

Renew Your Mind: Gospel Hope for Mental Health

Week 2: Feelings

Good Morning Connection Family! (sit)

Today we are in the 2nd week of our new series called, Renewing Your Mind, Gospel Hope for Mental Health. Last week, David gave us a great intro to the series and we talked about our thoughts and how we think them. Today, we are diving into something that many of us may find to be a little bit more intimidating, our feelings.

When was the last time you were really real with someone? A spouse, friend, coworker, neighbor? Studies show that while people do experience different feelings almost constantly, about 90% of the time, rarely do they share their deep down feelings with others.

Everyone has feelings. Young, old, male, female. If you are human, I'm talking to you. Feelings are apart of all of us. We all need to be aware of our feelings, because we all have them whether we are aware of them or not. And if that makes you nervous or you want to tune out right now, then maybe this message is exactly for you.

Maybe it's due to fear of judgement, or social conditioning to NOT share. Maybe we've shared before and been hurt or we think we'll be a burden to others. There can be many things that keep us from sharing about our feelings and just being real. And then often times, this can lead to us becoming a slave to our feelings, and finding ourselves being controlled by them instead of the other way around.

Today, we are going to throw all of that out the window.

Today, we are going to get real with our feelings, look at how Jesus handled His feelings, and work on ways to learn how to control our feelings.

Let's take a deep breath, and say a prayer, and we'll dive in.

(Pray-stand)

As we look at feelings today, let's start by making sure we all know the difference between feelings and emotions. Although used interchangeably, they are defined differently and I think this proper distinction is important and helpful to understand.

An **emotion** is a **natural and automatic mental and physical reaction to something around you**. Emotions are a **biological response that prepares you to respond**.

But a **feeling** is a **conscious, subjective experience of a physical sensation, touch, or emotion**. It describes how the body senses and how the mind registers it. Feelings are **how your unique self interprets those emotional responses**.

For example, let's say you hear a loud bang. Your heart starts racing, your muscles tense and stress hormones are released. You're now solely focused on that sound and where it came from. It all happens super quickly and before you've even had time to process and think it out, the emotion you have is fear.

Your body prepared you to act, survive, do what you need to do.

However, after hearing the loud bang, you realize it was fireworks. You think, "I'm relieved!" or "Oh! That startled me!", or "I'm nervous how my pets are going to react to that." Those are feelings.

Different people can have the same emotion-in this case fear- but they can interpret the situation differently and have different feelings about it.

Emotions happen to us, but feelings are how we experience and make sense of those emotions.

As you can guess, much research has been done on emotions and feelings over the years. While there are 6 widely agreed upon emotions across all cultures- **Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, Disgust, and Surprise** (sounds like the Disney movie Inside Out?!) there are an innumerable amount of feelings, since there are many factors that influence our feelings like our personalities, memories, context, relationships, culture, and beliefs.

Most professionals state that there are probably anywhere from 70 to over 130 different feelings or combinations of feelings.

Gloria Wilcox, a psychologist, licensed Christian marriage and family therapist, and former professor at St. Petersburg Theological Seminary, created what is called the “Feelings Wheel” in 1982 as a way to help couples in her therapy sessions to better identify and express their feelings. *(picture of “Feelings Wheel”)*

This wheel breaks down some of those basic emotions and helps to more easily and accurately define and describe what a person is feeling. A tool like this can be really useful when trying to communicate exactly how one is feeling to someone else who may experience that same emotion, differently. *(you may want to take a pic of this for later).*

So if feelings are a universal aspect of the human experience, how did Jesus experience feelings? What did He do with them? We know that he was fully human and fully divine, so He would have experienced a multitude of human feelings during His time spent here on earth.

Hebrews 2:17-18 reminds us-

“For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

And later, Hebrews 4:15 adds-

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

We have a high priest, Jesus, who has experienced every aspect of human life and feeling, just like us. Yet in His time spent here, in every feeling and every response, He did not sin.

