

EHC Week 1

“Emotions?”

Matthew 26:36-38 + Romans 12

Introduction

Tim. Pastor.

I'm really grateful for the past 4 weeks of my paternity preaching break. Can I call it that? I'm grateful for the extra mental space and energy to get to spend with Lindsay and the girls as we figure out being a family of 4.

Also really grateful for the men who stepped in to preach. We're a church that's built on God's Word, not Tim's Word. So no matter who is up here preaching - as long as they're preaching the Bible and pointing us to Jesus, we're going to be good to go as a church, Amen?

AND...I am so excited to be back - so let's get after it.

Matthew 26:36-38 + Romans 12:1-2. PRAY.

Humans + Emotions

To be human is to feel. To be human is to have emotions.

Think about your week for just a minute:

- You wake up, you realize it's Mondays and you're sad. Because well, Mondays are sad.
- On Tuesday you're driving to work, some jerk swerves, cuts you off, flips you off like it was your fault - you're angry.
- On Wednesday, you're invited to lunch by some coworkers who go out of their way to ask you questions, care about you, get to know you and you make some new friends - you feel happy.
- On Thursday, your kid is being disobedient for the 100th time, you snap at them like you promised you'd stop doing, you feel shame and guilt.
- On Friday, you go to a dinner party at a neighbor's house, you know the host but not a lot of other people, you stand in the room awkward and alone, you feel anxious.

Even right now, as you're sitting in this room - there's something going on within you emotionally.

To be human is to have emotions.

Now - here's the goal of this new series - *The Emotionally Healthy Church* - **Our emotional life, our emotional health and maturity, matters greatly in our discipleship to Jesus.**

To put it in the words of pastor Pete Scazzero - **“Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.”** - Pete Scazzero

It is not possible to grow into a mature, flourishing, made into the image of Christ, follower of Jesus if we leave our emotional lives unchanged by the Holy Spirit. We cannot be truly spiritually mature without becoming emotionally mature, as well.

So that's the heart behind this series, but my goal today as I take us into this, is two fold:

1. **Convince you that's true.** To convince you that your discipleship to Jesus must affect your emotional life or you're stunting your walk with Jesus and your love for others.
2. Begin to give us a **framework** for how to move forward from the Scriptures into this journey of emotional health and maturity.

What are Emotions?

Now before we get started, let me define emotions for us.

We're doing a series called *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, so I want to make sure when I say "emotions" we all hear the same thing. Now, this is a little bit easier said than done, so stick with me - this is going to pay dividends for the next 11 weeks, I promise.

What emotions are and what we do with them is a debate that goes way back into history and spans across disciplines - from philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, to theologians like Augustine and John Calvin, to modern day neuroscientists like Ralph Adolphs and Lisa Barrett - so many brilliant minds have studied and written on emotions.

In broad strokes, there are two leading theories of what emotions are and where they come from.

1) Body then Mind.

Emotions are physiological impulses or instincts that our minds give meaning and shape.

I walk into a room. I start sweating, my pulse starts racing, my hands get clammy - my brain tells me I'm feeling anxious because I'm at a party.

Bodily response our mind gives meaning to. Now, it's basically instantaneous, so it doesn't feel like a process, but the bodily physiological response comes first.

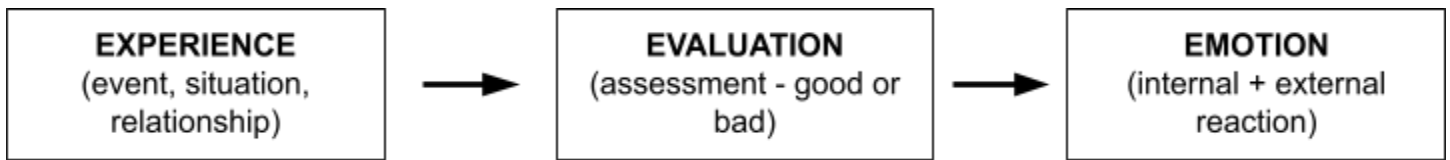
2) (Historic Christian position) is the opposite - Mind then Body.

The mind makes a value judgment based on a situation that then drives the emotional response.

