

CORE STRENGTH

A NEW LOOK AT THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

(WEDNESDAY CLASS SERIES) FEB. 17-MARCH 31, 2021



CORE STRENGTH

Looking at the Deadly Sin of **Wrath**

Wednesday, March 24, 2021



Koinonia Question

How would you complete
this sentence?

I feel happy when -----.

HAPPY



The gospel writers paint their portraits of Jesus using a kaleidoscope of brilliant "emotional" colors. Jesus felt compassion; he was angry, indignant, and consumed with zeal; he was troubled, greatly distressed, very sorrowful, depressed, deeply moved, and grieved; he sighed; he wept and sobbed; he groaned; he was in agony; he was surprised and amazed; he rejoiced very greatly and was full of joy; he greatly desired, and he loved.



In our quest to be like Jesus we often overlook his emotions. Jesus reveals what it means to be fully human and made in the image of God. His emotions reflect the image of God without any deficiency or distortion. When we compare our own emotional lives to his, we become aware of our need for a transformation of our emotions so that we can be fully human, as he is.

Compassion

The Gospels tell us that Jesus "felt compassion." The Greek word for "compassion" speaks literally of a sensation in the guts, but was used to speak metaphorically of an emotional sensation—just as we speak of "heart-breaking," "head-spinning," or "gut-wrenching" feelings today.

For whom did Jesus feel compassion? For people in need: a leper (Mark 1:40-41), a widow by the coffin of her only son (Luke 7:13), and two blind men (Matt. 20:34). He also felt compassion when he saw crowds starving for bread (Mark 8:2). His compassion was stirred by physical and spiritual needs. His heart broke when he saw people who were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).



Anger

Compassion moved Jesus not only to heal, but also to anger. In a dramatic scene, Mark portrays Jesus "looking around with anger" at religious leaders (3:5). They were concerned only to see if Jesus would break their rules by healing a man on the Sabbath. When Jesus did, they immediately plotted to kill him. But though Jesus was angry with these religious rulers, he was also "grieved by their hardness of heart." While the cruelty of their callousness deserved his anger, the condition of their stony hearts caused him grief.

Jesus felt "indignant" (Mark 10:14) when his disciples did not allow mothers to bring their children to him for his blessing. The disciples' self-importance irritated Jesus. Jesus slapped them with stinging rebukes: "Let the children come to me; stop preventing them." Jesus then hugged the children, blessed them, and laid his hands on them (10:16). Jesus' feeling of annoyance with the disciples quickly gave way to an outpouring of warm affection for the children.



In another instance, crass commercialism in the temple inflamed the zealous anger of Jesus and moved him to a violent action. The words of the prophet were like fire in his bones: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17, quoting Isa. 56:7). The pursuit of profits had excluded the opportunity for Gentiles to find and worship God in the court of the Gentiles, where people of different ethnic backgrounds and physically disabled people could gather to worship. But merchants had packed that area with their tables, stalls, boxes, and animals. People who had traveled a long way to find God were shut out. Though the terrified merchants running from the crack of his whip saw only the destruction of business as usual, Jesus' anger was motivated by "zeal for your house" (John 2:17, quoting Ps. 69:9) and directed toward the positive purposes of the worship of God and the mission to all nations.



Grief

Jesus also wept at the tomb of Lazarus. Witnesses said, "See how he loved him" (John 11:36). When Jesus saw Mary weeping, "he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" (11:33). When he stepped near to the tomb of his friend, "again he was greatly disturbed" (11:38). When the word "disturbed" was used for animal sounds, it denoted the loud, angry snorting of horses.

When used for human emotions, it emphasized the mixture of anguish and rage. Jesus wept. His groans welled up from the depths of his spirit, racked his body, shook the tombs, and echoed back from them. He raged against death, that terrible enemy that had attacked this, and every, family.

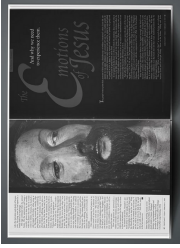


Joy

While Jesus was a "Man of Sorrows," Luke also paints a scene where Jesus "rejoiced very greatly in the Spirit" (Luke 10:21)-which implies more than cracking a wry smile. The occasion for this outburst was the return of the 70 from their successful mission.

On the eve of his execution, Jesus told his disciples that all he had revealed to them was so that "my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11; 17:13). They should abide in his love as he always abides in the love of the Father (15:10), and they should be one as he and the Father are one (17:11). Here again joy is the mark of life within divine love relationships.

Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, was also the Man of Joy. He obeyed the will of the Father and endured the cross by focusing on the joy set before him-the joy of unshakable love relationships in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:2, 22).



Love

Love permeated, guided, and empowered the spectrum of Jesus' emotions. He felt compassion, was angry, grieved, and rejoiced because he loved. Love is an unshakable commitment of the will. Love transcends feelings and keeps on going when feelings falter or vanish. But love also involves and expresses emotions.

Jesus loved with strong desire. He told his friends, "I have desired with great desire to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The combination of the verb "desire" and the noun "desire" doubles the intensity in Jesus' expression of his deep longing to be with his friends.

When a wealthy young man ran up to Jesus, knelt before him, and asked how he could inherit eternal life, "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21).

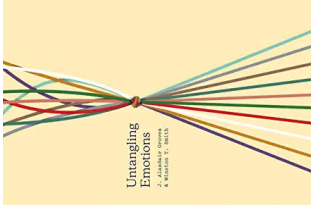


Much is made about the difference between friendship (philia) love and divine (agape) love, but this is

overdone. The words are used interchangeably for Jesus' love. For example, the sisters of Lazarus sent a message to Jesus to tell him, "the one you love (phileo) is sick" (John 11:3). Then the gospel writer tells us, "Jesus loved (agapao) Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." The point is that Jesus loved in many different ways. All the words for love in every language of the world together are still insufficient to describe the love of Jesus.

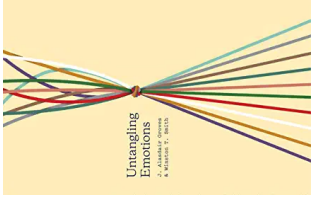


Two Approaches to Emotions



“Spit It Up”—Emotions Are Everything

The loudest voice in the room, at least in the Western world, tells us that our emotions are everything, the most important thing, the thing that most defines us. Perhaps few would say it that bluntly, but expressions of this belief are all around us. This doesn't mean our culture assumes that you understand your feelings or where they come from, or that you even like your emotions. Fundamentally, however, you live among a people whose actions and cultural practice proclaim over and over again that *what you feel is the most important thing about you*.



“Suck It Up”—Emotions Are Nothing

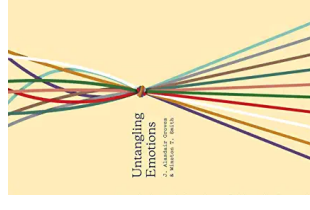
Perhaps it won't surprise you to learn that there is a second, opposite instinct out there. This instinct holds that emotions ought to be treated like a stray rabid dog that has wandered into your living room. Call it keeping a stiff upper lip, stoicism, or being a tough guy, the second voice from our culture argues (albeit more quietly than the first) that emotions are not to be trusted. And, given the way our culture's worship of emotion often encourages people to pit their feelings against truth or obedience, it's not hard to understand why this stoic minority reaction has been especially popular in many Christian circles.

Reflection:

- 1 - Were you raised more with "spit it up"/ emotions are everything or with "suck it up"/ emotions are nothing?
- 2 - Which have you experienced in churches/ among people of faith?
- 3 - What, to you, feels like a more biblical approach to emotions?

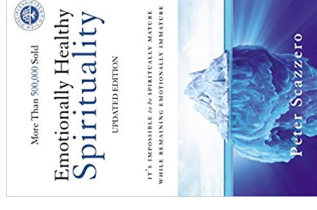
The Bible takes a radically different view. Unlike our assumption that the most faithful people will be the most carefree and emotionally upbeat, Scripture is full of aching, grieving saints who tear their clothes and sit in the ashes when their world gets upended. The basic logic in the Bible is this: if you care about others and the kingdom and mission of God in this world, you will be *and you should be* full of sorrow when you or those you love are injured, suffer loss, or die. You ought to feel angry in the presence of injustice. Your heart should beat faster when your family is in danger. As counterintuitive as it seems, awful feelings like grief can actually be exactly the right feelings to have, feelings that honor God and would be wrong *not* to feel. Christian author and thinker C. S. Lewis put this vividly when he said:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.²



