

The Emotional Life of God (Part 2)

Last week I started a series on emotions, a series I am calling “The Facts About Your Feelings.” As I mentioned, it is a series that I have wanted to do for some time. Part of the reason I have wanted to do it is because it seems to me that many, many people have virtually turned over the whole area of emotions to the experts—to secular psychology and to professional counselors, who are heavily influenced by secular psychology. I am always concerned when people stop seeing the relevance of the Bible in any realm of life. See God took the time to speak to us. He inspired prophets and apostles and writers of history to write down the thoughts of God. Thoughts that were applicable to every situation, every circumstance, every happening in our lives. What I see occurring in America today, even among Christian people, is a loss of confidence in God as healer, a loss of trust that the Bible really does speak to your family problems - problems that you might be having with your 5-year old or 15-year old. The Bible really does address the core issues in your marriage. The Bible really does address the core issues in your depression or anxiety. The Bible really does address the core issues in your dissatisfaction at work.

One of the features of modern life is what I like to call the “cult of experts.” As we move from an industrial society to an information society with the multitude of

what Peter Drucker calls “the knowledge world,” there is in the United States right now the sense that if you have a problem you must run to the expert, especially the credentialed expert, the degreed expert, in order to solve that problem. America, for example, right now has almost 1500 think tanks. Hundreds of thousands of Ph.D.’s who are people who define the needs and deliver the solutions. My baby is not sleeping through the night. Don’t talk to mom or a few friends, call an expert. Don’t know how to shop for clothes or arrange your closet, or hang tools in your garage, or deal with worry – pay for a consultant. In many churches 12-step groups are far more relied upon than the 12 apostles are. And for many, many Christians this over-reliance on the experts has led to a loss of discernment regarding the specific Biblical content of the experts’ advice.

Part of the reason why I wanted to do this series is to demonstrate the relevance of the Word of God over the whole of life, including that portion of life which Christians in churches have been most apt to turn over to the experts – the life of our emotions. I have no desire, none at all, to spend the next six weeks bashing counselors who seem to be the favorite punching bags of some churches and some preachers. In fact, on many occasions during this series on emotions, I am going to urge some of you to seek counseling. But in your seeking of counseling, I want to improve your discernment. I want to offer you a simple test regarding whom it is that you go to counsel with.

In the book of Jeremiah, and if you have a Bible I want you to turn there for a moment, Jeremiah offers a simple test for the difference between a false prophet and a true prophet. In Jeremiah 23:18, Jeremiah says, “But which of them has stood

in the counsel of the Lord to see or to hear his Word? Who has listened and heard his Word?" I would say if you are going to pick a Christian counselor you ought to apply to that counselor the test of Jeremiah 23:18. Has this person stood in the counsel of the Lord to see or hear his Word? In other words, is the counselor submitted to the Bible? Does the counselor really believe that the Bible is relevant to every part of life, including your family, your individual problems, and your emotions? Does the counselor test his or her particular techniques and counsel by the standard of God's Word? Does the counselor see himself as extensions of the ministry of the local church?

So through this series, friends, I have no desire whatsoever to use counselors as a punching bag. But I do want to improve your discernment in picking counselors and to encourage your confidence in the Word of God. So it is to help you with this whole issue of expertise and which experts to go to that I wanted to do this series.

Secondly, it is because of the great confusion that exists in the Christian church that I desired to do this series on emotion. I mentioned last week that the church tends to run to extremes in so many areas, but none more so than when considering emotions. On the one hand some people seem to have no room at all for emotions. It is like emotions are the great curse of God. Emotions are blamed for every problem we have. "We just have to stop being emotional and be pure reasonable beings. Then we will be liberated; we will be free." We have this "emotions just get in the way" kind of Christianity, a continual critique of emotions, and every time emotions are shared it is called "emotionalism". It is bashed.