You get on Instagram, you see that someone had a party and you realize you were left out, you weren't invited - you think - I'm unlovable, no one likes me, you feel sad and alone.

Again - instantaneous, doesn't feel like a process, but the value judgment and evaluation from the mind comes before the emotion and bodily response.

It would look something like this:



That is the historic Christian position of emotions.

Matthew 26:36-38

Ok. With that, let's go to Jesus. Matthew 26...

Matthew 26:36-38

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James + John - sort of Jesus inner 3 out of the 12), he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

To give you the context of what's happening in this scene, this takes place on Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus' last week on earth leading up to the cross. They've left the Last Supper where He's instituted communion, washed their feet, said that Judas is going to betray Him. Right after this he's going to be betrayed and handed over to the Romans. Final hours of Jesus' life.

Here is Jesus, facing down the cross, what historians call the most horrific way to die ever invented by mankind. Physical agony and spiritual agony await Him. ***And it's bothering His soul.***

To the point where he says to Peter, James, and John - **"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death."** Or as one translation puts it - **"I am swallowed up in grief."**

Jesus Was Emotional

To some of us, this Jesus with emotions, might not be the picture we're used to or generally think of...

Nursery painting. Growing up, my church, right outside of the doors to the kids area, had this lifesize painting of Jesus where he's standing in this pasture, has a lamb in this hand, and his other hand is kind of half yoga-posed, you know? This is not the exact painting but something like this (photo).

He's stoic. He's there. Sure he's fully human, but he's got this sort of divine aura about him that makes him just kind of float through life. Like an ancient C3PO but less annoying. "I...am...Jesus...human cyborg relations."

We have this picture of Jesus, largely influenced by some really poor 1960s theological ideas, where he has no emotions, no sorrow, no joy - fully God and fully robot. He's unemotional, unflappable.

But here in the garden, Jesus is troubled. Overwhelmed by his grief and sorrow. **He's experiencing deep emotions.**

But that's not just true here, right before the cross, Jesus is full of emotions throughout His life.

Let me give you just a couple of examples:

Mark 6 - Jesus has been doing a ton of ministry up until this point. He sends his disciples to go do ministry in various towns. They come back to tell him everything that happened, and he invites them to get away as a group to sort of debrief and pray. A crowd finds out where Jesus is and they run ahead to get around Jesus and be in His presence, and we read this in Mark 6:34 - **34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.**

John 11 - Jesus' friend Lazarus dies. He goes to see the grave, is greeted by Mary and Martha and he's so moved by this loss and by the grieving of his friends, and we read the shortest verse in the NT - **35 Jesus wept.**

John 2 - Or maybe the most famous example of an emotional Jesus. He goes to the temple, a bunch of people have turned it into an ungodly marketplace, taking advantage of the poor - **15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."**

And these are just a couple of examples of what we see time and time again in Jesus' life:

- Empathy and compassion
- Sorrow and grief
- Joy and Thanksgiving - he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard.
- Anger and zeal for God the Father's glory.

Here's my point in all of this → Jesus was an emotional being.

Not emotional like we would describe someone as emotional - but emotional as in - He had emotions. He was unafraid to feel and to feel deeply.

Jesus was an emotional being AND Jesus was perfect. (blameless, holy, without sin)

Which means something incredible that we have to understand → **Emotions are not bad.**

We'll talk about this a ton next week but emotions are part of how we are created in the imago dei, the image of God. The Trinitarian God has emotions - different than us in a hundred different ways we'll explain next week but emotions nonetheless. So our emotional lives are part of how we reflect God as humans.

Just to make sure I say this as clearly as I can → **emotions are neither righteous nor unrighteous.**

I would argue, and I will over the next 11 weeks, that every emotion can be either right or wrong. What matters is why they're there and what we do with them.

So the question then becomes → what we do with our emotions?

Two Bad Approaches to Emotions

And in my experience, both in life and as a pastor, I think when emotions come into play in our lives, what we tend to do with them goes to one of two extremes. This is based on our personality, family of origin (how we were taught to think about emotions), our belief system.

There's primarily two ways people approach emotions:

1. Approach #1 - Suppress Them

If you want to know if you're in this camp → You are already annoyed (which is ironic because that's an emotional response) that we would even do a sermon series, especially for an entire summer about emotional health.

