

The Emotional Life of God

This morning I am going to begin a new series that deals with our emotional life. Through the course of the series, I hope to deal with subjects such as overcoming depression. We are going to learn about how to deal with anxiety; how to handle grief; what to do with our anger and rage. We are going to learn about fear. And hopefully take some time to deal with positive emotions like joy and happiness, maybe even love. I am titling the series “The Facts About Your Feelings.” There was a book written, I think in the early 80’s, with that title. And while the book hasn’t particularly influenced me, I do like the title.

Now, you might say, “Rich, why a series on emotions?”

Let me share with you two of the driving motivations that caused me to do the series. First of all, I am seeing increasingly in the larger church in America, although not here in the Vineyard, a separation of the ministry of the church from the care of the soul. There is an increasing perspective when it comes to the emotional life, things like depression, anxiety, rage, or fear, that we take those problems to the experts, people who are not associated with the local church, people who don’t see themselves as extensions of the ministry of the local church.

There was a very unfortunate article, in my opinion, written recently in Christianity Today, which is a very popular evangelical Christian magazine. The author said, "I wouldn't take my car to a pastor to have him work on the transmission because I wouldn't expect a pastor to have the specialized knowledge to work on a car. Why do we think that a pastor or someone in the church would necessarily have any knowledge about emotional problems."

The notion that this particular author was advocating was that there is such a specialized understanding, such an esoteric knowledge base that is so far beyond the mature Christian or the godly pastor that unless you wanted to have a total amateur work on your emotions you would never go to the church, you would never go to a pastor, you would never go to a mature Christian for emotional help or when you are in crisis. So what occurs is that the traditional role of the church, which is the care of the soul, is stolen away from the church and is placed in the hands of the "experts."

And the church is not guiltless in this transference of responsibility. On many occasions, pastors and churches have abdicated their responsibility to care for the soul by saying, "We, in our church, don't get into all of that emotional stuff: depression, anxiety, fear, family breakdown. We don't get into all of that stuff. We leave that for the experts, for the professionals, and for the specialists. We are too busy with other things that the church is really good at like committee work and choir practice and deacon board meetings to waste our time with the everyday problems of real flesh and blood people.

One of the reasons why I want to do this series is to communicate to you that the Vineyard is not willing to abdicate the church's role in caring for the soul. We bless the fact that part and parcel of being a mature Christian and being a pastor is to provide real, relevant help for people's emotions. Along with evangelism, missionary activity, feeding the hungry, worshipping God and teaching doctrine, the church has a responsibility to pastor people, which means to care for their souls, to walk people through life's difficulties, to help people to overcome and find help and healing with emotional problems. That is, in part, why here in the Vineyard, Danny Meyer has trained and oversees 35 peer counselors. These are people who are in the church, who aren't experts, but who are mature Christians and who understand that one of the church's fundamental ministries is to help people through the emotional ups and downs and crises and difficulties that people have regarding their souls. The care of the soul is not a ministry that is given away to some other group, anymore than worship is something that we would farm out. Help with emotions and an understanding of the emotional life is intrinsic to the work and life of the church.

That is why we invest so heavily here in the Vineyard in pastoral care and counseling. That is why, along with the peer counselors, we have a number of life support groups within the church to help people overcome drug addictions, or sexual abuse, or sexual addictions, or eating disorders. That is why we started a counseling clinic here in the church. That's why we have over 150 small groups. That's why we have spiritual maturity classes and spiritual disciplines classes,

because Vineyard believes that the care of the soul and our emotional lives are an intrinsic part of what the church is for.

Let me spin this slightly differently. The view that all emotional problems must be taken to the experts, the specialists or the professionals really calls into question our doctrinal perspective that the Bible is sufficient to address life's issues and problems.

See, there are many churches, including ours, that have somewhere buried in their doctrinal statement the view that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and has supreme authority in the church regarding all the matters of faith and practice.

But it is not enough that the Bible is considered to be without error. Much of the evangelical church has lost a view that the Bible has functional authority. In other words, when we have a practical problem such as depression, or anxiety, or horrible communication in our marriages, or a sexual problem, or a difficulty with our 5-year-old, is it the Bible, sensitively and wisely applied, that interprets our problems for us? Is it the Bible that labels our problem, or do we opt for a secular interpretation? Is it the Bible that provides the framework for a solution or is it a non-biblical psychotherapeutic technique that really provides the framework for solving the problem?

