

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Psalms*
SERIES: *Old Testament*
SCRIPTURES: *Psalms*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to Philip Yancey; Dallas Willard*

Well good morning.

We're in the fourth week of a sermon series called **"The Old Testament...why bother?" (Series Graphic)**

Trying to give us the tools necessary to engage with and understand the Old Testament, which so often leaves people confused or offended. We're left wondering how this ancient text relates to our lives today.

Today we're going to talk about our **emotions**.

Believe it or not, the Old Testament has much to say about human emotion. The ups and downs of life. How we feel and how we express that feeling?

Emotions...feelings are part of what makes you human and makes you...you.

Christian singer Mark Lowry once said...

Do you know what life is? Life is a series of emotions. Life is a mountain after a valley. Jesus said, "I have come to give you life, more abundant." Bigger ups, bigger downs. Happy – Sad – Praise – Anger. This is how we experience life.

Often when we greet each other, we'll say, "How are you today?" And what we really mean is "tell me how your feeling"... Rarely do we say, "How are you thinking today?" Because feeling and emotion get's to the heart of being human.

Dallas Willard writes...

"Feelings are a primary blessing and a primary problem for human life. We cannot live without them and we can hardly live with them. Hence they are also central for spiritual formation in the Christian tradition." (Dallas Willard...pg. 117)

Life is series of emotions. Good days and bad days. And part of following Jesus is learning to recognize and express our emotions in appropriate ways. And so that's what we want to talk about today.

And it brings to a book in the Old Testament that is all about understanding and expressing the full spectrum of human emotion. So if you have a Bible go ahead and turn with me to the book of Psalms.

I. Background to the Psalms.

The book of Psalms is a book of Hebrew poetry. 150 Psalms total. These Psalms are written to express emotion and feelings.

Kathleen Norris says this about the Psalms... ***"The Psalms do not theologize. One reason for this is that the Psalms are poetry, and poetry's function is not to explain but to offer images and stories that resonate with our lives."*** (Yancey 113)... In other words the Psalms are intended to engage with our emotions.

Philip Yancey says it like this...

The Psalms should not be read as God representing himself to people. They are people representing themselves to God.

The Psalms should be read as personal letters to God. The audience in the Psalms is God...and we are “reading over the shoulder” of the writer as he/she expresses their feelings to God.

Whether you are facing temptation, celebrating success, harboring a grudge, suffering injustice...the Psalms teach us, guide us as we learn to express our emotions in appropriate ways.

So let’s dive in and look at...

II. 3 Kinds of Psalms

This may come as a shock, but the most common Psalm is the

1. Psalm of lament

Psalms of lament help us to recognize and express the human emotion...**sadness.**

This is really important. Sometimes in our world, we create this tough guy persona...we tend to hide our emotions, especially tears. Even if we don’t always come right out and say it, we feel self-conscious about our tears. “Big boys don’t cry”

Lament Psalms teach us to recognize and express our sadness...that it is ok to cry and to hurt. I realize that we all experience sadness and hurt in different ways. But we all experience it, and learning to be a healthy person requires learning to acknowledge and express our sadness and our hurt.

Let me just give you a few examples from the Psalms...

Psalm 42:9-10 - ⁹ I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? ¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,

Psalm 88 - ¹³ But I cry to you for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. ¹⁴ Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me...darkness is my closest friend.”

Psalm 102 - ¹ Hear my prayer, LORD; let my cry for help come to you. ² Do not hide your face from me

A few weeks ago, we got a call at the church. A gentleman who had been into some trouble with the law, but is trying to get his life turned around. And just got himself a job. But needed some financial help in the meantime.

So I agreed to meet him in town and talk to him a little bit more about this.

It was kind of funny, when I asked him how I would know it was him, he said... “*I look Mr. Clean*”. He was right. Big burly guy, arms as thick as my waist, with a bold head and tattoo sticking out of t-shirt.