On the other hand, you see this uncritical acceptance of all emotion. “Let’s just celebrate all emotion and no emotion is bad. Emotion has no moral content.” So you hear the silly statement: “Emotions are not right or wrong, they just are.” All healing is said to proceed from “getting in touch with your emotions.”

Both of these extremes that we find in the church are wrong. Let me raise something that I didn’t raise last week regarding why you don’t want to go to the one side of “emotions just get in the way – the problem with people is they are just too emotional.” And you hear folks critiqued that way. “She is just too emotional.” “Her problem, his problem, or even the church’s problem is they just have too much emotion.” Of course, if we mean that that person’s emotions are out of control, that the fruit of the spirit of self-control is not evident in their lives, or if we mean that the church manipulates people’s emotions in order to push them toward a certain decision, or if we mean that the church substitutes emotion for truth, then we might have a problem. But the simple dismissal of emotion or the bashing of emotion as if it just gets in the way is simply not part of the Biblical balance.

And neither is it part of the biblical balance to celebrate emotions uncritically or to suggest that the problem in the church is that the people think too much. I have been around church for quite a long time and occasionally I have heard speakers suggest to the crowd or to individuals during ministry time that their problem is they think too much. “You have to get out of your mind, brother.” One very well known speaker, who fills conference centers, once told the crowd, “Many of you just need to put your brains in a rocket ship and shoot them to the moon in order to receive the things of the Spirit.” The crowd exploded in applause. Whenever

anyone tells you to stop thinking, it is probably because they want to do the thinking for you. That is the time you need to put on your suspicion hat. All kinds of red flags ought to go up. That is the time that you know you are about to be sold a bill of goods.

What is the problem of people? It is almost never that they think too much, or feel too deeply. Again, listen to God's Word on this subject. Ephesians 4:17-18, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding, separated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

It is so fascinating to me that the Bible does not buy into this dichotomy in the soul of man. The problem is just your brain. The problem is too much emotion.

Paul says that the problem that people have regarding God is both a problem of thinking and a problem of feeling. He said that people are darkened in their understanding. It is like a mist is over people's minds so that they can't see the truth in Jesus Christ even though the facts are laid out. There is this darkness, this mist.

I don't know if you have ever driven in a fog or in a mist. A few years ago my family traveled to the top of Pike's Peak in Colorado, about 14,000 feet up. When we were on our way headed down, this big cloud settled on top of Pike's Peak. Here we are, driving along this curvy roadway, where if you drove off the road you were going to fall a few thousand feet and then roll a few thousand more and bounce to the bottom. We were in a cloud. We couldn't stop because we were afraid we would be bashed from behind.

That is what people are living like today. We have to keep moving because we are afraid we are going to be bashed from behind, but we don't really know where we are going. We are in a fog. Our understanding is darkened. Look around you, friend, and tell me if you don't see the truth of this Biblical statement that people are in a fog. Many folks don't have a clue regarding how to really have a good marriage. There are folks who don't have a clue regarding what is going to create health in their children, what will make a healthy, responsible adult. Bosses at work don't have a clue regarding how to treat their employees, how to really motivate them. People don't have a clue about how to get in touch with God, how to find real spiritual connection, real spiritual satisfaction.

There is this ache in our hearts that we feel. There is this ache in our souls, but most folks don't have a clue as to how to address that ache or satisfy that thirst. People are in a fog about God. Really just clueless regarding what God is really like. Other than a few little statements like, "I think that God is probably kind and it will all work out in the end," people are in a fog about the nature of God. They are in a fog about the attributes of God – his justice, his holiness, his mercy, and his love. Folks are in a fog that God is still in control of the world, that God still runs things and that it is not all just random chance.

The problem, friend, is never that people think too deeply. It is that there is a mist over our minds. And the problem is never that people feel too deeply. Paul says that the problem is, rather, the reverse, that there is a hardening of people's hearts. Is that not what you see in many people? It is like a thick callus has covered their hearts – a loss of sensitivity, a loss of tenderness.

You say, “How can people be so cruel? How can they hurt their own children? Or pull out a gun and shoot a stranger at a filling station?”