See, a large part of the issue regarding farming out all family, individual and emotional problems to the experts is that it reinforces the view that the Bible, sensitively and wisely applied, really is not sufficient functionally. The Bible may tell us the way to be saved eternally, but for the way to live, well, now we must go to the experts.

Why should you look to the Bible for answers for emotional problems? Because it has been breathed out by God Almighty. It has been *inspired* by God. Now, God worked in conjunction with people as he breathed out his message into messengers who wrote these things down in the Bible. You know, each of those messengers had their own temperaments, their own personalities, their own writing styles, their own historical situation, and so the messages in the Bible sound different in style and tone depending on the messenger, much the same way that if we had someone who could play different musical instruments began blowing into a trumpet. The trumpet sound would be different than a piccolo, and that would sound different than a bassoon.

So it is that when God breathed his message into the apostle Paul, who was very logical, very learned, Paul's message sounds different than the message that came through Luke or that came through Isaiah. But the source, Paul says, of all scripture is God. That is what gives the Bible authority. In the Bible, we hear God's voice.

Paul doesn't only point to the source of the message as the reason why we ought to study scripture, Paul also points to the Bible's usefulness, the Bible's practical value in our lives. He says, in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking (literally reproofing), correcting and training in righteousness." In verse 15, he told us that the Bible was able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The Bible is useful in explaining to you how to be saved. It tells you the way of salvation. It tells you that if you put your faith in Christ and what Christ did for you at the cross in paying the price for your sins and

opening up the way for you to God, if you trust in Christ and in him alone, you will be saved.

And then he expands on the usefulness of scripture in a positive and negative way in verse 16 saying that positively, the scripture is useful for teaching us, that is for showing us truth, and negatively it is useful for reproving us, that is in pointing out lies. These first two words concern truth. They concern doctrine – teaching and reproving. The Bible says, here is accurate truthful doctrine and here is heretical, false doctrine.

Now, the second two words concern Christian practice. Correcting is the negative part of the second pair, correcting to straighten out your practice, to *straighten* it up. Training in righteousness is the positive part of your practice.

You see, what Paul was saying is that scripture is useful for straightening out your thinking on the one hand and your practice on the other. Or to put it in different words, scripture is useful for straightening out your beliefs on the one hand and straightening out your behavior on the other. Paul is talking about orthodoxy and orthopraxis. He is saying that scripture can fill you mind with the truth as you are trying to figure out your problems and find a strategy to solve them. The Bible provides a framework for discovering both the issues in your life and the solution.

Scripture also provides you with the truth about how you should live. How you should relate in marriage. If you want to build a foundation for you marriage, you build it on the Bible. If you want to build a foundation for child-raising, you build it on the Bible. If you want to build a foundation for friendship, or for

reconciling a relationship, or how to be emotionally well, or deal with anxiety, or depression, or anger, or grief, build your emotional life on the Bible.

Why should we meditate on the scripture? Well, Paul says, first of all, you meditate on the scripture because of its source. It was inspired, breathed out, by God. And you meditate on the scripture because of its usefulness, because it tells you what is true and it communicates to you how to live.

You say, “Rich, where does this view – that the church is responsible to address the emotional needs and the emotional hurts of its members and that the Bible is sufficient – leave professional counselors? Outside the church walls?”

There is an enormous amount of confusion right now concerning the nature of Christian therapy and Christian counseling. All you would need to do is pull down from a good seminary library a few recent issues of a pastoral counseling journal, and you would find such enormous ranges of opinion regarding what the nature of Christian counseling is and what the role of the Christian counselor is vis-a-vie the local church.

One of our counselors recently gave me an article from Counseling Today. It is a publication of the American Counseling Association. In it, they were describing the incredible confusion regarding what pastoral counseling and Christian counseling is all about. These two fellows were commenting on their understanding of Christian counseling. They have one of the largest networks of pastoral counseling centers in the country. Their names are Lindner and Ross. Lindner, and understand that he is representing an extreme position, but it is a position out there, said, “Here is my understanding of pastoral and Christian counseling. One of our intake questions is

‘Do you have any spiritual practices?’ But typically, God language [and he put that in quotes] is not a major focus of what we do at the pastoral counseling center. It is very much how we envision who we are, what we are doing and what is happening in the lives of people who come in, but we don’t spend a lot of time on overtly ‘spiritual’ methods.”