As we talked, he began to share some of his life story with me. Said, growing up his mom had always been the stable figure in their home. But when he was only 13 years old his mom had a disease that quickly took her life. He said, “*I remember I was sitting with her when she passed. I cried that day, wondering who would take care of me.*” He said, after this happened, “*My dad quickly fell into alcoholism and a year later he died.*”

The next in line to assume custody of him was his older sister. At this point, this big monstrous guy...began to tear up. He says, I remember plain as day, the day we

went to court, my sister looked at me and then she looked the Judge, she pointed at me and said clearly... *"I DO NOT WANT HIM."* He said, *"I've been trying to figure life out ever since."*

In that moment, I realized, once again, that nobody is immune to sadness and despair and that sometimes, no matter how big and how tough we think we are...life makes us cry. I knew, here's a guy who's feeling the words of the Psalm writers...

"Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me...darkness is my closest friend."

Remember when you were younger, people would quiz you on Bible trivia. One question we always asked was, *"Do you know the shortest verse in the Bible?"* Do you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is? I'll tell you. It's found in John 11.

Jesus has just lost a good friend, Lazarus.

John 11 - ³³ When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Verse 35...

John 11:35 - Jesus wept.

Shortest verse in the Bible, at least in English words. But oh so powerful...

Jesus, the Messiah, the savior, the Creator...lost a friend and it brought tears to his eyes. Jesus, in his humanity, experienced and expressed sadness.

In fact, Jesus in his time of deepest...cried out using the words of the Psalmist, did you know that?

In **Matthew 27:45-46**...Jesus has been beaten and hung on a cross...he is in the process of slowly suffocating. **⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice...“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Do you know where that comes from? Turn to Psalm 22...

Psalm 22 - ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.^[b]

In his time of despair and anguish, Jesus turned to the Psalms to express his emotion.

You have felt sadness too, haven't you?

The child who falls and skins a knee.

The student who is left out by his peers.

The loss of a loved one.

Kids make poor choices.

Diagnosis is not what you had hoped.

You cannot avoid sadness. Life is a series of emotions. It's part of what makes you human. The Psalms of lament teach us about human sadness and how to express it.

A second category of Psalms are called...

2. Imprecatory Psalms

Also known as Psalms of cursing. Some of you are wondering if we should be talking about this in church, right?

The imprecatory Psalms are related to another human emotion, anger. And learning to be a healthy person requires learning to acknowledge and express our anger in appropriate ways.

So I'm just gonna read straight out of the Bible and give you a few examples of this...

Psalm 10:15 – Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness

Psalm 69:23-24 - ²³ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. ²⁴ Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.

Psalm 109 - May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. ¹² May no one extend kindness to him. ¹⁵ May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may blot out their name from the earth.

The purpose of these Psalms is NOT to say this is what you should actually do. It's this is how I feel. This is what anger makes me feel inside.

Have you ever been angry? I'll just give you an example from my life. I suspect this kind of thing doesn't happen to you. But just pretend you've felt this way before.

Can I share something with you all that makes me angry? **Waiting.** I hate to wait. Don't you? I get angry when I have to wait. More than that, I don't really like crowds, especially crowds of strangers. It makes me feel uncomfortable. The double wammy for me, is having to wait, in a room full of strangers.

So the other evening, Friday, February 14th...Valentine's Day. Jenny and I decided to go out for dinner.

We usually avoid that evening in particular...because it usually means, waiting in small rooms full of lots of people that you don't know. But we had babysitters available and decided to go. But we knew it would be busy so we called ahead. Call ahead seating is a brilliant idea. We were told, our names on the list and it would be a 40-50 min wait.

We arrived 30 mins later and the line of people at the restaurant, was out the door. But we had called ahead so we didn't have to wait in that line. We were able to go straight up the host. But as we went to check in I noticed the host marking us on a list, as "arrived".

And all of a sudden a flood emotion began rushing through my veins. Anger.

My mind starts racing...we called 30 mins ago, arrived on time and are planning to be seated in 15 mins! You just marked us as "arrived". What does that mean? Shouldn't we have already been on the waiting list? That's the whole point of call ahead...Is this a second waiting list? There's the list for people who called, but then you're added to another list after you've arrived. The whole point of calling ahead is so that you don't have to arrive and sit and wait with 100 other people.

