



Emotional
Life

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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(Lamentations 3)



olumbine. Road rage. Workplace shootings. Parental advisory warnings. Abortion rights. Gay rights. The mere mention of a word or phrase can conjure up universal images of a rapidly changing culture. The unsettling issues of modern culture impact people. As they filter all of their life experiences through their thoughts and feelings, they arrive at personal interpretations of those experiences. These interpretations of life events may be positive or negative—healthy or unhealthy—and will affect their emotional life. A healthy emotional life is essential—but how can people maintain it in this evil world?

GAINING EMOTIONAL HEALTH

God's Word promises that His children can have peace, joy, and a "sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The foundation of such healthy emotions, however, must be a healthy faith. Consider the following suggestions for gaining and maintaining emotional well-being in today's trying culture.

Healthy Faith Fosters Self-Worth

Even after confessing their sins and receiving God's forgiveness, many believers still have trouble finding peace and joy. Christ paid the price of human redemption. Each person is valuable, lovable, forgivable, and changeable in His sight. Emotionally healthy people see themselves as God sees them.

Healthy Faith Meets Reality

There is no earthly life without storms. What happens to people in life, however, is not nearly as important as *how* they choose to react to it. Emotionally healthy people can keep a correct perspective on their difficulties and react appropriately.

Healthy Faith Resists Future Shock

Healthy faith lessens one's fear of the inevitable: change. To live is to grow. To grow is to change. To resist change in life is to resist growth. Emotionally healthy people are not afraid to grow and change.

Healthy Faith Moderates Stress and Tension

A certain amount of stress and tension are essential for excitement, motivation, and growth in life. When people have healthy faith, they can trust more and worry less. Material possessions will perish with the passing of time, so people ought not spend much time or energy worrying about them. Emotionally healthy people spend time on endeavors of eternal significance that are also stress-relievers—such as enjoying close relationships.

Healthy Faith Finds Joy in Giving

Giving is contrary to human nature, but it is an essential element in Christianity. In fact, giving generously should be second nature to the developing disciple. When people give generously from the heart, they discover blessings from God (Mal. 3:10). Emotionally healthy people recognize the joy in generosity.

Healthy Faith Is Affirmed in Fellowship

Isolating oneself from other believers or adopting religious beliefs or practices that are without biblical support are harmful to healthy faith. Peter warns that, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). Paul advised believers to discern what is true by using sound bib-

lical interpretation (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). Emotionally healthy people identify not only with Christ but also with at least one established group of Christians.

Healthy Faith Sees God as Love

Sometimes people are limited in their understanding of God. For example, those with an overly strict earthly father may attribute an imbalanced strictness to God's character. To see Him only as the God who presided over the flood and the destruction of wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah is to see only an angry God. While God is strict and angry at times, the Bible also says that God is love (1 John 4:16). Emotionally healthy people understand and experience God as love.

Healthy Faith Manages Anger

Constructively

Properly directed, the energy anger creates can be very constructive. Anger makes a poor master, but an excellent servant. Emotionally healthy people direct the energy created by anger into constructive activities. They go for a walk and cool down instead of saying what can never be retracted or doing things that can never be undone. They put anger to work for them.

Healthy Faith Balances Work and Play

God gave people work in Genesis 2:15. He also gave them play, for He designated one day in seven for rest and worship (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:8-11). By keeping this balance, emotionally healthy people learn to work hard and rest well.

RESTORING EMOTIONAL HEALTH

People who feel emotionally unhealthy may be internalizing the pain of past or present situations. It is possible to help heal these unhealthy thoughts and feelings. There are four steps for them to follow to help "pray through" the process.

1. They need to talk honestly with God about what hurts them.

2. As they talk to God, they can let the feelings associated with the hurts come to the surface—fear, tears, anger, pain. Then they can give those feelings to God in prayer.

3. They can ask God for a new, constructive way to feel and think about the hurtful situations.

4. They can praise God for the new meaning He gives to life as they learn to see their hurts in a less painful way.

Of course, these suggestions are a process. Repeating the steps over a period of weeks or months helps bring healing and assurance. People will not find overnight relief from emotional hurts that may have lasted a lifetime. However, starting the process is a healthy beginning to gaining emotional well-being.

Even in our emotionally taxing world, Christians can enjoy the best of emotional health. A healthy faith is a helpful support in the unavoidable storms of life. It helps to remember Jeremiah's words about God: "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23).

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of emotional life include:

- > Joshua 1:5-9
- > Psalms 4:7; 23
- > Proverbs 3:31-33; 14:30
- > John 16:20
- > 2 Corinthians 7:10
- > Philippians 4:9
- > Colossians 3:12-17

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on emotional life at Lamentations 3:22-25 on page 1039. See also the personality profile of Jeremiah on page 976.