Now, that is precisely what we are not into here at the Vineyard. Every month, for that reason, Danny gets together with a group of Christian counselors who are working here in the community, many of whom are members of this church. And consistent with this understanding – that matters of the soul are to be cared for by the local church, and that the Bible is relevant and sufficient to provide help for our emotional lives – the Christian counselors who gather each month here at the church see themselves as extensions of the ministry of the local church.

You say, “Help me with this, Rich. What do you mean that the Christian counselor sees himself as an extension of the ministry of the local church?”

Let me share two things with you about any Christian counselor, who you would take a matter of your soul to, that you would open yourself up to and say, “Speak to me about my depression. Teach me; help me with my fear and anxiety. I have been overcome by grief. My husband and I are struggling and are on the verge of separation. My child has run away from home or is using drugs. Help me, please help me.” Before I would take my problems to another, I would want to have certain questions answered regarding that other person.

I will speak personally to you because from time to time I have personally gone for counseling, and Marlene and I have sought out marital counseling as we have hit

rough times in our relationship and needed outside help and perspective. I tell you this private matter because I believe it is foolish for a couple or a person, because of pride or shame, to keep running their head into the wall, trying to solve a problem on their own instead of seeking help. Who is it that I was looking for when I needed help? Who is it that you should look for and bring your problems to?

My first major concern was not the degree on the person's wall. A person can have the degree on the wall and have the view that I just shared a few minutes ago, which is: we don't get into God-talk around here; spiritual issues are really not our concern; we are mainly technicians – auto mechanics – working on the emotions or the marriage. I am so convinced about the relevance of the Bible for all of life that when I was looking for a counselor, I was looking for, first of all, someone who shared my view that the Bible was sufficient to address my problem and my marital problems and who saw that his job was to be faithful to the Word of God in interpreting our problem, in labeling our problem, in suggesting a solution.

When I have been in for counseling and when you, if you are a Christian believer, go in for counseling, what you ought to be looking for is not some new incredibly novel understanding of your problem. You ought to be looking for help in wisely and sensitively applying God's Word to your life because you, like me, should want not the thoughts of men, but the thoughts of God. "My soul is at stake here," you are saying. "My marriage is at stake. My child's welfare is at stake. I don't want your best ideas, counselor, I want God's best ideas."

My first pre-]requisite in choosing a counselor is someone who believes in the sufficiency of scripture and submits to God's Word. Someone who is constantly

testing their methods by “where is that in the Word of God?” Someone who is constantly saying, “Is this consistent with what I find in the scripture?” Their language, their thought forms, they are drenched in the Word.

A second thing that I was looking for when I sought out a counselor was someone who met the biblical prerequisites for being an elder. Someone who gives themselves full-time to ministering to the soul ought to meet the biblical qualifications of elder as laid out in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1. These folks ought to see themselves as pastors in other words. Pastors who are working in non-traditional settings. Their offices may not be in a church building. They may be in a professional building. They may be in a counseling center. They may be in another kind of office setting, but they don’t see their work as separated from the local church, rather it is an extension of the ministry of the local church. They see themselves as accountable to the local church and accountable to God. Because they are pastors working in a non-traditional setting, because they are pastors, they see that there is going to be a judgment upon them for what they have done with people’s souls.

Now the counselors that are working on our staff and the counselors that are working in non-traditional settings that attend this church, who I have had the privilege to get to know deeply, in my opinion meet the qualifications for the kind of people you should bring your problems to. They are testing their therapies by God’s Word. They are attempting to demonstrate the relevance of the Word of God for the whole of life – marital, family and individual care. They, in my opinion – at least

those that I know well – meet the biblical requirements of elder and they do see their work as an extension of the ministry of the local church.

Now, why a series on emotions? Because, number one, emotions, our souls, are not something that we just hand to the experts and the church washes its hands of this very difficult work. I'm doing a series on emotions because the care of the soul is intrinsic to the work and the life of the local church. And whether the care of the soul is being done in the church building or by extension in a counselor's office, it all ought to come under the local church. It is part of our life together. It is part of what it means to be a Christian community.