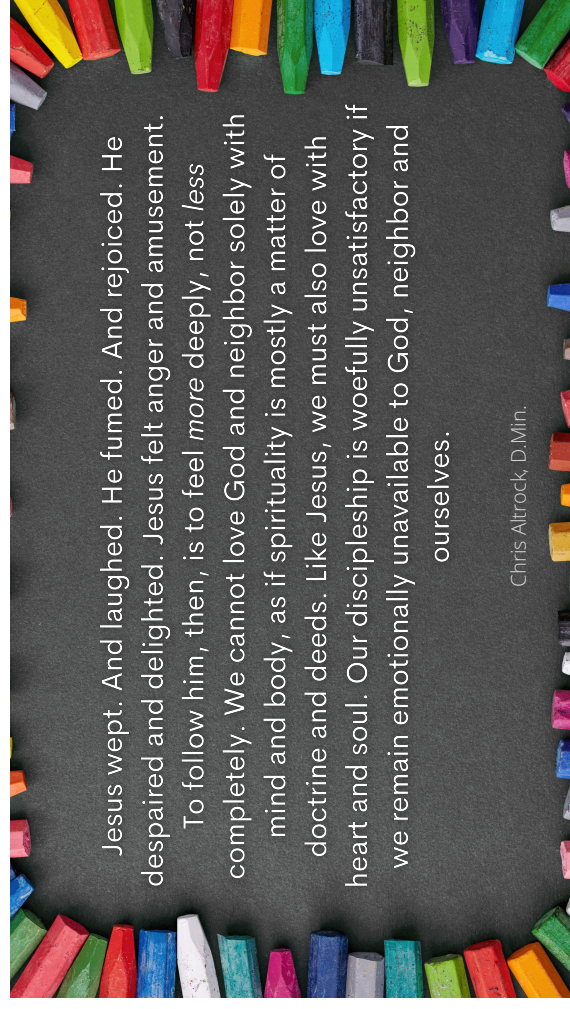
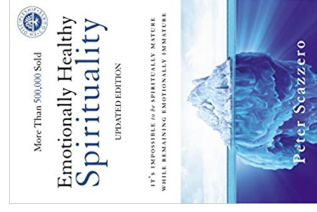
Many people assume that emotional maturity means fewer highs and fewer lows, that our goal is to feel *less* rather than more. But when we look at Jesus's emotions, we see that he was a man of deep, intense feeling. He was "deeply moved" (John 11:33), and he "earnestly desired" (Luke 22:15); he was "very sorrowful" (Matt. 26:38) and "full of joy" (Luke 10:21 NIV).

Jesus did not attempt to hide his strong emotions. He prayed "with loud cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7) and, as B. B. Warfield described, displayed "open exultation of joy."⁵ The more Christlike our emotions become, therefore, the more deeply we will feel; we'll experience deeper love for our fellow Christians, greater hatred of evil, stronger pity and compassion for sinners who are perishing, and more fervent joy in the Lord. So ask yourself: Do I feel more deeply about the things of God than ever before? How we answer is a measure of our emotional maturity.



"Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God. . . . Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice. . . ."

"When we deny our pain, losses, and feelings year after year, we become less and less human. We transform slowly into empty shells with smiley faces painted on them. Sad to say, that is the fruit of much of our discipleship in our churches. But when I began to allow myself to feel a wider range of emotions, including sadness, depression, fear, and anger, a revolution in my spirituality was unleashed. I soon realized that a failure to appreciate the biblical place of feelings within our larger Christian lives has done extensive damage, keeping free people in Christ in slavery."



Anger/ Wrath

What is the difference between
"good" anger and "bad" anger?



Anger/ Wrath

The difference has to do with ...

- 1 - its target
- 2 - its expression



Anger/ Wrath

Target: Good anger must fight for a good cause--its
rightful target. "When anger becomes wrath, the
goods it defends are
my agenda (thwarted by your foolishness,
thoughtlessness, or alternative plans),
my control (undermined by your interference, or
God's),
my dignity (cut by your offensive comment, neglect,
or contemptuous tone),
my cherished reputation (besmirched by your
derisive slander or truthful expose), or
my high expectations (disappointed by your
mistakes, my own failures, or inconvenient realities).



Anger/ Wrath

Target: "Good anger depends on a rightful sense of
what is 'due,' either to use or to another, and a sense
of what justice requires, but we struggle to
differentiate justice from self-justification."



Anger/ Wrath

Target: "Anger, when it is a holy emotion, has justice as its object and love as its root. Justice concerns giving to another what is due. Good anger fuels our passionate and persistent efforts to make sure others get the respect they deserve, to stand against oppression and tyranny, to hold accountable those who cause injury and damage, to honor our commitments and promises, to give equal treatment to the marginalized, and to uphold rightful authority."



