

YOUNG ADULTS 2018: “ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE DISCOURAGED”

Sunday: Minds, emotions, and God

What did God intend as the purpose for minds and emotions?

- God’s origin and intention for the human mind and emotions

Genesis 2:15-20, God placed Adam in the garden and gave responsibility; Adam wasn’t a robot, and God didn’t give daily directions like “do this on Monday, do this on Tuesday;” God gave Adam the capacity to think

- God gave boundaries, consequences; “you *may* eat” of various trees—preferences acceptable within boundaries
- “tend and keep” implies consideration, planning, arranging, managing; cultivating and guarding
- “Let Us make man in Our image;” we are triune beings
 - ...and the soul is what we are focusing on here; He cares very much about our minds and emotions
 - ...and God also has a mind and is intentional in His actions
 - ...we also have spirit (which must be made alive again after the Fall) and body
- effort for work and for relationships was required even before sin
- brought the animals to see what Adam would name them; God could have done this

What is the mind? It is that part of our being which understands information, analyzes that information, and chooses what to do about that information. God does this too. He assesses Adam’s situation and says it’s not good for him to be alone. And then He helps Adam to realize this as well. God wants us to think His thoughts.

Genesis 2:21-25 focuses more on the emotions. They include our feelings, and the Scriptures often uses words like heart and soul to refer to emotions as well. But emotions are also related to our *motives*; they are the things which move us. Emotions are a whole-being response to good/bad, happy/sad, etc.

Adam’s joyful exuberance comes out when he sees Eve and says, “This is now!” It means, “Finally!” When we think God’s thoughts, we have emotions in perfect harmony with God’s plans.

- their relationship was unfettered by shame, and that brings joy, wonder, excitement; a relationship of equals
- Note: Eve is the “helper” of Adam—an elevated position that is only used otherwise for God as our helper
 - ...and Adam does not say, “I have lost a rib” but “I have gained a helper”
 - ...the parent-child relationship is temporary, but the husband-wife relationship is permanent
- there appears to have been joy with God’s relationship as He regularly walked with them each evening
 - ...this is implied in Gen. 3:8
- the relationship would now be a model for every future marriage, as the man would make a mental decision
 - ...leaving father and mother, clinging to wife

- Knowing God now

Our minds and emotions are intended to be agencies for knowing and experiencing what God wants us to know and receive. (God still appeals to minds and emotions for unbelievers too, as we announce in the gospel—though it is also the Spirit of God at work to open those gateways for God’s message.) The original design is still desired by God. After the Fall, God didn’t tell mankind to try harder; He provided a sacrifice so that His original intentions could still be met.

- Mark 12, the first and greatest commandment, and also the second commandment
 - ...love God with everything we are; love cannot be commanded, but He appeals to us on that basis
 - ...a reflection of our Creator; God has heart, soul, and mind too, and we respond to Him
 - ...He gives us the capacity to respond to Himself in the same way that He responds
 - ...effort required in this relationship too, full capacity with heart, soul, mind, strength
 - ...love in action in 1 Cor. 13 connects with these features too
 - ...philosophers have often denied the body, but it is a means for glorifying God too (cp. Rom. 12:1-2)

- Philippians 2:13

- ...God works in us to will—that is, to choose—and then to do
- ...we *have* the mind of Christ, but subjectively He works to bring our will into line

-Psalm 106:9-13

...the people had seen the deliverance of God at the Red Sea, but they “soon forgot His works”
...cp. Exodus 13 when Moses tells them to remember their departure from Egypt
...this is an important function of our minds, and it is sinful to forget some things
...we must actively rehearse truth in our minds
...Phil. 4:8, meditation on what is good and lovely
...Ephesus had to remember where they had fallen from
 ---the reason we fail is because we fail to remember and then we leave our first love
...for those who struggle with discouragement and depression, put scriptures everywhere
 ---remember who God is
...discouragement, depression, and despair are not themselves sins
 ---but they become sin if we leave God out of the picture

-Philippians 4:6-7

...God had a perfect design, and when something was “not good” He could make it good
...but that is not the world we live in, and that’s not just an axiom but our genuine experience
...this verse shouldn’t be used as simplistic advice—just be happy!
...this passage is intended to reveal that we are being attacked; our hearts and minds need to be guarded
...you are not alone when you feel this way, and there is a resource for the attack: God’s peace
...the resource is greater than the threat: prayer, then expecting that God will keep His promise
...recall the prayer and the joy of Acts 16 that established this gathering of believers
...and recall that Paul was in prison while writing Philippians

We often get blindsided by the trials of life. Where do we find joy?

In His presence is fullness of joy, Psalm 16	prayer in Acts 16
The joy of the Lord is our strength, Nehemiah 8	power in Acts 16

Tuesday: The dark feelings

What went wrong with human minds and emotions?

There are deep complexities connected with the brain and the mind. The brain is a physical organ and has to function correctly; yet it is not exactly the “location” of the mind, which also has to function correctly. There are both spiritual and physiological aspects to this subject, and we need God’s wisdom.