Now let me share with you another reason why I want to do this series on emotions. That is because it seems like in the church and larger culture people run to two opposite extremes regarding how to handle emotions and emotional problems. On the one extreme, emotions are almost entirely discounted, dismissed, minimized. One Christian psychologist wrote a book several years ago called "Emotions – Can you Trust Them?" In preparation for this series I have read lots of different counseling books and so I picked this book up. It was a quick read. At the end of the book, I thought to myself, "This whole book could have been reduced to just one word on one page – No." Emotions – can you trust them? No. I couldn't believe that this Christian psychologist had virtually no room in life for emotions. Emotions were basically things that got in the way that you constantly needed to subordinate to thinking. As far as I could tell, reading through the entire book, I found no place where emotions had a positive contribution to make.

And you see this in many churches and among many Christians. It is the view that we would be better off without these messy things called emotions, because feelings and emotions just get in the way, they constantly need to be subordinated to thinking. Some churches and books will teach this rigid hierarchical view that first you have thinking, the brain, but under the feet, way down are emotions. That has colored a large part of Christian discussion regarding feelings and emotions. That is one extreme.

The other extreme is what I call the almost uncritical celebration of all the emotions, as if the emotional life is the only part of the human person which is not fallen. The classic woman goes into the counselor and says, "I am angry, but I know I shouldn't feel that way." And the counselor immediately interrupts and says, "Never say you shouldn't feel this way or you should feel that way. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They just are."

Who says that feelings are neither right or wrong, they just are? Where is that verse in the Bible? Feelings can be wrong. You can get incredibly angry about things that you should not be angry about.

The former head of the Securities and Exchange Commission was removed from his job when it was discovered that he was a wife-abuser and used to fly into a rage when he came home from work and all of the carpet fibers were not vacuumed in the same direction. If he saw carpet lines crisscrossing each other or in a swirl pattern, he would become unbelievably angry and abusive.

Feelings can be wrong. I have known of families where the father or mother would fly into a rage when a light was not turned off. What are we talking about for

a 60-watt bulb? A penny a day? Or when the shower wasn't completely wiped down after a shower, lest horrible mold would grow.

It is quite possible, and often the case, that feelings are wrong and sinful. A person could feel wonderful in an adulterous relationship with a person who is not their spouse. Haven't all of us experienced feeling happy, for at least a period of time, feeling excited and great about something that was sin?

Some Christians dismiss feelings and minimize feelings, discounting them all together. Other Christians celebrate feelings in an uncritical way and communicate to people, "Just feel the feeling. Feelings have no moral content." Throughout this series I hope to provide you a balanced biblical perspective on emotions and feelings. One that gives proper place for emotions and the human personality without celebrating all emotions. Where we see, on this tightrope, giving room and place for emotions without validating every single emotion or every different feeling.

You say, "Rich, I have been raised in the church and in my family with a very confused view of emotions. My former church had no room for emotions. My family had no room for emotions. The moment strong emotion was shown, it was suppressed. No one could show anger or be upset or cry. Emotions, as I have been taught, are just things that get in the way. They don't help us to live the Christian life. I don't really understand the place of emotions at all or why God gave these things to us – like grief, jealousy or anger; love or compassion. Why are they there? Why should I learn about them?"

Think with me, just for a moment, of a world that has no emotions. Along with being bland and colorless, tasteless, think with me for a moment of what it would be like to have no emotions. I can tell you that if you had no emotions, if the world were filled with Mr. Spocks in the Baby Boom version of Star Trek, or Data on Star Trek the Next Generation, or the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz who didn't have a heart if you are too old for Star Trek altogether, if the world were filled with the Spocks and Datas and Tin Men and you didn't have any emotions, I can tell you terrible decisions would be made on a continual basis in almost every area of life.

Imagine you are walking in a dark parking lot at 3:00 a.m. in the morning and behind you hear the footsteps of two large men following you and speeding up to catch you. Now, without the emotion of fear, your decision regarding what to do in that situation would be greatly impaired. You might turn to the men and say, "I wonder if you have the time. My Rolex seems to have stopped." Or "I have to pull my car out of this lot. All I have on me is a \$100 bill. I am not sure the parking lot attendant can change it. Does either one of you guys have change for a \$100?"

One of the values of emotions is that they inform our decisions. In fact, the Bible does not teach the rigid hierarchy that some churches and counselors do of first mind and then emotions. The Bible doesn't tend to compartmentalize the soul. It tends to focus attention on the heart, which is the seat of all of our inner functions, of our knowledge and of our emotions. Your brain and emotions don't live in two different places. Rather they interact with each other and inform each other. They help each other. It is not first mind and then emotions. It is both together to make a good decision.