And then I was paranoid every time someone else checked in...were they being marked ahead of us. Had they called ahead? I realized in that moment, I had this feeling of dislike toward the people who were walking through the door. They might be taking my spot. I was mad at the restaurant and even toward the host who had just checked us in. So I just started praying the Psalms out loud...

Break the arm of this host...pour out your wrath on her...

I'm just kidding...

But all this emotion, flooding through my mind.

It's called anger. You can't avoid that initial feeling, but the real issue is what you do with that emotion.

There's this well-known passage from Ephesians where Paul says,

Ephesians 4:25-26 - ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin"

Imprecatory Psalms remind us that anger is real. You will experience it, you can't avoid it. But in your anger do not sin. Following Jesus, being a disciple means learning to express it appropriately.

The Psalms teach us that one of the best things you can do with your anger is take it to God. Pour your heart, emotion, frustration out to him. He can handle it. And then you won't hurt other people.

What's interesting is that often in these imprecatory Psalms you'll notice a change of tone...

Psalms 109 for example, which we read earlier... May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. ¹² May no one extend kindness to him.

Ends like this...

³⁰ With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD...I will praise him. ³¹ For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them.

As the Psalmist cries out, he/she eventually moves towards trust in God and healing and calm. The Psalm becomes anger therapy.

Dorothy Sayers once said, **“We all have diabolical thoughts, but there’s a world of difference in responding with words (to God) instead of deed, whether we write a murder mystery or commit murder.”** (Yancey 136).

When I am angry, I have several options. I can get revenge. I can deny or suppress my feelings. Or I can take them to God.

As I stood there, at that restaurant, in that crowd of people, I began to think about my emotions. Why was I feeling that way? What was I really concerned about? I began to think things like, it’s just a meal. Maybe you’ll wait an extra 30 – 40 mins...why does that make you so angry? And you’ll be standing with Jenny that whole time. You’ll be together. I’d stand anywhere beside Jenny. You actually get to go out for dinner. Some people don’t.

I began to realize how shallow and immature I was. And also how lucky I was. I started thinking how difficult the job of the host must be and all the servers that night. I began to think, I’m glad there’s people who do that job. Began thanking God for the host and the restaurant.

That’s why the anger Psalms are so valuable. They help us to recognize and understand anger and then how to appropriately express our anger, so that we do not hurt others.

A third category of Psalms are

3. Psalms of Joy

You know the feeling you get when you wake up on the right side of the bed!
Everything seems to fall into place.
You whistle while you work.
Life is good. Life is worth celebrating.

Psalm 8 - ¹ LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! ³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?^[c] ⁵ You have...crowned them^[f] with glory and honor. ⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands...⁹ LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The joy starts in observing creation...

You've had these moments, where you see the sunset over the open farm fields of Franklin County or the sunrise over the ocean. You've seen the moon and stars lighting up a clear night sky. And it brings a sense of joy and wonder...worship, and celebration.

And then, in this vast universe, that humans would be the pinnacle of God's creation.

You have crowned them with glory and honor... that's you and me! It's amazing isn't it? I mean sometimes we look at ourselves and we think, really that's what glory and honor looks like. But, it's true, humans are...crowned in glory and honor.

Made in the image of God...

The apple of his eye...

Carved in the hands of the maker...

These Psalms of joy celebrate creation and the place God has given human beings.

We have a pre-school that meets here at the church throughout the week.

And on that same Friday, on Valentine's Day there were throwing a party. I was sitting in my office working this sermon. All of a sudden I began hearing all kinds of shouting and cheering down in the gymnasium. And so I quietly got up and walked to my door and I looked out into the gym. It was the coolest thing.

About 20 kids, age 4/5...were lined up in two lines. And they were having a relay race. Where one kid at a time would go running across the gym. And what was so neat, was that as each kid left the group to take their turn and run, the other 10 were cheering and dancing and yelling for all their worth, shouting out the name of their classmate. Pure joy on display.

