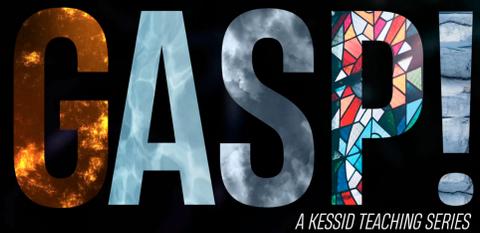


“THE JOURNEY INWARD”

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Speaker: Danny Clinton



Like many Christians today, I was taught that feelings are unreliable and not to be trusted.

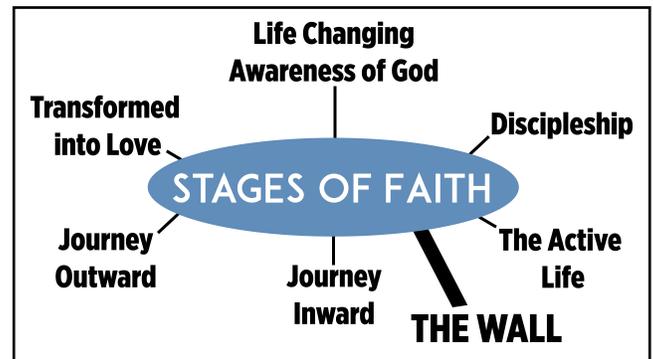
- They go up and down and are the last thing we should be attending to in our spiritual lives... But that’s an incorrect view.

There are hundreds of emotions, each with their variations, blends, and hundreds of particular nuances...

- Researchers have classified them into eight main families:
 - Anger (fury, hostility, irritability, annoyance)
 - Sadness (grief, self-pity, despair, dejection, loneliness)
 - Fear (anxiety, edginess, nervousness, fright, terror, apprehension)
 - Enjoyment (joy, relief, contentment, delight, thrill, euphoria, ecstasy)
 - Love (acceptance, trust, devotion, adoration)
 - Surprise (shock, amazement, wonder)
 - Disgust (contempt, scorn, aversion, distaste, revulsion)
 - Shame (guilt, remorse, humiliation, embarrassment, chagrin)

And yet... Most Christians do not think they have permission to consider their feelings, to name them, or express them openly.

- This applies especially to the more “difficult” feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and so on...
- **Truth:** Feelings are an important part of how God communicates to us.
- For many people this a brand-new concept: It’s never entered into your mind that God might be speaking to you through your feelings...And so, you have lived much of your life believing that feeling is a “less than” adequate way to hear from God, as if emotions are some kind of compromised truth.
- **You’ve asked:** How could I listen to my desires, dreams, likes, and dislikes? Wouldn’t they potentially take me the way of rebellion, away from God? And so, we live denying these parts of ourselves...



But... When we deny our pain, losses, and feelings year after year, we become less and emotional! Less human!

- We transform slowly into empty shells with smiley faces painted on them.
- Sad to say, that is the sour fruit of much of our discipleship in our churches.
- In a very real way, this failure to appreciate the Biblical place of feelings within our larger Christian lives has done extensive damage, keeping free people in Christ in slavery.

“The journey of genuine transformation begins with a commitment to allow yourself to feel.”

Scripture reveals God as an emotional being who feels. A Person.

“The LORD regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled.” (Genesis 6:6)

“I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.” (Exodus 20:5)

“For a long time, I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.” (Isaiah 42:14)

“The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until He fully accomplishes the purposes of His heart.” (Jeremiah 30:24)

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with kindness.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

“How can I hand you over, Israel? ...My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.” (Hosea 11:8)

“He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.’” (Matthew 26:37–38)

“He looked around them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’” (Mark 3:5)

“At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit . . .” (Luke 10:21)

Scripture also reveals that we are made in Gods image.

- God thinks. You think.
- God wills. You will.
- God feels. You feel.

As a human being made in God’s likeness, you must accept that part of that likeness is to feel.

“At the very least, the call of discipleship includes experiencing our feelings, reflecting on our feelings, and then thoughtfully responding to our feelings under the lordship of Jesus.”

This is because so much of our true selves is buried alive within our emotions.

- We know this as we look at how God designed our bodies to respond physiologically to those in the world around us.

God speaks to us...

- Through a knot in the stomach, muscle tension, trembling and shaking, the release of adrenaline into our bloodstream, headaches, a suddenly elevated heart rate, etc.

In other words, you feel—even if you are unaware of it.

- It's how you've been made!!!
- The problem, however, is that we can't reflect and respond thoughtfully to our feelings if we don't know what they are...
- The whole time God may be screaming at us through our physical body while we are out looking for (and prefer) a more “spiritual” signal...

“In this way, often our bodies know our feelings before our minds.”

The real problem for many of us comes when we have a “difficult” feeling such as anger or sadness...

- Unconsciously, we have a “rule” against those feelings...
- We feel defective because we ought not to be feeling the “wrong” things.
- We then lie to ourselves, sometimes convincing ourselves that we aren't feeling anything because we don't think we SHOULD be feeling it.
- SO... “We shut down our humanity to avoid the mess that comes with being human.”

“When we neglect our most intense emotions, we are false to ourselves and close off an open door through which to know God.”

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, and his classic work on the importance of...

- “Maintaining a balance between our reason (intellect) and feelings (heart).”
- Says... “The issue is not, by any means, to blindly follow our feelings, but to acknowledge them as a part of the way God communicates to us.”
- He provided excellent guidelines for sorting out how God speaks to us through the raw material of our emotions...

Ignatius explored the difference between...

- Consolations: “Those interior movements and feelings that bring life, joy, peace, and the fruit of the Spirit”
- Desolations: That which brings us “death,” inner turmoil, disquiet, and “spiritual turbulence.”
- With this awareness of what we are feeling, Ignatius echoed the apostle John, who said... (Vs) *1st John 4:1 – “Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”*
- Sometimes God is prodding us to a better choice.
- Other times they are our fleshly desires or the enemy.

“God intends that we mature in learning to recognize how He speaks and guides us through our feelings.”

Closing Challenge:

In ‘The Cry of the Soul,’ Dan Allender and Tremper Longman summarize why awareness of our feelings is so important:

“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. . . However, we often turn a deaf ear—through emotional denial, distortion, or disengagement. We strain out anything disturbing in order to gain tenuous control of our inner world. We are frightened and ashamed of what leaks into our consciousness. In neglecting our intense emotions, we are false to ourselves and lose a wonderful opportunity to know God. We forget that change comes through brutal honesty and vulnerability before God.”

- It’s there in that vulnerable ‘place of change’ that one can experience both the beautiful discomfort and internal inspiration that comes with feeling something authentically...

My hope for you is that you learn to “Journey Inward.”

- That you allow yourself to experience the full weight of your feelings without censoring them.
- That once in this vulnerable place you can reflect and thoughtfully decide what to do with those feelings.
- In the end, you discover that God has been speaking to you through those feelings, desiring to show you more of who He is and how much He loves you.