You are thinking of taking a new job. On a rational level things are checking out. But you have a gut check. Something doesn't feel right. That may be an indicator light. Just like fear in the parking lot says that something is wrong here and I need to be careful, the gut check may say the same thing to you. Wait a minute, I need to go back to the drawing board on this decision. Something may be wrong here. There may be a red flag that I am not paying attention to.

A friend of one of your kids comes into the house. You feel some suspicion. You process out with your brain and say, "Well, I don't have any reason for feeling this, but there is something about this kid. He feels a little oily to me. A little underhanded, a little creepy."

Why a series on emotions? Because I think that as we learn about our emotions, we make better decisions – vocationally, maritally, and in child-raising.

Biblically, it is from the heart that we decide, not the mind or emotions alone. But both working in concert.

We need to learn about our emotions to increase our self-awareness. John Calvin, a great Christian Reformer and writer of the Institutes of Christian Religion, which to this day remains among my very favorite of Christian books, began his famous Institutes of Christian Religion this way, he says, "True religion consists of two things: knowing God and knowing ourselves."

If you don't understand emotions, you won't understand yourself. We must learn about emotions to become more self-aware. Why do you do the things you do? Maybe there is a sin, behavior, addiction in your life that you have struggled mightily against, that you have tried to pray about, that you have tried to memorize Bible

verses concerning, that you have confessed to God and others – and yet, this particular addiction, sin or habit just keeps creeping back in your life. It might be that learning about emotions would increase your self-awareness so that you get in touch with particular times or particular situations of vulnerability. Do you fall into this pattern because you haven't learned successfully to handle your anger? Do you fall into this pattern because you haven't learned to deal with depression? Do you fall into this pattern because you don't know how to find joy or happiness in the Lord?

The more you understand emotions in general, and the more you understand your own emotions, the more self-aware you will become and the more you will be able to live in liberty. Why is your marriage going the way that it is? Why did you get into a fight the moment you came into the house? Our actions are often driven by our emotions. When we don't understand our emotions, we don't understand our actions.

We must understand emotions because many of us are slaves to and are completely dominated by our emotional lives. The Bible teaches that one of the activities of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life is self-control. In Galatians 5 the last fruit of the Spirit mentioned is self-control. Yet many of us feel completely out of control regarding a certain emotion. We might be out of control concerning depression or anxiety. We might be out of control in our anger or jealousy. We find ourselves ruled and dominated. And instead of emotion being a servant, assisting us in the task of self-awareness and decision-making, part of our emotional life rules and dominates us and enslaves us. In this series on emotions I am going to be

talking a lot about self control because no one can live successfully without learning to control their emotions and their impulses.

Back in the 1960's, a psychologist from Stanford University did an experiment with 4-year olds. He put a marshmallow down on a table in front of a 4-year old and said, "Now, if you can wait and not eat this marshmallow in a little while I will give you two marshmallows." The 4-year olds would look at the marshmallow. They would be sitting at the table and a fluffy white marshmallow would be in front of them. The psychologist would leave the room for a second. A number of the children, the moment the psychologist left the room, took the marshmallow and shoved it in their mouth. The psychologist was gone for 15-20 minutes observing what the other children did. Some would sit and close their eyes, putting their hands over their eyes so as not to look at the marshmallow. Some of them sang to themselves. They would close their eyes and sing songs. One of the children put his head down on the table and went to sleep.

Well, this psychologist tracked the kids, followed up on all of them as they were graduating High School. Here is what he found. Those kids who were able to control their appetite at age 4, were now as graduating seniors in High School more socially competent, more personally effective, better able to cope with frustrations in life. When they met challenges, they were less likely to fall to pieces or freeze or become rattled or disorganized. They were more self-reliant, more confident, and more trustworthy.

The kids who grabbed and ate the marshmallow had more trouble in life. They were easily upset by frustrations. They were immobilized by stress. They tended to

be prone to outbursts of anger or jealousy. They overreacted. They provoked fights and arguments.

One of the reasons we are going to learn about our emotions is to begin to understand, especially for those of us who have never understood, what self-control, the control of impulses and emotions, is all about. For many of us, I hope this series will be a liberating experience so that we are not dominated or mastered by our anxiety, our worry, anger or depression.