You think, and I'll actually throw myself strongly in this camp as well, we think - "some people are rational, some are emotional. And if the emotional people would just be more rational, we'd all be better off."

This looks like a couple of different ways...

For some of us, we try to **detach** from our emotions and emotional responses to life. We hear words like - "emotional health" or "emotional maturity" - and think that means a life absent from emotion. A life where we get above our emotions such that they never impact us or affect us. We think the goal of emotional maturity is to be "stable". We never have to feel...really anything.

Others of us tend to **distract** ourselves from our emotions. So anytime something unpleasant rises to the surface in our soul we just head to a bar and grab a drink or reach for some other substance, or open up Instagram or Netflix. "I'm sad, I don't want to feel sad—I'll just order some food and binge watch the next season of Bridgerton." We just numb ourselves to reality.

Still others Christianize our emotional suppression by **spiritually avoiding** our emotions - "Jesus is alive so stop being sad." "Stop being anxious, just trust God." "Let go and let God." We hear emotional maturity and we think - only ever happy. If that person were more mature, they would be more joyful. We think emotional maturity is never feeling bad emotions and only ever feeling good emotions.

You see, the problem with this though - suppressing our emotions is that it is, at best, a temporary solution. You can suppress your emotions all you want, but eventually they're going to leak out.

I heard one pastor say recently that trying to suppress emotions is like trying to keep a beach ball under the water. You ever play that game in the pool, you try to push it down, but it always, always finds a way back to the surface.

Emotions are the same way...

- Maybe they leak out slowly, where you just gradually become a bitter, resentful, passive aggressive type of person.
- Or maybe they leak out suddenly, all at once. You just suppress your emotions for so long that you eventually hit a point where they explode out of you. You have a nervous breakdown, a mid life crisis - some type of outburst of all the bottled up desires.

And it's not the way of Jesus. It's not the pattern of the life of our savior, who does not see emotions as something to be suppressed or avoided or only ever feel the good ones.

But the second approach is just as dangerous, and I would argue more of a threat for our church and our cultural moment...

2. Approach #2 - Obey Them

In this approach, we don't suppress our emotions, we obey them, we let them rule over us and run our lives. We ride the waves of our feelings up and down and up again. Regardless of whatever is tangibly happening in our lives, our emotions call the shots.

And in case you think obedience is too strong of language, listen to some of these phrases, maybe you've said them or you've heard someone say them:

- "I *can't* help myself, that's just how I feel."
- "I *have* to do what makes me happy."
- "I *have* to do what I *feel* is right."

This is obedience language. It is as if our emotions are something outside of us that we have absolutely no control over - they are reality and the governing rule in our lives and we are servants to their every beck and call.

Those who are pulled to obey our emotions, often put the weight of our bad emotions onto our circumstances. The problem is not the evaluation or emotional response, the problem is the experience we're having...

- If you have an anger problem, it's probably because you have a bad boss, or a bad spouse, or bad friends - change those you'll be good.
- If you're sad, it's probably because you hate your job and you're unfulfilled and you aren't being recognized or serving in your passions - change all that you'll be good.

This is dangerous.

Being driven by every whim of feeling and emotion you have will eventually wreak havoc on yourself and on the people around you.

- The man who lashes out at his kids in violence and anger teaching them to hate him and each other.
- The wife who has the emotional affair because she feels more loved by someone she's not married to, bringing destruction on her household.
- The person who hops from one job to another to another because they're just not feeling it anymore or it got too stressful and it causes great financial strain on themselves and others.
- The person who can't keep a friendship because they're constantly blame-shifting or making excuses for their gossip and sarcasm and leaves division and pain in their wake.

This is not the way of Jesus.

Emotional Maturity

Neither suppression nor obedience are markers of emotional maturity.

- Emotional maturity is not "getting up above" emotions to where we're never affected by them or only ever feeling happy.
- Emotional maturity is not being ruled by every to and fro whim of our feelings justifying it by saying we're "self-aware".

Emotional maturity is having the right emotion, at the right time, with the right amount, for the right duration, because of the right reason - namely, love.

