

Cry of the Soul - Part 1

- I. Introduction:
- A. Are emotions moral or amoral? Is it true or false that emotions are neither right nor wrong – they simply are? Is it inherently wrong to feel certain emotions? Should we strive to feel certain emotions and to suppress other emotions?
 - B. How do we deal with and understand our emotions? What causes different emotions?
 - C. Are there such things as negative and positive emotions?
 - D. Should we attempt to suppress certain emotions?
 - E. The Cry of the Soul: How our emotions reveal our deepest questions about God.
- II. **Thesis:** Emotions are not amoral, but vocalize the inner workings of our souls and are as tainted as any other portion of our person.¹
- III. **Organizational Sentence:** We will start by examining this thesis, then we will move on to asking why this study is important, and then this week we will examine three basic movements in relationships that provoke our emotions. Next week we will explore different emotions specifically to see what they reveal about us and where we are with God.
- IV. **Examining the thesis:** Emotions are not amoral, but vocalize the inner workings of our souls and are as tainted as any other portion of our person.
- A. It is common today to think of emotions as neutral or amoral aspects of human experience. It is common to think that it is not what emotions we experience but what we do in response to these emotions that really matters.
 - B. It is also common today to think of some emotions as bad or negative, like anger or despair, and other emotions as positive and good, like happiness. Often this sort of thinking leads people to think that they should suppress the negative emotions in the attempt to always feel happy and positive. Christians especially tend to believe this since the bible talks about rejoicing always and being joyful.
 - C. Both of these views are flawed.
 - 1. The first view, that emotions are amoral, is flawed because this denies that sin affects us entirely or wholly. The bible teaches that we are totally depraved. Every part of our being has been perverted by sin: our minds, bodies, will, and even our emotions. Therefore, even our emotional responses will often be sinful. Emotions themselves are not amoral. There is a moral and immoral way to respond to our circumstances. Our emotions are no more or less sinful than our desires or thoughts or

¹ Allender, Dan, and Longman III, Tremper. The Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994, pg. 14.

behaviors. Just like behavior, a positive emotion can be sinful, like for instance, taking joy in the pain of others.²

2. The second view, that since some emotions are bad and others are good we should suppress the bad ones and will ourselves to feel the good ones is also flawed because it does not recognize the complexity of emotions. Emotions involve a complex interplay between our bodies and our heart. We do not merely experience anger in our minds but also in our bodies physically. This is true of all our emotions. There are physiological manifestations of different emotions. A person cannot change the emotion they are experiencing through an act of the will. By attempting to suppress emotions, a person merely attempts to disengage or avoid the way they are feeling. The result is often a person who thinks they must always be happy and so therefore they end up acting happy all the time even when they don't feel this way. It is dishonest and dangerous. People around you can recognize the unhealthy nature of this approach. The bible itself even seems to say that the absence of feelings is often a refusal to face sorrow or anger.³

D. Instead of see emotions as amoral or as good and bad, we should understand emotions as a window to the heart. In this view, all emotions tell us something about where we are with God. It is easy to think of emotions being caused by our environment alone, but we will see that though emotions are often seemingly caused by our horizontal relationships, they actually reflect our vertical relationship with God as well.

V. **Asking why this is important:** We should look at our emotions not for the purpose of trying to effect direct change of negative emotions to positive emotions, but by listening to our hearts and examining what they reveal about where we are with God.

A. Emotions are often unstable and sometimes they seem to come out of nowhere. They are powerful and so they are often considered dangerous. For this reason, many people try to avoid emotions all together. Sometimes, we cling to and feed certain emotions in order to avoid feeling other emotions. Men often feel anger rather than hurt.⁴

B. This is why we will be using the Psalms to explore the world of emotions. The Psalms record men and women struggling with God by being open and honest with their emotions. In fact, their emotions are expressed beautifully and poetically in Psalms as God's people turn to God with their darkest and brightest emotions. There is no pretending everything is ok in the Psalms. There is no suppressing of darker emotions in Psalms. But, neither is there acceptance and complacency of certain emotions. There is movement toward hope and joy away from anger, jealousy, and despair.

² Ibid., pg.14 and 33.

³ Allender, Dan, and Longman III, Tremper. The Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994, pg. 23.