And I believe we need to learn about emotions because as we understand emotions not only in ourselves but in others, it will increase our relational success. Again, if you have ever met someone who doesn't understand emotions well, you find that they have great difficulty in relationships. They don't know how to read others or to read the mood of a room. They talk when they should be quiet. They are quiet when they should talk. They frown when they should smile and smile when they should be frowning.

Churches that minimize the role of emotions are going to have lots of relational problems. People are going to be bouncing off each other. Not only will they be bouncing off each other, but churches that don't understand emotions will often be abusive. An essential quality for treating others well is understanding the proper role of emotions in the Christian life.

But I tell you when feelings are denied, when they are dismissed or discounted, when they are made fun of in a family or church setting, people are often easily abused. We cut off a part of us that makes us care about each other, that makes us

empathetic toward each other. People become objects to be pushed around or manipulated, to be used.

Let me tell you the ultimate reason why we need to understand emotions. The ultimate reason is because emotions are part of what it means for us to be made in the image of God. Let me put it this way, and I will be talking more about this next week, God is an emotion-filled being and when he created human beings to be made in His image, a part of that image is our emotions. When we discount or dismiss emotions we are dismissing something that is intrinsic to the person of God.

To spin this in a slightly different direction, you can never get close to God, you will never be intimate with God, you will never be able to walk with God, unless you begin to understand the whole emotional life of God that is part and parcel of his being and person-hood. Emotions are not something that we just find in people, part of us having hormones and chemicals running through our blood. Emotions are part of heaven – part of the glory of almighty God.

The view that God is an emotional being, not dominated or ruled by his emotions, but filled with emotion, capable of feeling, and, even more so, what we do affects the emotions of God, may be radically new for some of you. It is certainly in opposition to what some teachers have taught in the church's history. Let me give you a little doctrinal lesson.

The Greeks, especially Plato, but also Aristotle developed an understanding, a philosophy of God that became known as the impassibility of God. The view that God lies beyond all emotions and all pain, that you could never attribute to God emotion or pain because those things are human. And in the early church it was

considered to be part of Christian orthodoxy to speak of God as being impassible, not impossible, but impassible, that God doesn't feel anything and he certainly doesn't suffer anything, that God cannot be affected by anything we do or don't do. Christian writers said that when the Bible speaks of God as suffering, or having emotions, they are probably speaking anthropomorphically – attributing human characteristics to God. Just like the Bible speaks of God's ear being open when he has no ear. The Bible speaks of God's anger or his grief but he doesn't really experience those things. It's just a way of expressing what it looks like on our end. One medieval theologian, a man named Anselm, even said that God could not ever be spoken of as compassionate. He is beyond all of those feelings. He is experienced by us as compassionate. He is experienced by us as merciful. But to imply feelings in God is to detract from his perfection.

Thomas Aquinas even said that it is difficult to attribute love to God, if by love we mean loving feelings to God. We experience God as being loving, being kind, merciful, but it is not part of God's feelings, because God is beyond feeling.

Listen closely. I believe that much of the church for much of its history – at least in this area of the emotional life of God – was more influenced by Greek thinking, by Plato and Aristotle than they were by the Bible because the Bible demonstrates to us a God who is full of feeling, not beyond feeling or absent in feeling, but filled with perfect feeling. In fact, one of the interesting facts of comparative religions is that the Bible alone of all the major world religions shows a God who feels. Most of Hinduism displays an impersonal God. The goal of Buddhism is to get beyond

emotion and passion. Allah, the god of the Muslims, is not affected by mankind! He is above all of that, but the God of the Bible feels and is filled with feeling.

Jesus, of course, was frequently said to be filled with different kinds of emotions. In Mark 3:5, it says that he looked around at them in anger and was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts. He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored. He was angry, indignant and distressed over people's hardness of heart.

Of course, Jesus experienced great sorrow. He is often known as the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Luke 19:41, it says, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.'"

In John 11, when Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus, it says, "When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews that had come along also were weeping, he was deeply moved in Spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him,' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept."

We worship a God who sheds tears, who weeps.

He was not only angry and filled with sorrow, but he also experienced compassion. It says in Matthew 9:36, "When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." When Jesus healed the leper, it says he was moved out of compassion.

Luke 7 it says, "When he came to a widow and saw her weeping over her dead son, when the Lord saw her his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'"

He was often filled with compassion or the Bible will talk about him being moved with compassion. He loved the rich young ruler it says in Mark 10. Jesus looked at him and loved him. It says that Jesus loved Martha, the sister of Lazarus. At times he was filled with joy. He was really happy.