Anger/ Wrath

Target: "Wrathful anger's show of force often covers up or overcompensates for our perceived weakness and vulnerability... Psychologists call anger a 'secondary emotion' because it masks other sorts of distress. Most people feel comfortable striking out at others than acknowledging what's really eating them up inside."



Anger/ Wrath

Expression: "Even if we admit that anger can be a natural and healthy God-given emotion, we have to come to grips with the fact that more often than not, it burns out of control... Even a legitimate grievance (the right target) can be dealt with in destructive and disastrous ways."



Anger/ Wrath

Expression: Disordered anger comes in three categories:

- 1 - getting angry too easily
- 2 - getting angrier than we should
- 3 - staying angry too long



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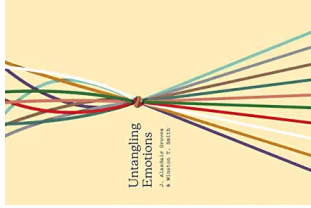
Examining our Wrath

For a week, keep a journal and document every time you get angry. Write down the object of your anger (ie. what were you angry about?). Then rate the intensity of your anger (1-5). Review your responses.



As we said in the last chapter, we think the word *engage* best captures the balanced approach of Scripture to the unbalanced extremes the world around us suggests for dealing with our emotions. Engaging walks a deliberate, middle road between the twin pitfalls of the hyper-emotionalism that fawns over our feelings and sets them up as dictators and the stoicism that squashes negative emotions from the outset. The Bible's model of *engaging* emotions means something very simple: when an emotion comes on your radar, you look at it, see what you find, and *then* (not before!) decide how to respond.

The beauty of engaging is that it doesn't judge your emotions ahead of time as either good or bad. When you engage something, you move closer and explore it, preparing yourself to deal with whatever you uncover. If, as we have argued thus far, there are good negative emotions (as well as bad) and bad positive emotions (as well as good), then it is imperative that we figure out what is going on before working to shut down or amplify the feelings flowing from our hearts.

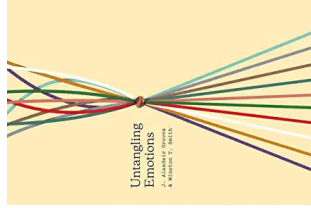


Identify

The first step can sound so basic as to be not worth mentioning: to engage something, you need to become aware that it exists and put a name of some sort on it. This, however, is actually the hardest step for many! For obvious reasons, coming to the conscious realization that you are in fact feeling something and then putting some kind of descriptive words on that feeling is quite challenging for someone who hasn't realized he or she is feeling anything at all. For some of us, being asked, "Why are you so upset?" or "How do you feel about that?" is like being blind and having someone ask you what color the sky is today. If this is you, turn to someone you trust and ask, "What emotions do you see in me most often? What do they look like when I show them?"

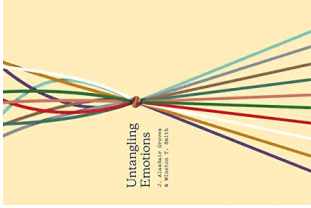
Examine

Once you've observed that an emotion is present, the next step is not rocket science: look at it, turn it around, and see what you can learn about it. Here we pull the categories of "communicate," "relate," "motivate," and "elevate" back into service (see chap. 2). Your emotions are always telling you something about what you are valuing, caring about, or loving. What are they telling you? They are always saying something about your relationships. What are they saying? They are always pressing you toward some kind of action. What are they energizing you to do? Finally, they are always influencing your relationship with God. What is their effect on your worship right now? In other words, examining emotions entails asking questions like *Why am I feeling this? What am I reacting to? Why is this hitting me so hard? Why isn't this affecting me the way it usually does? and How is this emotion making me want to behave?*



Evaluate

Once you have identified that something is happening inside you and examined what is going on in that feeling, you're ready to take the next logical step: figuring which aspects of what you are feeling are good and godly and which are destructive or selfish. This is hard to do! You will rarely find only good in your emotions or only bad. Instead, you'll almost always find good and bad mixed together. And you have a lot at stake; you wouldn't be feeling emotion about it if you didn't.



Act

When you know *that* you are feeling, have named *what* you are feeling as best you can, and have decided *which* aspects of the feeling are good and which are bad, you are finally ready to act. While options for action are endless, proper responses to emotions fall into two fundamental categories.

Copy

On the one hand, we want to embrace and nurture the loves of our heart and the behaviors that are good. On the other hand, we want to resist and even starve loves and actions that are bad.