The problem is not that they don’t think enough. The problem is that there is a hardening of the heart, a callus, so that people don’t feel what God designed them to feel. How is it that America can remain such a violent society? Because we expose ourselves to thousands and thousands of hours of violence, maim and bloodshed, watching movie after movie of people being shot and gore all over and brains splattered on the walls. The callus just grows thicker.

God says, through the prophet Jeremiah, “My people have forgotten how to blush.” Well, if there is anything that applies to our day it is the loss of the capacity to blush. The callus is so thick on many of our hearts that we don’t feel shame any longer. People on TV advertise their perversities. There are TV shows that celebrate the cheapest form of sin. “Yes, I slept with my sister’s husband, so what?” “Yes, I lied about being pregnant to get a husband, so what?” “Yes, I have been two-timing my girlfriend or devising ways to be lazy at work.” The problem is the hardening of the heart.

It is never that you feel too deeply. It is almost always that you don’t feel enough. You don’t feel what you ought to feel when God designed your heart to feel things. We don’t feel pity the way we should. We don’t feel compassion the way we should. We don’t feel shame the way we should.

This week I want to continue talking about the emotional life of God. The ultimate reason why we ought to pay attention to emotions is not to figure out our problems, but as I suggested last week, we have emotions because we have been

made in the image of God and God has emotions. Throughout the Bible, when it is not read through the lens of Greek philosophy, we encounter a being, a divine being, who is filled with emotion – a God who is absolutely passionate, who is furious in anger, outraged at the insult to his dignity, violent in his responses. And yet, He is more tender, more safe, more comforting than the most nurturing mother who has ever lived.

This morning I am going to talk about The Emotional Life of God. Let's pray.

As we consider the emotional life of God it is interesting to note how God has been refashioned, updated. His has lost some of his harder, more unpleasant edges in many Christian books and lots of church teaching. So in many churches today God is basically a projection of all the politically correct virtues of current thinking so that we could pat ourselves on the back and say, "Well, isn't it wonderful to discover that God is really just like us after all. God is a God who celebrates diversity and is really after establishing self-esteem. His basic message is I'm OK; You're OK, too." There is this almost embarrassment, the kind of embarrassment that a social ladder climbing family might feel at a polite dinner party when one of the ostracized family members drives up on his Harley with his sleeves rolled up and with a big tattoo of a heart that says, "Mabel" across it. His other arm is tattooed with "I am a fool for Christ". It is almost that kind of embarrassment, that nervousness – "Oh, no, someone is going to blow it for us" – when in a setting of nice church goers someone starts talking about the wrath of God. The fact is that there are so many passages in this book called the Bible in which God is shown to get angry. Especially in the 20th Century, there have been so many attempts to explain away the wrath of God

passages. “Oh no, you must never think of the divine being as being angry Himself. The ancient Hebrew people just projected that onto God. They spoke of him as if he were angry. Really what they meant was that certain activities are self-destructive. They are just going to hurt you. So they were saying in their ancient way, ‘Listen, when you look at that activity and weigh out the pros and cons, there are just too many negatives, but God never gets angry.’”

Listen to me. The ancient Hebrews were not simply projecting onto God some human quality, speaking as if God got angry. They were referring to a very real emotion in God when they said through prophets like Jeremiah (if you are taking notes 23:19-20), “See the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath. A whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart.”

Or how about this from the words of Hosea the prophet in Hosea 13:7-8, “So I will come upon them like a lion. Like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them. Like a wild animal I will tear them apart.”

Trust me, the prophets were never speaking *as if* God got angry. They were searching around for metaphors, analogies, for describing the very real anger of God.

You say, “Rich, that is the Old Testament.”

Turn with me to the New Testament. Romans 1:18, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who

suppress the truth by their wickedness.” We find phrases like “the wrath of God” all through the New Testament as well.