You say, "Well, Rich, I mean that is Jesus. You haven't proved that God is filled with emotion. Maybe emotion was just part of Jesus' human nature."

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit can be grieved. In Eph. 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." Impersonal principles cannot be grieved. Impersonal standards or forces or powers do not feel grief, but we can cause the Spirit grief. Full personhood implies emotion.

The Old Testament, in particular speaking of God, not about Jesus and his humanity, but about God the Father, often portrays God as filled with anger. Listen to verses like these:

Naham 1:6 – "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger, his wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him."

Or Jeremiah 10:10 – "But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, an everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes and the nations can not endure his indignation."

He is not only angry in the Old Testament, he is so filled with love. Jeremiah 32:41 – "I will rejoice in doing them good." Here is a great verse for the emotions of God. "I will rejoice in doing them good and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and with all my soul."

God hates showing anger. He loves when his anger is past. Isaiah 57 says, "For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry. For from me proceeds the Spirit and I have made the breath of life, because the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry. I smote him. I hid my face and I was angry. But he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him. I will lead him and quiet him with comfort, creating for his mourners the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord. I will heal him."

I want to finish by talking about one quality of God. I am going to continue in discussing the emotional life of our Lord next week in part 2 of this message. But I want to talk about one thing to get you in touch with the idea that God feels. I want to talk about the suffering of God in closing.

There has been in the history of the church the idea that God cannot suffer, that he is beyond suffering. That what we find in the Bible is a God who condescends, who wills to make himself vulnerable so that he can be hurt by the likes of us. Does your view of God include this perspective that it is not only people who suffer, but God who makes people, who also suffers with us and can experience grief? It says in Isaiah 53 concerning the coming Messiah that he would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We see in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the trial of the Lord, in his beating and mocking and then in his crucifixion the profound suffering of the Son of God, suffering that was not just physical, but spiritual and emotional. The Son of God's suffering included suffering the loss of the Father. When the Son of God was hung on the cross, he cried out quoting Psalm 122, "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken me?" He suffered on the cross the forsaking of God. When Jesus

became sin for us, so closely identifying with sinners that he took on himself the sins of the world, when Jesus became on the cross sin, God turned his back on his Son Jesus and for the first time in all of eternity, the Son lost the Father. As the Son drank from the cup of the wrath of God, wrath poured out on sin, the Son suffered at a level that no person has suffered in the history of the world.

It wasn't just because of the brutal physical pain that we say that Christ is acquainted with suffering. It is the brutal spiritual and emotional pain that made his suffering so overwhelming. When he hung on the cross, the Father turned his back on the Son of God because God's eyes are too pure than to look at evil. And Christ, in that moment, had taken on sin. He became the sin bearer. And so Christ, in that moment, lost the Father. And therefore he lost light, life, hope, and love. He suffered.

You say, "Well, again, that is Jesus in his humanity that suffers. But God, who is pure Spirit, can God the Father suffer?"

The answer is absolutely yes. Christ suffered on the cross the loss of the Father. But understand this, friend, the Father suffered the loss of his son. The love of God is so great that God is willing to put himself in the position of humanity and God, great, awesome, powerful God, omnipotent God who can choose anything, has chosen to make himself vulnerable to being hurt, to suffering. At the cross, the Father suffered – not in the same way that Jesus did. Jesus suffered the cross. The Father suffered the loss of the Son.

Have you ever lost a loved one – a husband? A wife? A parent? A grandparent? Have you ever lost a friend to death? A child? Have you suffered a miscarriage?

Have you ever lost someone you loved? Our eternal Father, because of a heart filled with emotion, the emotion of love, perfected love in making himself vulnerable enough to suffer the loss of his beloved Son. A Son who it is clear was the delight of the Father. A Son in whom he was well pleased. The Son who was the very image of the Father. The first born of all creation in whom the fullness of deity dwelt bodily. The Son who Isaiah says, "Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul delights." The Son whom the Father had great joy in, who was perfect. The Father suffered the loss of that Son, giving him up in order to rescue us.

Therefore, our Father in heaven understands, not in a distant, cold, intellectual way but *understands* emotions experientially. God feels in response to our feelings. He rejoices in our joy and shares in our grief. There are lots of pragmatic reasons for us to study emotions together, but the best reason is: we will never know God well until we know him as a person filled with perfect emotions.