

Dear Friend,

As I was reading through Psalm 119 this morning I was struck by the variety of emotions that the author expressed. Consider this array of emotions in just eight verses (113-20): “I hate the double-minded but I love your law. I hope in your word. ...let me not be put to shame... I love your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of you and I am afraid of your judgments.” These verses are indicative of all 172 verses of this psalm. The author of this psalm was a passionate man. He felt deeply about God and his word, sin, his personal safety, those who disobey God, etc. It would not be off the mark to say that this man was emotionally stirred up about the things of God.

Seeing all this emotion expressed by the psalmist makes me wonder about myself. I have emotions and I am passionate about many things. However, I’m not sure if I can say with honesty: “I hate every false way.” “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” I can honestly say that my eyes have shed streams of tears because my children have not kept my rules. I cry at movies. I hate lima beans. I hate being disrespected by my children. I hate having to wait more than a minute at the check-out in the grocery store. When my wife says she loves me, those words are sweet to my taste. Being told a member of our hunting party has shot a big buck are words that are sweeter than honey. But I’m not sure I can honestly say what the psalmist says. I don’t seem to be as emotionally stirred up about the things of God as he is.

What does my emotional life tell me about myself? Should I be able to honestly say all the same things the psalmist says? How do I change my emotions? How would changing my emotions change my life? While we all have emotions and we all know that our emotions have a profound impact on how we live, few of us have figured out what to do about our troubled emotional life. Things that ought to appall us instead excite us. Things that ought to excite us instead bore us. We find it virtually impossible to act in love towards those with whom we are angry. We are immobilized by anxiety and driven by our lusts.

We live in the midst of a society that spends billions of dollars a year on drugs and therapies to “fix” emotions. We are a society obsessed with alleviating every negative emotion and trying to achieve the state of “blissfulness.” While sometimes there are physical or neurological influences, most of the time our emotions are merely the reflection of what our hearts value and trust. The gospel of our Lord Jesus offers the only real hope for changing our emotions and thus our lives. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

I don’t have all of the answers for how this works but I do know that the Bible is full of help for us in dealing with our emotional lives. While it is entirely a work of God’s grace, God has given us, in his word, the means of grace we are to use in having a heart that values and trusts the right things so we are full of the right emotions. We should and can be passionate about the things of God, as was the psalmist. We should and can overcome troubling emotions through the gospel that will enable us to be free to love God and others. However, it is a fight to change. It is the fight of faith.

It is a fight we cannot win alone. For this reason, I am so excited that we are going to host the “Changing Hearts, Changing Lives” seminar this October. I view this seminar as a tremendous aid for us in the fight of faith in which we are engaged. Dr. Paul Tripp, who will present this information, is an author, counselor and lecturer in Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He will share with us not only the biblical description of why we do what we do but also how we change and help others to change. The leadership team is praying that God will use this seminar to assist each of us personally but also to help us become a community that is able to help others change. I am praying that every person in our church will make every effort to attend this practical and insightful seminar. You will be receiving a letter and a brochure describing this seminar within the next few weeks. I trust you will come to the seminar and encourage every Christian you know to join you.

Learning to change with you,