⁴ Ibid., 23

- C. So, what we find in the bible is that God Himself experiences emotions, including anger, sadness, jealousy, and contempt (hate?). But, these emotions are always properly founded and God always acts properly.
- D. For us, what is important is not necessarily what emotion we are feeling, but when and why we are feeling it. Emotions do not tell us only how we are doing with other people, but ultimately with God.
- E. “Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice. To understand our deepest passions and convictions, we must learn to listen to the cry of the soul.”⁵
- F. How do we listen to our emotions?
 - 1. Do we assume that positive emotions are a sign of faithfulness and spiritual health?
 - 2. Do we assume that negative emotions are a sign of sin and a lack of faith?
- G. No, we listen to our hearts by learning what our emotions reveal about the questions we have about God. We listen to our emotions in light of Scripture to see what they say about God’s character.
- H. So this study is important for our personal relationships with God, because by listening to our hearts through our emotions, we can then listen to the gospel and see it penetrate our hearts at a whole new level.
- I. The Psalms help us to realize that every emotion in context is a theological statement. All our emotions are finally a statement about God. All negative emotions essential question God and ask, “Are you good?” All positive emotions essentially are celebrating His goodness.⁶ And rather than being a God who is waiting to crush us for acknowledging that we are angry with Him, God welcomes and wants us to come to Him with our pain, fear, hurt, and anger.
 - 1. Psalm 88 is an open lament
 - 2. The Psalms invite us to question God, but they invite us within the context of worship, faith, and ultimately hope that God is good.
 - 3. Psalm 139 shows us that we cannot escape from God. We cannot hide from Him, and this is good. So, let’s be honest.

VI. Three basic movements in relationships that provoke our emotions:

- A. We respond emotional to the way others relate to us. Three basic ways others relate to us are: attack, abandon, and love.
 - 1. We usually respond to these movements by others in 1 of 2 ways.
 - 2. Fight or Flight
 - 3. Each relational movement provokes a consequent emotional response in us. These responses then open a door to our deepest questions about God.
- B. ATTACK - People move against us : When people attack us whether that be through words, physical actions, or passive aggressive behavior, we usually fight it or flee from it producing differing emotional responses. Attacks are characterized by a threat to our position, property, person, or power.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶ Ibid., 34 and 43.

⁷ Ibid., 45.

1. Fight: When we fight the attacks of others, we get angry and usually attack back.
 - a. Anger reveals the question: *Is God just – will He let the wicked win?*
 - b. Our anger is the result of something we want being hindered by someone else because of their attack. Sometimes, we interpret actions by others as attacks that aren't even intentional or wrong but we see them as attacks because they hinder what we want becoming ours.
 - c. When we respond to attack with anger, we are attempting to forcefully win back what is lost. We are attempting to right an injustice.
 - d. Anger responds to attacks through demanding justice in our time. Instead of waiting on God's timing to right every wrong, we take vengeance into our own hands.
 - e. Examples:
 - Road rage: people harm others who have cut them off
 - Cursing someone out: we attack verbally those who have offended us or who have harmed us in some way
2. Flight: When we flee from the attacks of others we feel fearful and run seek to avoid the attack.
 - a. Fear reveals the question: *Can I trust God to protect me?*
 - b. Our fear is a response to an attack we find overpowering. We want to preserve our life or reputation or whatever it is that is being attacked, and so we run from the threat.
 - c. Fear avoids confrontation and avoids situations where attacks might continue.
 - d. Examples:
 - Avoidance: we avoid those who attack us

C. ABANDONMENT - People move away from us: Abandonment leads to loss; loss of friends or family. Abandonment is a separation that leads isolation, loneliness, and a feeling of death. This loss is cruel because our desire grows as the hope of companionship fades.⁸

1. Fight: When we fight abandonment, we get jealous.
 - a. Jealousy reveals the question: *Is God good and faithful, or will He leave me empty and bless others? Will God satisfy my desires or will he leave me empty?*
 - b. Jealousy and envy come from wanting to keep what we eagerly fear we might lose. It is an aggressive attempt to hold on to what we fear is slipping away. It is a desire to hold on and possess something or someone.
 - c. Instead of trusting God to provide for us, we strike out against someone who we think is stealing what is ours, or we strike out against the one who is abandoning us.

⁸ Ibid., 47-48.