- He has aged my flesh and my skin,
And broken my bones.
He has besieged me
And surrounded *me* with bitterness and
woe.
- 6 He has set me in dark places
Like the dead of long ago.
- 7 He has hedged me in so that I cannot get
out;
He has made my chain heavy.
Even when I cry and shout,
He shuts out my prayer.
He has blocked my ways with hewn
stone;
He has made my paths crooked.
- 10 He *has been* to me a bear lying in wait,
Like a lion in ambush.
- 11 He has turned aside my ways and torn
me in pieces;
He has made me desolate.
- 12 He has bent His bow
And set me up as a target for the arrow.
- 13 He has caused the arrows of His quiver
To pierce my loins.^a
- 14 I have become the ridicule of all my
people—
- 15 Their taunting song all the day.
He has filled me with bitterness,
He has made me drink wormwood.
- 16 He has also broken my teeth with
gravel,
And covered me with ashes.
- 17 You have moved my soul far from
peace;
I have forgotten prosperity.
And I said, "My strength and my hope
Have perished from the LORD."
- 19 Remember my affliction and roaming,
The wormwood and the gall.
- 20 My soul still remembers
And sinks within me.
- 21 This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
- 22 *Through* the LORD's mercies we are not
consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
- 23 *They are* new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
- 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"

3:13 ^aLiterally *kidneys*

KEY PASSAGE



Emotional
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NEW EVERY MORNING

(3:22-25)

Emotions are strange: Feelings come and go. At times, we feel as though we can conquer the world; at other times, we feel as though the world has conquered us. How can we deal with these surging emotions? How can we maintain our faith in God despite these ups and downs? God's people can trust in Him for every part of their lives—even their emotions.

- God knows our limits. He never gives us more than we—with His help—can handle (1 Cor. 10:13).
- No matter what happens today, tomorrow will be new. A fresh batch of God's mercies awaits us (Lam. 3:22, 23).
- The best response when circumstances threaten to overwhelm is to wait quietly for the Lord's help (3:25, 26).

One of the keys to maintaining a healthy emotional outlook is to leave the circumstances and challenges of everyday life in God's hands and to trust Him to do what's best.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about emotional life on pages 1040, 1041. See also the personality profile of Jeremiah on page 976.

8 Their tongue *is* an arrow shot out;
It speaks deceit;
One speaks peaceably to his neighbor
with his mouth,
But in his heart he lies in wait.

9 Shall I not punish them for these
things?" says the LORD.
"Shall I not avenge Myself on such a
nation as this?"

10 I will take up a weeping and wailing for
the mountains,
And for the dwelling places of the
wilderness a lamentation,
Because they are burned up,
So that no one can pass through;
Nor can *men* hear the voice of the
cattle.
Both the birds of the heavens and the
beasts have fled;
They are gone.

11 "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a
den of jackals.
I will make the cities of Judah desolate,
without an inhabitant."

¹²Who *is* the wise man who may under-
stand this? And *who is he* to whom the mouth
of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare
it? Why does the land perish *and* burn up like
a wilderness, so that no one can pass through?

¹³And the LORD said, "Because they have
forsaken My law which I set before them, and
have not obeyed My voice, nor walked accord-
ing to it, ¹⁴but they have walked according to
the dictates of their own hearts and after the
Baals, which their fathers taught them,"
¹⁵therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the
God of Israel: "Behold, I will feed them, this
people, with wormwood, and give them water
of gall to drink. ¹⁶I will scatter them also
among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor

PERSONALITY PROFILE

Emotional
Life

JEREMIAH SHOWS IT'S OK TO CRY

(JEREMIAH 9)

In our culture, sons are often told, "Big boys don't cry." Such well-intended advice to toughen boys to face the challenges of life often trains them to perceive their emotions as a sign of weakness and to repress them. The prophet Jeremiah, however, was not afraid to cry. He expressed his feelings loudly and clearly. His words of anger and grief teach us lessons about emotions as well as lessons about the ways in which we can communicate with God. Jeremiah was a big boy who knew when to cry.

Known as the "weeping prophet," Jeremiah cried and mourned for the people of God. He preached a message of judgment through tears that flowed from a heart of compassion. Even God's severest truth is never void of His love. God has not merely directed us to condemn sin, but also to love the sinner. Jeremiah's message offers us a wonderful example about balancing the character of God with the compassion of God.

Jeremiah also offers us an intimate view of his own relationship with God. His prayers were never edited. He did not leave out the raw anger or doubt. The prophet was not afraid that God might somehow be offended by his honest feelings. Jeremiah's awareness of his own feelings made him particularly sensitive to God's deep expressions of disappointment and sadness. He was open to the heart of God because his own heart was open to God.