Now, it is very important that when discussing the anger of God we continue to avoid the extremes, the one extreme of explaining away the anger of God in the Bible, of being embarrassed by it, of trying to minimize it or smooth it over or say, “Well, it is really a matter of expressing something and is not really one of God’s feelings. It is just if you do a lot of self-destructive things you will probably destroy yourself. If you drink too much, you are going to ruin your liver. If you have sex outside of marriage, you might catch a sexually transmitted disease. That’s all it is.” It is important that we avoid the one extreme. God really does get angry.

But as we look at phrases like “the wrath of God” in Romans 1:18, we need to avoid the other extreme of projecting onto God all of the failures, all the weaknesses, all the corruption of human anger. When people think about human anger very often they think about a loss of self-control – someone flying off the handle. Some of you grew up in homes like that. When you think about anger you think about your dad flying into a rage over nothing. The lights weren’t turned off. He had a bad day at work and just comes home and explodes at everyone. He starts hitting you or your mom. That is what we think about anger. We think about this loss of self-control or temporary insanity. “I don’t know what came over me,” people say. “I just saw red. When I saw my girlfriend with this other guy I lost it.”

There is no compulsiveness in the wrath of God. There is never any loss of self-control. There is never any delight in hurting people, or cruelty or irrationality. God’s wrath, God’s anger is never a corrupt thing. When you come upon the

passages in the Bible where God is angry, do not place over them your experience of anger from people in the past, any more than when you read the God is loving passages you put over them the corrupt, manipulative, controlling, dominating kind of love that maybe you experience, love that always involved “I will love you, if...”; God’s emotions are always holy. They are always clean. They are always under his self-control. They are always according to his standards of love and justice.

Let me put this differently. The problem in the Bible that people had with God is not that “God, you get angry and you shouldn’t get angry.” That’s a modern problem. We have great difficulty with anger all together. But the problem of the people in the Bible is not “God, you get angry and you shouldn’t.” It is “God, when are you going to get angry? God, do you really condone injustice? Are you morally indifferent to our situation? Are you ever going to act? Are you asleep, O God? When will you rouse yourself?”

Read through the Psalms. Read through the great prayers of the prophets. Read through the charges that unbelievers had against God and the charge was always this: God will do nothing, either good or bad, even though we continue to sin.

Here is what I am saying, friends. God’s anger shows the most wonderful thing that we can imagine about God. That we have a God who is responsive. He is not just above it all, doing his thing on Mars somewhere. The Bible shows a God who cares so deeply, who is so involved in the lives of men and women that he gets angry precisely at those times when we ought to get angry. The anger of God is both the most frightening thing we can imagine, but also the most comforting thing we can

imagine. It says to us, "God cares. He gives a rip." It matters to him what we do and what people do to us.

I will tell you what you should be embarrassed about. Never be embarrassed about the anger of God passages in the Bible. That just showed that God cares. He is involved. Be embarrassed by the thought that we would worship a God who is absolutely indifferent, a God who is like Buddha with his eyes closed and his legs folded in a perfect serene peace, rather God reveals himself to actually put himself in the position of a person who is being hurt and harmed. Whenever there is a victim, what we find in the Bible is God reacting as if he were the victim. Whenever there is an offense, God is so responsive, so involved in people's lives, he responds as if he were the offended. Whenever something negatively affects a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, God responds as if he were the one against who this thing was directed.

We ask: against what is God's wrath revealed? And it says, "Against the godlessness and wickedness of men." It is not only wickedness that provokes the wrath of God, that brings about this response of anger in God. It is also godlessness. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. Christianity is not just a substitute word for being moral. "Well, I don't know why I need to become a Christian. I am a good person." Christianity is not just a set of morals. People say, "Well, I know all about Christianity. Do good to your neighbor. Be a nice person." The wrath of God is revealed against godlessness. Christianity involves the worship of the true God. It is essentially about God. And God gets angry whenever you attempt to get rid of him and to live life as if God didn't exist. Every attempt that we have to say "God, you are not going to be

involved in my work life or my business decisions” is godlessness. Every time we put up the “No Trespassing” sign to God, we say “God, I will deal with you at church, but certainly not in who I date. I will acknowledge you in kinship and in crisis and when I am afraid, but hands off of my money. Don’t go poking around in my bedroom.” Godlessness.