- d. James 4:2 – “You want something but don’t get it. You fill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.”
 - e. Examples:
 - When we crave attention, we become jealous of those who gain attention. We insult or destroy others in order to remain the center of attention.
 - When a friend or a loved one pays attention to others, we become jealous and punish the one who is abandoning us.
2. Flight: When we flee from abandonment, we feel despairing and depressed.
- a. Despair and depression reveal the question: *Will God leave me isolated and alone?*
 - b. Despair is the refusal to struggle for relationship.
 - c. It deadens our hearts and pretends not to care about the one abandoning us.
 - d. Despair refuses to hope in the restoration of relationship for fear of hurting again.
 - e. Denial often follows or even distraction.
 - f. We are all created to have intimate relationships (not necessarily sexual). Sometimes we like being alone, but no one likes being isolated from relationship.
 - g. Instead of seeking to kill others, despair seeks to kill oneself emotionally by not feeling, and sometimes seeks to cease living.
 - h. Example:
 - Isolation
 - Alcohol or drug abuse attempts to take away feelings
 - Suicide attempts to stop all feelings

D. LOVE - People move toward us: When we feel abandoned, and someone offers us love and kindness, we can have difficulty trusting them. So sometimes we fight love or flee from love.⁹

- 1. Fight: When we fight love that is offered, we feel contempt.
 - a. Contempt reveals deeper more personal questions: *Does God really love me? If God moves toward me and love, and if I am aroused with hope that he cares for me, will he really follow through? Does God really want me? What if God’s movement is fake or meant for another?*
 - b. Contempt is a defense against love that leaves us vulnerable to hurt.
 - c. Contempt demands distance so that I cannot be hurt.
 - d. Examples:
 - Daniel in college who was a jerk to those who treated him well. He was contemptible toward me because he thought I would eventually hurt him.

⁹ Ibid., 49-51.

- He despised those who offered friendship because he did not want to hope that someone would be his friend.
- 2. Flight: When we flee from love that is offered, we feel ashamed.
 - a. Shame reveals the deeper more personal question: *Does God love me or will He hate me if He sees what I really am?*
 - b. Shame seeks to avoid the hurt of humiliation. Shame is fearful of being exposed and then not being loved.
 - c. When others offer love to us, we don't believe that love will continue if they knew who we really are.
 - d. Shame justifies avoiding love.
 - e. Examples:
 - Shame rejects others who offer friendship and love because it does not believe it is worthy of love or it doubts the love offered will continue to be offered once we are exposed.

VII. The Gospel: God's answers to all these questions.

- A. With all this talk of emotions, it is easy to get so introspective in analyzing ourselves that we cannot get out of it. Continual introspection will only lead us to despair as we discover our depravity. Our eyes must turn towards Christ if we want the deepest cries of our hearts answered.
- B. The Gospel is God's answer to all these questions.
 - 1. *Is God just – will He let the wicked win?*
God is just and He will judge the wicked. God has judged sin on the cross in setting forth Christ as a propitiation for sin. Christ will judge sin at His return. (Rom. 3:25-26 & Rev. 19)
 - 2. *Can I trust God to protect me?*
Yes, God promises to be with us through all harm by His Holy Spirit in us. He also promises to raise us up on the last day into eternal life where sin and death reign no more.
 - 3. *Is God good and faithful, or will He leave me empty and bless others? Will God satisfy my desires or will he leave me empty?*
God is faithful and always fulfills His promises as He did in Christ, who died according to the Scriptures for the forgiveness of sins. God will not leave me empty or alone if I trust His promises. God has not abandoned us, but became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and He has sent His Spirit into our hearts ensuring us that we are His children with full rights.
 - 4. *Will God leave me isolated and alone?*
God will not leave me empty or alone if I trust His promises. God has not abandoned us, but became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and He has sent His Spirit into our hearts ensuring us that we are His children with full rights.
 - 5. *Does God really love me? If God moves toward me and love, and if I am aroused with hope that he cares for me, will he really follow through? Does God really want me? What if God's movement is fake or meant for another?*

God really does love us, so much that He gave His only Son that we may have eternal life. He will follow through and will not withhold His love for us. He has loved us, not because we loved Him first, but because of grace.

6. *Does God love me or will He hate me if He sees what I really am?*
God already sees who we are and loves us in our rebellion, guilt, and shame.