Like Jeremiah, we can make it a point to pray when we feel least like praying. We can ask ourselves before we pray, "Does God just expect me to tell Him what He wants to hear; or can I really tell Him what is on my mind and heart?" Such openness allows for a healthy emotional life. The more we learn to communicate fully with God, the more we will find ourselves open to His Spirit, sensitive to His corrections, and growing in compassion for the world.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about emotional life on pages 1040, 1041. See also the key passage note at Lamentations 3:22-25 on page 1039.

8 "Look, I go forward, but He is not *there*,
And backward, but I cannot perceive
Him;

When He works on the left hand, I
cannot behold *Him*;
When He turns to the right hand, I
cannot see *Him*.

10 But He knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come
forth as gold.

11 My foot has held fast to His steps;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.

12 I have not departed from the
commandment of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth
More than my necessary *food*.

13 "But He is unique, and who can make
Him change?
And *whatever* His soul desires, *that* He
does.

14 For He performs *what is* appointed for
me,
And many such *things are* with Him.
Therefore I am terrified at His presence;
When I consider *this*, I am afraid of Him.

16 For God made my heart weak,
And the Almighty terrifies me;

17 Because I was not cut off from the
presence of darkness,
And He did *not* hide deep darkness from
my face.

JOB COMPLAINS OF VIOLENCE ON THE EARTH

24 "Since times are not hidden from the
Almighty,
Why do those who know Him see not
His days?

2 "Some remove landmarks;
They seize flocks violently and feed on
them;

3 They drive away the donkey of the
fatherless;
They take the widow's ox as a pledge.
They push the needy off the road;
All the poor of the land are forced to
hide.

Indeed, *like* wild donkeys in the desert,
They go out to their work, searching for
food.

The wilderness *yields* food for them and
for *their* children.

6 They gather their fodder in the field
And glean in the vineyard of the wicked.

7 They spend the night naked, without
clothing,

And have no covering in the cold.

They are wet with the showers of the
mountains,

And huddle around the rock for want of
shelter.

9 "Some snatch the fatherless from the
breast,

And take a pledge from the poor.

10 They cause *the poor* to go naked,
without clothing;

And they take away the sheaves from
the hungry.

11 They press out oil within their walls,
And tread winepresses, yet suffer
thirst.

12 The dying groan in the city,
And the souls of the wounded cry out;
Yet God does not charge *them* with
wrong.

13 "There are those who rebel against the
light;

They do not know its ways
Nor abide in its paths.

14 The murderer rises with the light;
He kills the poor and needy;

SOUL NOTE



Gaining Understanding (23:13-17) Job admitted that he was afraid of God because God had allowed such darkness into his life (23:16). God is not the author of evil, but He may, at times, allow the press of evil into our lives. God is sovereign, so nothing happens without His consent. In times of suffering, our emotions roll and we struggle with God. But that's when we can begin to understand God's power, sovereignty, and love. Faith forged in the crucible of suffering comes through refined and strengthened. **Topic: Emotional Life**

THE VANITY OF LIFE

I The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

"Vanity^a of vanities," says the Preacher;
"Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity."

What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?

One generation passes away, and
another generation comes;

But the earth abides forever.

The sun also rises, and the sun goes
down,

And hastens to the place where it arose.

The wind goes toward the south,

And turns around to the north;

The wind whirls about continually,

And comes again on its circuit.

All the rivers run into the sea,

Yet the sea *is* not full;

To the place from which the rivers come,

There they return again.

All things *are* full of labor;

Man cannot express *it*.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing,

Nor the ear filled with hearing.

That which has been *is* what will be,

That which *is* done is what will be
done,

And *there is* nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which it may be
said,

"See, this *is* new"?

It has already been in ancient times
before us.

¹¹ *There is* no remembrance of former
things,

Nor will there be any remembrance of
things that are to come

By *those* who will come after.

THE GRIEF OF WISDOM

¹²I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. ¹⁴I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

1:2 ^aOr *Absurdity, Frustration, Futility, Nonsense*; and so throughout this book

SOUL NOTE



Life's Secret (1:1, 2) "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The words of Solomon describe the attitude of one who "has it all," but realizes that there is still a feeling of emptiness. The word "vanity" means "vapor" and pictures how quickly life passes. Like Solomon, many feel that their lives are meaningless, too. But in the final chapter, Solomon gives the solution to humanity's dilemma: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13). Because life is fleeting, God's people should accept every day as a gift from God, reverencing Him and living to please Him. That is the secret to a successful life. **Topic: Emotional Life**

SOUL NOTE



Looking for Meaning (1:16-18) Wisdom is much to be desired, yet it can lead to great frustration. "In much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." The more people know, the more they feel responsible for that knowledge, and the more they realize the extent of their ignorance. Having great wisdom did not guarantee that Solomon would live wisely. Wisdom and knowledge for their own sakes do not give meaning to life; in fact, the wisest and most brilliant may face the most aching realization that something is missing. Without God, wisdom and knowledge are ultimately meaningless. **Topic: Wisdom**