And this godlessness is revealed in vv. 19-20 of Romans, when Paul goes on to say, “Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain, for since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature has been clearly seen, being understood from what is made so that men are without excuse.”

Paul is saying that in looking at creation, looking at the evidence from what has been made around us, everywhere the universe is shouting about God, “I exist. You have to deal with me. You have to pay attention to me. You have to take me into account. You just can’t make independent decisions apart from me.” Paul is saying the evidence for God from the creation is overwhelming.

Some of you know that I used to be an attorney. So whenever I think about evidence I think about it from a legal perspective. People will often say, “Where’s the evidence for the truth of Christianity? Where’s the evidence? If there is so much evidence for the existence of God, why don’t people believe?”

Do you know what the biblical answer to that is? The biblical answer is that there is a mountain of evidence proving the existence of God and the nature of God. There is a mountain of evidence. The problem is that the jury, who is deciding on the evidence, is totally biased. Paul says in v. 18 that God’s wrath is revealed against

the wickedness of men who suppress the truth. They see it. They are handling this mountain of evidence. They hear the testimony, but they are biased. Sitting on the jury are people who are saying, "Wait a minute, now. If I really listen to the stuff about God, that is going to make me change. I might have to give up some of my habits. I might have to stop sleeping with my girlfriend. If I listen to this evidence and decide based on the evidence, then I am going to have to change." The jury is biased. They have all kinds of self-interests. "No, no, no. There is no evidence." They put their hands over their eyes and stick their fingers in their ears.

For those of you who are interested, there is a fascinating new book out called "God the Evidence" written by a fellow named Patrick Glenn. He was a Harvard educated atheist. He went to school in the 1960's and was politically very liberal. Had no friends or social relationships who were Christians. Christians were people who lived in the South and screamed in Baptist churches. Here is a guy from Boston, MA. The typical secular intellectual. Through a series of circumstances and situations, he began to get in touch with his bias toward the evidence. And while I don't agree with everything in his book, he amasses an amazing amount of evidence as he explores modern physics and biology, evolution and psychology. His basic argument is, "Look at it. Everywhere we find God." His book opens with a summary of a lecture given by an astro-physicist named Carter. I am not going to bore you with the details of the lecture. I can hardly understand it. The lecture title was "Large Number Coincidences and the Anthropic Principle in Cosmology."

Boiled down, for those of us who don't have IQ's of 180, Brandon Carter shows that virtually everything in the universe, all of the different forces, the gravitational

force, the nuclear magnetic forces, the force of electromagnetism – all of these forces are in such delicate balance for only one conceivable purpose – to produce people. That if you tinkered with any force in the universe even slightly you couldn't have human life. And from the outset, at 10 to the minus 43rd seconds of the big bang, 0.00 with 42 0's seconds, the universe needed to know exactly how everything was going to unfold because if it had unfolded just slightly different, the universe would consist entirely of helium, or it would be a universe without protons or atoms, or a universe without stars, or a universe that collapsed back on itself.

Against what is God's wrath revealed? Against the bias, against the pseudo-intellectual objection that there is just not enough evidence. When a person has made up his or her mind at the outset that "I don't want God to exist." God is angry at all the ways we fence him out. When we say to him in our own lives and in our own hearts, "This far, God, no farther" the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

And how does God show wrath? Often times he lets us have what we want. Three times here in Romans 1 – in v. 24 it says, "God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another."

Verse 26, "God gave them over to shameful lusts."

Verse 28, "God gave them over to a depraved mind."

One of the ways that God shows his anger toward you is that he lets you have what you are after. He lets you walk away from him. He lets you fence him out of your life. He gives you over to what you say you want more than him.

