

May 31, 2001

Dear Friend,

As you may know River Hill's men's "B" softball team lost the second game of the season in the final inning. We were ahead 8 to 4 when the other team, St. John's Lutheran, batted for the final time. All we had to do was get three outs and we won the game. To make a long story short they got 5 runs before we got three outs and so they won the game 9 to 8. The moment that final runner was safe at home my heart was pierced with the pain of disappointment and regret. The moment the pain struck, I had the thought, "This is crazy to feel this bad over a stupid game." Then, I had another thought, "When was the last time I felt this bad about my sin or about people going to hell?" Then another thought struck me as I thought about how good I felt the previous week when we won. "When was the last time I felt that much joy because of God's love for me in Christ?"

My emotions show me what I love, what I trust and what I am hoping in for happiness. My emotions are the indicator lights on the dashboard of my soul to show me what I am seeking to be happy. My grief at losing shows that I believe losing a softball game is worse than sinning against God. My joy at winning a softball game shows that I believe winning is more satisfying than being loved by God. How am I to respond to this revelation of my heart? First, I confess my sin. I agree with God that it is a wicked thing to be so grieved about losing when I have so little grief over my sin. And I agree with him that the only reason I am forgiven is because he put this sin on Christ and killed him so that he can justly forgive me. Second, I go to God in his word and in prayer and ask him to expose my sins and to give me the gift of repentance (Psalm 139: 23-24, 2 Tim 2: 25). I think much of Christ and his dying for my sins and of my offending this free grace by my loving winning more than this Jesus. Finally, I ask the Holy Spirit to do whatever it takes to make me a person who grieves over my sin and rejoices in Christ more than I grieve over and rejoice in anything in this world.

I can imagine that you may be thinking to yourself. "This is unrealistic. How can I control my emotions? How can I change how I feel? I don't plan to have the emotions I have, they simply happen to me. I cannot be held accountable for them." I would respectfully admonish you to consider what you are saying. Your emotions do not just happen. If that were so, then God could not command you to feel certain ways. Here are but three examples of the hundreds of commands to feel certain emotions. "Grieve, mourn and wail. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into gloom." (James 4:9) Philippians 4:3 says, "Rejoice in the Lord. I will say it again, rejoice!" Eph. 4:31 says, "Rid yourselves of anger." Let me be the first to say that changing your emotional life is no easy task. The reasons we feel certain emotions when certain things happen are complex. However, at the heart of the matter is our heart. Ultimately our emotions show us what we trust, love and hope in for our happiness. Godly emotions result from trusting, loving and hoping in God and his promises rather than in the things of this world. So my daily battle is to "hope in God" because when I do, I will grieve and rejoice over the right things.

Seeking the gift of godly affections,