How?

If we are going to be talking about handling our feelings, and managing them appropriately, then Jesus is the best role model to look at. If He experienced what we experience and did it right, then I want to follow His example. I don't know about you, but want His gospel hope for my mental health!

Throughout the Bible, we can find several examples of Jesus' feelings and what He did with them. And we know that He didn't just experience the good and positive feelings. He also experienced the hard and painful feelings too.

For example, in Mark 3, we read about a time when Jesus was healing on the Sabbath and all the scrutinous eyes were on Him as he was about to heal a man's hand. Verse 5 says-

"He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored."

Another time, in John 11, we find Jesus at the tomb of His dear friend, Lazurus, who has died and verse 35 tells us that-

"Jesus wept."

We know that Jesus went on in verses 43 & 44 to heal Lazurus, saying-

"When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Or, how about the time we read in Matthew where it says Jesus experienced what can only be described as a type of fearful anguish that night in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:38-39 reads-

"Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

There are so many more examples you can find of Jesus and His feelings and responses in the Bible. But what is so interesting, and we can see it even here in just these 3 examples, is how Jesus responds in these feelings.

How did Jesus respond when He was angry? How did He respond when He was sad? What about when He was scared and in distress?

Jesus' response was always governed by truth, love, and obedience. His feelings were never uncontrolled or sinful. His actions were constantly drawing people TOWARD God, not away from Him.

Can the same be said about our feelings?

If we are honest with ourselves and each other, probably not.

How many times are we not even aware of our feelings and consequently our responses until it is too late? How many times do we act solely based on our feelings? How often do we do something because we “feel like it” or don’t do something because we “don’t feel like it?” I’m not sure where in the bible it says to follow our feelings, and for good reason.

How many times do we *feel* as if our feelings are controlling us instead of us controlling our feelings?

Just like we talked about last week with our thoughts as we looked at Romans 8, the same is true for our feelings. We have the choice to give in to our sinful nature or to choose to let the Spirit be in control.

“So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.” (8:6)

It is a choice. We can allow our feelings to be controlled by sin and death or by the life and peace that only Jesus can bring.

Because let’s be real, we cannot do it alone. We NEED him to come in and renew our minds, and our hearts. Our thoughts and our feelings. We need His help to choose His way.

Whether you find it to be harder to control your thoughts or your feelings, the truth is that both need to be surrendered to God. We need to ask DAILY for Him to come in and renew our minds and hearts. And He wants to do just that.

We just looked at some of Jesus' feelings, now listen to what Jesus has to say to us about our feelings. Jesus is saying this as He is about to be betrayed and crucified, yet He is able to say this through it all. John 14:27 reminds us what Jesus says in this moment-

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

When we give Him full control of our feelings and our thoughts, we can receive this peace that He is talking about. We don't have to be troubled and we don't have to be afraid. We can have this peace and He wants to give it to us freely.

I'm sure even already this morning, you can think of all of the feelings that you've already experienced. Maybe you've experienced a lot just to get here- stress, anger, annoyance, disappointment, nervousness, and more!

We're going to do a little exercise together. Whatever you've felt already today, I want you to take a moment and reimagine what that feeling might have looked like if as soon as you felt it, it was surrendered to God.

The second that stress about being late creeps in, in comes God's peace; You're going to get there. It's going to be okay.

The moment that anger enters the situation, in comes God's peace; Your kids are just kids, they are going to fight, let's pray this peace is contagious. It's going to be okay.

The instant you pull into the parking lot and nervousness enters your system, in comes God's peace, That person doesn't think anything bad about you because you forgot to text them back. Let it go. It's going to be okay.

Whatever that feeling is for you, that go to feeling of stress or pressure when everything around you starts to spin out of control, what would it truly look like to invite God into that

moment and into that feeling? To remember that because we are in Jesus we can access that peace at any time, ANY time.