See, we think God's wrath is revealed when we are disciplined by God, when sin is exposed. That is not the wrath of God. The wrath of God is not what is happening with the Clerk of Courts, whose name is being splashed on the front page of the Columbus Dispatch every day. The wrath of God would, rather, be revealed when God doesn't intervene. He lets a person go. He says, "I have been after you and after you. I have been calling you to turn to me. But you would not. So I am now going to allow the thing that you have wanted to just sink its clutches into your life. I am going to let the power of that addiction overwhelm you. I will not intervene." That is the wrath of God.

You want to divorce? I have spoken to you over and over again about it. But if you keep fencing me out, I will say "fine." That is the wrath of God. You want to marry outside the faith or get romantically involved outside the faith – I'll let you have what you are pursuing.

You want to work and work and work and neglect your family and children? Then I will let you have that and all that goes with that. That's the wrath of God.

One thing we need to remember about God's anger in the Bible is that God does not delight in showing anger. He does not delight or take any pleasure at handing us over to what we are after. God doesn't delight in stepping back and allowing our addictions to overwhelm us.

It says in Lamentations 3:31-33, "For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion. So great is his unfailing love, for he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men."

It is as if punishment and turning us over is distasteful to him. Like a compassionate father, he doesn't like to do this.

God delights in showing good, in showing mercy. Another way to put it is that the Bible says over and over again that God's anger lasts for just a moment, but his mercy endures forever. Listen to these passages. Let them wash over you so that you really feel the heart of God.

Isaiah 54:8, "In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." His wrath is for a moment. His love is everlasting.

Psalms 30:5, "For his anger lasts only a moment. But his favor lasts a lifetime." Isn't that a great verse? "His anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime."

Many of us are living in that "His favor lasts a lifetime." Yes, God responds to sin and godlessness with wrath. But his delight is in being compassionate and gracious. He is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. A God who forgives wickedness. Who will forgive you and show mercy to you, if you turn to him.

I want to say just a few words about God's grief. If you have a Bible, look at Ephesians 4:30, "and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." One writer, Martin Lloyd-Jones, said that this verse shows the difference between Christianity and every other moral system. When people say that being a Christian is just the same thing as being a nice person, he asks: where in being a nice person do we ever think about grieving the Holy Spirit? See, every other system of morality presents people with a code: don't do

this, do that, you are breaking the code. Or don't do this or that because it will hurt you. But only in Christianity does it say don't do this or that because you are in a relationship with God that is so close and personal that if you were to do otherwise, you would grieve God. You would hurt him. You would cause pain to his heart.

Again, the Bible is consistent in showing that God, far from sitting aloof, above it all, in a protected bubble on Mars somewhere, is emotionally involved in what we do. God cares. And his care is revealed in this passage: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

What is the reason why you ought to obey God? Paul says that in part it is because when you don't, you grieve him. God is so close to you, in fact, if you are a Christian the Holy Spirit has entered your life. That's how close he is. The Spirit of God is living inside of your heart. You can't be a Christian unless you have invited God to live inside of you. But if you have invited God to live inside of you, then what you do with your body and thoughts and words affects God. We can grieve the Spirit. Does it occur to you that when you blurt out some statement of criticism, when you blurt out some angry, harsh judgment, when you slice someone apart with your words, you are grieving the Spirit? Boy, talk about a text that gives lie to the fact that God has no feelings.

It is not only in these overt acts of sin or thoughts that we grieve the Holy Spirit. I believe the Spirit of God is grieved whenever we neglect him, when we ignore the prompting of God. When God prompts you to call someone or to say something kind, to get involved in another person's life, when the Spirit of God prompts you in the morning to read your Bible or to pray. The Spirit of God prompts you to give and you say to God, "Not now." Essentially, "Leave me alone and stop talking to me. Stop

influencing me. Stop prompting me in a certain direction.” I believe God is grieved whenever we completely ignore his promptings in our lives.

