doesn't lead us to anger — Rom 12:3: *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think*
 - Thinking highly of ourselves makes us more prone to anger, but we are supposed to have better spiritual understanding.
- Worry
 - Verse: Phi 4:6-7: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
 - Commentary
 - We should not feel anxious.
 - Instead we should take action and pray to remove our anxiety.
 - Then this will lead to a sense of peace that will encourage us to continue doing good.
 - Actions inspired by worry will be bad, but actions done with a confident sense of peace will be good.
 - We need to seek to really understand and build our faith so we can overcome our worry.
 - Phi 4:8: *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

Positive Emotions

- Joy
 - Verse: Phi 3:1: *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*
 - There is a command to rejoice — action, which helps us to feel more joyful.
 - But we also see that the command to rejoice is something we are obligated to do, regardless of how we feel.
 - The whole book is about how to properly understand our circumstances so that we will be joyful even when things are hard.
 - So we choose to actively rejoice in our trials so that we can also feel some sense of joy in adversity.
 - This keeps us positive and faithful to God instead of despairing and in danger of falling away.
- Sorrow for sin
 - It is good to feel sorrow for our sin — Ps 51:17: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*
 - So we need to choose to mourn our sin —
 - Mat 5:4: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
 - Joel 2:12-13: *Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments*
 - We choose to take action to make us better understand our sin so that we feel sorrow — Joel 1:13-14: *Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth o ministers of my God ... consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly*
 - The sorrow that we feel motivates us to take action and properly repent — II Cor 7:11: *For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!*
- Conclusion:
 - The significance of emotions is how they relate to our actions
 - How our actions influence which emotions we feel.
 - And how our emotions influence which actions we do.
 - Our responsibility
 - Act to manage our emotions
 - We seek proper knowledge and understanding which produce positive emotions that help promote good behavior.
 - We seek proper knowledge and understanding to reduce negative emotions and discourage sinful behavior.
 - Act properly regardless of our emotions
 - Yet, we do the right thing, even when we don't emotionally feel like it.
 - And we abstain from doing the wrong thing, even if emotionally we want to.
- Does God want us to be feeling based? Or action based?
 - Feelings
 - Emotions are reactionary feelings — does God want us to be people governed primarily by our feelings? And just acting based on how our circumstances make us feel?
 - Eph 2:3: *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*
 - Actions

- No, God wants us to think spiritually, and act according to proper understanding.
- I Pet 1:13: *Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded*
- Rom 12:2: *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*
- Know — not feel.
- Decide — not react

Action Love vs. Emotional Love

- Intro
 - Consider how this applies to love.
 - Two kinds of love
 - Action love = obedience
 - Emotional love = affection
 - Most important command: Love God — so which is God asking for? Obedience or affection?
- Action Love
 - God's definition of love
 - I Cor 13:4-5: *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered*
 - I Jn 3:16: *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*
 - God defines love by actions.
 - God commands action love
 - Jn 14:15: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*
 - Jn 14:23-24: *If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word ... He who does not love Me does not keep My words*
 - I Jn 5:3: *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.*
 - I Jn 2:3: *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*
 - Deut 11:1: *You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.*
 - Deut 13:1-4: *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder ... saying, "Let us go after other gods ... and let us serve them," you shall not listen ... for the Lord ... is testing you to find out if you love ... God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and ... keep His commandments.*
- Emotional love
 - So what about emotional love?
 - We should have affection for God, right?
 - Psalm 42:1-2: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?*
 - Psalm 116:1-2: *I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.*
 - When will we feel love for God?

- Based on what we know and experience about Him.
- Our affection for God will be the result of growing in our understanding and knowledge of who God is and what God has done.
- Examples — Simon vs. the sinful woman in Lk 7.
- Benefits of emotional love
 1. Can be a way for us to know if we love God
 - If we feel deep emotion and affection for God that can be a sign that we've really come to understand who He is and appreciate what He's done.
 - We really know Him! We really love Him!
 2. It can be a great motivation
 - Emotional love really motivates us to act!
 - Gen 29:20: *So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.*

*** Emotion is God's gift to us, not our gift to God.**

- Since emotional love is so powerful and feels so significant, we feel like this is the greatest thing we can offer God.
- What look at the offering God wants:
 - Rom 12:1: *Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*
 - Heb 13:15-16: *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*
- Emotional love is God's gift to us, that comes through understanding, that motivates us to do His will even more!
- You seek understanding, let the Lord bless you with emotion, and let that emotion move you to do greater things for Him.

• Two dangers of emotion

1. Our emotional love can be meaningless
 - It can be based on vain earthly things, rather than understanding for God — emotionally stimulating worship.
 - Or a very shallow understanding of God — one sided.
 - Or it can be all emotion and no obedience — Example of Saul and David.
2. We can't rely on our emotion
 - Yes, our emotion can motivate us to act.
 - But you can't only choose to act when you're emotionally motivated.
 - Because there are going to be times when you need to do something when you're not feeling it.
 - If you only act when you feel like it you will be an inconsistent Christian that lacks forward growth, but instead vacillates back and forth.

Conclusion

You act to seek true understanding that will help cultivate proper emotions.

You need to act according to your spiritual knowledge, rather than your emotions alone.