- Right Emotion + Time - Angry when appropriate. Sad when it's sad. Joyful when it's joyful.
- Right Amount - Not every situation is the hardest ever/worst ever/saddest ever or best ever.
- Right Duration - If I forgive someone, I let it go. I don't stay angry, sad, upset. I also don't move on too quickly when that would be inappropriate.
- Right Reason - Not pride, self-interest, selfishness. BUT Love of God + Love for others.

Think about those examples from the life of Jesus, right?

Weeping for the death of Lazarus - How emotionally immature would it be for Jesus to show up on the scene laughing, disengaged, unemotional, stoic. How unloving. But instead - He weeps. He grieves. The correct emotional response at the loss of His friend and the suffering of Mary and Martha because of his love for them is tears and a broken heart.

Temple - Can you imagine Jesus walking through the temple all stoic - "oh sorry, do you mind if I just overturn this table really quickly? Thank you." Or just didn't care at all - "Yeah there's dishonoring the house of God, but whatever." That is not a response of love. That is not a response that loves God and loves others showing itself through proper emotion.

Emotional maturity is having the right emotion, at the right time, with the right amount, for the right duration, because of the right reason - namely, love.

This is why I believe so wholeheartedly that thesis from Pete Scazzero that we started with - without emotional maturity we cannot grow into spiritual maturity - **because spiritual maturity, according to Jesus, is a life of wholehearted love for God and love for others**. Simple as that.

But if we remain emotionally immature - we remain stuck on ourselves, unable to grow in love for God and love for others - and we cannot grow into spiritual maturity.

Here's what happens, in Pete's words:

"It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. Many are supposedly 'spiritually mature' but remain infants, children, or teenagers emotionally. They demonstrate little ability to process anger, sadness, or hurt. They whine, complain, distance themselves, blame, and use sarcasm - like little children when they don't get their way. Highly defensive to criticism or differences of opinion, they expect to be taken care of and often treat people as objects to meet their needs."

Whine. Complain. Distance. Blame. Sarcasm. Using other people to meet their needs. This is not the way of Jesus which calls us first and foremost above everything else to love God and to love our neighbor.

Which is how we can:

- Be in CGs, even lead them for years - and yet remain **numb or emotionally distant** - unable to empathize with those around us, unable to really feel much of anything, unable to care about the hurt of others - unable to love.
- We can read book after book on theology and know the ins and outs of theological concepts like the atonement, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology and yet remain **distant or disconnected** from our spouse, our kids, our friends - compulsively overworking, or escaping into hobbies, or withdrawing into the TV or our phones - unable to love.
- We can come into the gathering, sing at the top of our lungs, lift our hands high, worshiping and celebrating Jesus (I'm assuming the best here ok?), and yet live in a constant state of **irritability or hypersensitivity** - The smallest comment or the smallest remark can send us lashing out or cutting off or spiraling - unable to love.

We cannot allow our emotional lives to go unmatured, unsaturated, and undeveloped by the Spirit.

We cannot grow into spiritual maturity, we cannot grow to become more like Jesus to the glory of God which shows itself in deeper love of God and others (which is the goal of the Christian life!) if we don't allow God to mature our emotions and be king over our emotions as well.

I don't want that for you. I don't want that for me. I need this.

Church planting assessment. Before getting ready to plant Citizens, Lindsay and I went through a couple of different church planting assessments. Which is basically a weekend where you go meet with a bunch of other pastors and church planters and their wives for them to poke around in your life and heart and then tell you whether you should plant a church or not. (It's as fun as it sounds).

And I remember the feedback we got from one in particular. I'll spare you all the details of the meeting. But the assessment report that came back said something along the lines of:

Tim's theology is good, check on that. He can preach the Bible. He can lead an organization. He has an entrepreneurial spirit and is able to start new things. And I'm thinking - Awesome. This is great.

Then the last little bit: *However, while we recommend he should plant, we are also concerned that he tends to ignore the emotional state of his soul and hold himself to an impossibly high standard, leading him towards the danger of burnout and depression and lack of love for others.*

AKA - We think you should plant a church but you need to be aware that you're probably an emotionally stunted perfectionist.

(This sermon series is mostly for me, you can listen if you want to, ok?)

I'm on this journey with you. I need this for myself.

So the question I'm inviting our church to ask is a question I've been seeking the Lord on for the past couple of years.