The last thing about God’s emotions that I want to talk about today – we certainly could talk about God’s compassion, his love – I want to finish with talking about the joy of the Lord. It is an emotion that I think that many folks who think about God don’t think about the fact that God is very happy. He is filled not only with love and compassion and, for a moment, he might get angry and feel grief, but in addition, we who are Christians worship a happy God. A God who is filled with joy. And it is a good thing that the one who runs the universe is happy, that he feels delight. The reason why you sometimes are filled with delight is because you are made in his image. Joy and laughter are not just something that people understand. God doesn’t scratch his head and say, “I don’t get that at all.” Our joy and happiness are just a shallow reflection of the incredible joy, the infinite happiness of our God.

You say, “What makes God so happy?”

God is really happy about himself. He takes great delight in his own being. He takes great delight in the relationship of his inner being, in the relationship of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Spirit and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son. I will tell you what else also makes God happy along with himself.

Zephaniah 3:17, “The Lord your God is with you [or is in your midst], he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you [he will take great delight in you with joy], he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

Now, let me ask you this. When you kneel down to pray or when you lift your eyes up to the sky and you pray to God, did it ever occur to you that you are praying

to a God who sings over you? This is not some syrupy, psychologically comforting concept. This is the Bible. This is hard-edged theology. That God sings and the reason there is music in the universe, the reason we have worship music, is because it first came from God. He will rejoice over you with singing.

Did it ever occur to you that when you approach God, he is a being who sings over you? What would it sound like to hear God sing? Some folks have told me that they have had some of the most powerful experiences of their life when they went to these Promise Keepers men's events at football stadiums, like the Hoosier Dome in Indianapolis, or the Astro-Dome or in Yankee Stadium where 60,000-70,000 men are on their feet along with an orchestra or huge band and 70,000 men have their hands up and are worshipping God. I have been told that this is one of the most overwhelming experiences of their lives to worship along with 70,000 others.

What would the voice of God sound like? Maybe it would be as overwhelming as singing with 70,000 men multiplied to the infinite degree. It would be so powerful, so awesome to hear the voice of God, that we would be melted and reduced to ash in our response of excitement, in the thrill.

What would it sound like to hear God sing? Maybe it would sound like 70,000 men and it would also sound like the most tender voice of a mother singing her baby to sleep as she rocks him in her arms. I imagine the voice of the Lord is more comforting, more soothing, than the voice of any mom rocking her baby to sleep.

I think God loves to sing. God is like the ultimate worship leader. I picture the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son, that when the son comes home and is dirty and the Father says, "Let's throw him a party. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let's

have a feast and celebrate, this son of mine was dead and now is alive. He was lost and is found.” It also goes on to say that there was music and dancing there. I believe the Father led the singing. That is how much joy is in God’s heart when one person who has been keeping God out of their life, when one person says, “I am turning and running back to God, I want to find God, I want a relationship with God.”

You say, “Rich, I can’t believe God would sing over me, that he would take delight in me. I feel so guilty with all that I have done and all the ways I have blown it. No way could God sing over me.”

Well, Zephaniah 3:17 is preceded by vv. 14-15 which say, “Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your punishment.”

If you turn to Christ, if you say, “Jesus, I acknowledge what I have done. It’s been wrong. Now I want to place my sins on you. Be my sin bearer,” the Lord has taken away your punishment.

You say, “I can’t delight in the Lord. There are too many things against me. Too much stuff is going wrong in my life.”

Verse 15 says, “He has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. Never again will you fear any harm.”

You say, “How could God be with me? He is too holy and I am too unclean.”

Zephaniah says, “The Lord your God is with you.” Literally in your midst.

“Oh, he could never delight over me.”

Zephaniah says, “He will take great delight in you.”

Perhaps you have caused the Lord grief. Perhaps you are a person who knows that God, in anger, has turned you over, allowed you to have what you are after, and now you hate what you have produced. Turn back to God. This day, turn to Christ. Surrender yourself to him. He delights in doing good to all who turn to him. He will rejoice over you with singing. Let's pray.