Now, disclaimer, just like last week, we can't just say, "well, start to feel better feelings. Just don't be anxious. Give God your feelings, it's fine." We all know it's not as easy as that.

(sit)

I must admit, that personally for me, most of the time feel pretty level headed and feel like I do have my emotions in check (even if they are slightly wild and highly energetic ones!)

But one thing I have learned about myself over the years, and you've probably seen it for yourselves already too, is that I don't do anything halfway. I'm an all or nothing kind of person. I've got 1 speed, 100 miles an hour. And that's the same when it come to my feelings. And so even though it doesn't happen to me often, when I do start to spiral, I spiral at top speed and quickly find myself out of control, with my feelings all over the place.

Also admittedly, despite the fact that I would not call myself a controlling person, I don't like to feel out of control and I really don't like negative or hard feelings. I struggle with things like sadness and disappointment, and I don't like to stay in those down places very long. My personality wants to run, as far and as fast as possible from those hard and sad places to the happy, lighthearted places of bubbles and glitter and unlimited iced coffees.

But Jesus has been working in me to help me give those feelings, all of those feelings to Him. To help me to know when I need sit and stay and soak in the hard, uncomfortable places, to pause and let myself feel them. And then know when it's okay to leave, be freed, and off to the next thing. (stand)

One simple step in the process of renewing our feelings that has really helped me and I think can help you is the practice of gaining perspective.

Psychological research shows that gaining perspective—specifically through something called self-distancing, which basically is when you step back from the emotional immersion, can be extremely helpful. By shifting from a first-person viewpoint ("I am

stressed") to a distanced observer view (using third-person point of view, "Emily is stressed right now.")) can help to lower emotional reactivity, reduce overthinking, and help you to make wiser decisions.

Studies done by Ethan Kross and Igor Grossman show that this distanced reflection helps to promote intellectual humility and recognition of multiple viewpoints. Specifically, they talk about this idea of "Solomon's Paradox" which is the tendency to be able to give clear, rational, wise advice to others while failing to be able to apply the same sound judgement to your own situations. Ethan Kross said about his study:

"We simply asked our participants to use their own name and other non-first-person pronouns such as 'you' when thinking about themselves. Instead of saying, 'Why am I feeling this way?' you adopt a distanced perspective by asking yourself, 'Why are you feeling this way?'"

We can even see an example of this self-distancing in the book of Psalms. Check out what the psalmist says in Psalms 42:5-

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

I have found that finding perspective like this in most situations really helps me to 'unspiral' and get back to homeostasis with my feelings. I get so focused on this one small part of the picture that it's overwhelming and taking my thoughts and feelings captive. But when I can just zoom out and see the bigger picture, gain a little perspective, I can come back into reality and make better sense of it.

So what if we took this idea and this practice of perspective and kicked it up a notch?

What if we instead explained and defined it this way:

"The ability to see in things in a true, Godly way, realistic to His thoughts and feelings about us. A way of viewing reality that aligns with God's character, truth, and His

priorities. Understanding situations and emotions from God's point of view." We could call this 'God Perspective'.

Maybe then, we could see and feel things a little more clearly. We could truly discover and believe how God feels about us. Because don't forget that God feels all the feels for you.

You are loved, with an everlasting love, like it says in Jeremiah 31:3

You are a child of God through faith, like it says in Galatians 3:26

You are a new creation, like it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17

And you are forgiven, like it says in Ephesians 2:10

Gaining God Perspective in our lives helps us to counteract the lies and remember that we are not alone. Our feelings are real, and we feel them, but we must remember that our feelings are not always truth.

You may feel abandoned, but you are never abandoned.

You may feel worthless, but you are not worthless.

You may feel condemned, but you are not condemned.

Turning and renewing our feelings through the lens of what God sees when we look at our situations and at our hearts has so much power to make change in our lives.

Having God Perspective in our lives and everyday situations wouldn't just be helpful, it would be transformational. Because it truly is the gospel hope for a world full of seemingly hopeless situations.

Let's Pray.