And you just kind of saw the joy on the face of the kid who was running. "They're all yelling for me. I get to be the star right now." Didn't matter how fast, didn't matter how coordinated. Just one little 5 year old at a time, being celebrated by their classmates...

And my thought as I watched was, this is Psalm 8 in action, this is what the writer was seeing as he wrote... **"you have crowned them with glory and honor!"**

Sometimes you just need to hear that joy, and know that joy, and feel that joy deep in your heart!

Kind of thought, how great that be if this week...Five Forks church became the church of the Psalms of Joy. Each of us, in our own little worlds. That you would shout to your family and your co-workers and the strangers on the street... **"You are crowned with glory and honor!"**

And then as we see and experience joy and honor and celebration, it turns to worship. Praising God for who He is, His goodness and His blessings in our lives.

9 LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You need moments in life, where your deepest joy is credited back to the creator Himself. God is the source of the good and perfect gifts, the joy we experience.

I read this neat story.

Took place in a college classroom in Missouri back in 2002. The professor wanted to give his students a taste of God's incredible love and grace. It was the day for final exams.

Students had spent hours late into the night studying. One student, Denise Banderman walked into the classroom minutes before the professor arrived. Everybody in the room was doing last-minute cramming. Then the professor enters and takes a few minutes to review. Most of it was familiar, but there were some things that no one remembered ever hearing. The professor responded with what sends cold chills up every student's spine: *"This is in your textbook, and you are responsible for the content on this exam."*

The time came for the test. Every student took up their pen and turned over their test. I want you to hear this in Denise's own words: *"I couldn't believe it! To my astonishment every answer on the test was filled in. My name was even written on the exam."*

A wordless stir traveled like a wave over the class as each student looked at their completed exam. On the bottom of the last page of every test was this note from the professor: **"All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an A on the**

final exam. The reason you passed the test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation for this test did not help you get the A."

The rejoicing that must have happened that day.

(Denise Banderman, Hannibal, Missouri; cited in PreachingToday.com, "Professor Takes Students' Test for Them")

And I began to realize in many ways that the same story that happens all over Scripture.

To a tax collector named Zacchaeus. God is taking the test.

To a woman caught in adultery.

It's like, one day God looked down on Shaun and saw his brokenness and failure and a life that would just never add up. He saw anger and sadness. And so God stepped into Shaun's life (**JESUS ON CROSS**) and said "the creator is taking the test for you. You will receive an A."

When I hear that I think, "How great is our god. How majestic is your name in all the earth!"

We need these Psalms of Joy which teach us how to recognize and express joy and celebration in our own lives.

In closing, I just want to encourage you with...

III. Two simple and practical ways to use the Psalms this week.

1. Read/Listen them.

Pick out a few Psalms that express different emotions. Pick out some Psalms of sadness, pick some Psalms of anger, pick out some Psalms of joy. And as you go through your day, stop every once in a while and just ask yourself. How am I feeling? Then try reading through one of the Psalms that expresses that feeling. Then share your personal feelings with God. This is emotional therapy.

2. Write your own.

Learn to write out your emotions. This will help you express, relieve, heal your emotional well-being.

The other day, I had a long day at the office, meeting in the evening didn't get home until late. Walked in the door. Everyone was already in bed. Lights were turned off. Went to sit down, where I normally sit down on the couch and there was this little folded piece of paper sitting on the edge of the couch where I normally sit:

I opened it up and it was little hand written note from Keagan. He's only 6, most of the words were spelled wrong but it said...

“Hapy Valntine’s Day bab. I lov you.” (Spell it like this in on the PP slide!)

And then a little picture of him and me.

Learning to write out our emotions can be therapeutic.

We live in a world that so often tries to hide, suppress, fake our emotions. But emotions are core to our humanity and part of following Jesus is learning to recognize and express our emotions and feelings.

PRAY!

Favorite Psalms to include in bulletin:

Psalms of Joy - Psalm 8; Psalm 19; Psalm 23

Psalms of Lament – Psalm 22; Psalm 88; Psalm 102

Psalms of Anger – Psalm 10; Psalm 69; Psalm 109