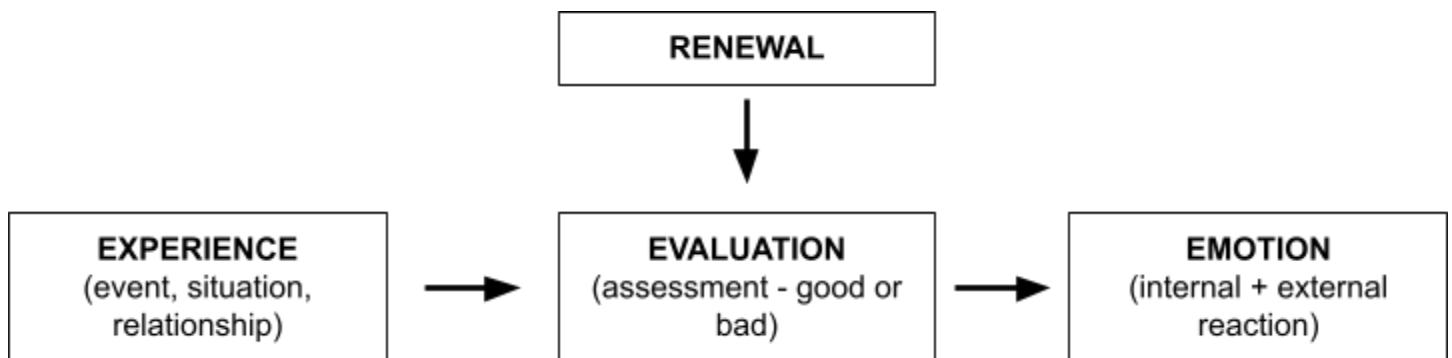
As followers of Jesus, what does it look like to begin to move towards emotional maturity (or emotional health)?

Be Transformed

That's what the next 10 weeks are all about. It's going to be great. Here's the baseline understanding you need to get.

Romans 12

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.



It's not my experience that is the problem, or my emotion that is the problem → It's ultimately me that is the problem. I need God to renew me, renew my mind.

God wants to do a work in you. By His mercy. By His grace - in view of what Christ has done for us on the cross - we offer ourselves to God to be transformed.

Would you change me by your grace, by the power of Your Spirit, in the goodness of the gospel - Will you renew my mind? Will you transform me? God - you can have my emotional life. I will not keep this from you. I will not suppress it. I will not obey it. You are king. You are Lord.

Lord, in my flesh, in my sin - this is the filter I want on that situation or circumstances, this is the evaluation I want to make and it leads to this particular emotion. I want to believe the problem is the experience. I want to run from my emotions.

But no more Lord, grow me up, mature me - but I want to be transformed. I want to live out of a new creation. I want to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect to you and I want that to affect my emotional responses.

- When that person sins against me, hurts me, betrays me, I don't want to immediately play the victim, think about how wrong they were, think about the justice I want to enact on them. I want a new evaluation - it hurts, yes, but teach me to forgive and respond in love and mercy.
- When my kid won't stop doing the thing I told them to stop 10x over the past 5 minutes, I don't want the framework and evaluation of dishonor, them ruining my comfort, them getting in the way of my self-actualization as a parent - I want a new response - gracious discipline. Kindness and sternness leading them to repentance and heart change and the gospel.
- When I'm sad because life isn't going how I want. When I don't know how to move forward. When I feel alone - Lord I want your eyes to see - renew my mind.
- When I want to run from every bad feeling that comes my way - push it down, distract myself, fake it - Lord, help me to be honest before you and before myself and before others - and change my heart.

So I want to invite you into this journey with God. Will you just step into the process?

Will you just pray this prayer this summer - **God, you can have my emotional life.**

Will you grow me into emotional maturity? To have - the right emotion, at the right time, with the right amount, for the right duration, because of the right reason - namely, love.

SO MANY WAYS TO WALK IN THIS TOGETHER THIS SUMMER:

1. **Redemption**
2. **Book Clubs**
3. **Morning Prayer**

4. **Worship Night**
5. **Pastoral Care**

****GIVE SPACE BEFORE GOD TO BE OPEN FOR JUST A MOMENT.**

Communion. Pray.