- **What went wrong?**

Genesis 3:8-18; Satan lied to Eve; humans believe Satan’s lies, and he is a deceiver to corrupt our minds (2 Cor. 11:3)

As a result, their thinking and emotions were affected, vv. 7-8; and there was fear, v. 10

Adam blamed God for his problems, v. 12; at least Eve was accurate, v. 13; we should take responsibility for our guilt

They indeed gained the knowledge of good and evil, but it was ruinous because it didn’t include power to choose good

Satan wants to ruin our enjoyment of God: he left off the name of “the Lord,” Jehovah, the relationship name (Gen. 3:1)

Notice that shame leads to guilt, which leads to fear; these often go together; fellowship with God was broken

Relationships were also ruined (v. 16), so that intimacy was replaced by a desire for control, domination, power

And the whole creation, which was to be cultivated, became a place of toil, sweat, exhaustion; creation itself groans

- **God was eliminated.**

Right thinking towards God could have been maintained by accepting His way of sacrifice. Romans 1: this was rejected.

v. 21, futile thoughts and foolish hearts; v. 24, bodies are misused; v. 25, choosing a lie; v. 26, vile passions

A refusal to glorify God and to be thankful, vs. 21

Cain’s example of refusing sacrifice, Gen. 4; not glorifying God leads to intentional elimination of God (Rom. 1:28)

...and that leads to a debased mind, a mind that doesn't meet the standard (as a substandard coin)
Then our emotions become governed only by immediate desires, Rom. 1:24, 29, etc.; Jude 10, acting like the beasts.

- But even *with* God, there are causes of pain and sorrow in our world.

Romans 8:21-23, everything has been affected. We experience loss, grief, unfulfilled goals, abuse, illness, and so on.

We do suffer the consequences of our own sins: Mt. 26:5, Peter wept

But the entire world is fallen. We can get diabetes, and we can also be affected by sorrow and depression.

-a fallen world marked by death affects believers also: Acts. 9:39, Phil 2:27, believers also

-natural disasters: Luke 13:4, the falling tower; Acts 27:20, hope gone in a storm

-injustices and abuses that happen to us when we are *sinned against*: Luke 13:1-2, Pilate killed Galileans

-unfulfilled desires: Prov. 13:12, hope deferred makes the heart sick

- Biblical examples of sorrow:

Job: weary of life (illness, injustice), Job 3:11, 10:1

Rebekah, weary of life due to family, Gen. 27:4

Jacob: all things are against me, Gen. 42:36

Moses felt wretched, asked for death, Num. 11:5

Joshua: God has not really helped us, Josh. 7:7

Gideon asked if Lord was with them, Judg. 6:13

Naomi: the Lord is against me, Ruth 1:13, 20, 21

Hannah: woman of sorrowful spirit, 1 Sam. 1:15

David: I would fly away and be at rest, Ps. 55:6

Elijah wanted death due to failures, 1 Ki. 19:4

Shunamite woman, anguished soul, 2 Ki. 4:27

Jonah angry at God, sought death, Jon. 4:2-4, 8-9

Jeremiah asked why he was born, Jer. 20:18

Nehemiah couldn't hide a sorrowful heart, Neh. 2:2

The Lord's soul exceedingly sorrowful, Mt. 26:38

Paul was forsaken by everyone, 2 Tim. 4:16

Consider Elijah, 1 Kings 19. We are always going to have a valley after a mountaintop experience.

-fatigue; fear; disappointment; comparisons to others; all these lead to a critical spirit and way of thinking

-"I am not better than my fathers;" a false standard had partly motivated his actions

...and this false belief about himself and others led to discouragement and depression

Consider Job. Satan attacked him, and he had judgmental friends (like the disciples in John 9, "who sinned?")

-yet God actually used these things to help Job grow in the end

- Biblical responses to sorrow:

Romans 12:2, the renewed mind.

Billions are spent on advertising to change our thinking; what we think is important.

Ephesians 6:10-19, God's armor, and the necessity of prayer

It is the armor of righteousness, 2 Cor. 6, and the armor of light, Rom. 13

Note especially the helmet of salvation, which protects our minds

...so that we never forget that God has redeemed us; and it's also the "hope of salvation," 1 Thess. 5:8

Ask "What is God doing?" instead of "Why did this happen?"

Wednesday: Psalms in the cave

A case study of David's sorrow, depression, and recovery

- How do we end up in the cave?

There are different types of depression, including post-partum depression and other medical bases. Times of crisis, whatever the cause, can bring us into a cave experience. David's experiences in Psalms 142, 57, and 34 reveal his despair and recovery. But first, what is the background?

-envy and injustice, 1 Samuel 18; threatened with attacks and death, 1 Samuel 19

-"a step between me and death," (20:3); momentarily questioned Jonathan's loyalty (20:8), and then alone

- the priests know something isn't right, and David lies about his situation (ch. 21)
- ends up with the Philistines, has to pretend insanity to protect himself (21:10-14); then the cave (22:1)

Notice that external pressure—not of David's own making—led him to wrong decisions and internal pressure. In Psalm 56 David describes the oppression and pride of others as well as his own anxiety and the “all day long” sense that there is no end to the trouble. The cycle of discouragement leads to depression, then despair; and despair is a sense of hopelessness that can even cause one to think of death.

- Psalm 142: The reality of the cave

- v. 1, crying out verbally to the Lord
- v. 3, his spirit is overwhelmed; deep depression often brings a sense of darkness, a dark hole without escape
- v. 4, refuge has failed me; the name of the cave, Adullam, is related to the word “refuge”
 - ...the sense that no one cared about him, even though 400 had gathered to him (1 Sam. 22:2-3)

Notice that it's okay to admit our complaints (v. 2) and instability. Jeremiah did so in ch. 20, ch. 32 of his book. We should not live with complaining spirits, but God can accept our complaints and help us through them.

- Psalm 57: The revelation of the cave

- vv. 1, 4, 6, David is aware of his emotions
- v. 2, God Most High, the all-powerful God
- David knows that he is overshadowed, an image of protection; he is encompassed by the Lord, not his struggles.
 - ...calamities pass by—they are temporary
- vv. 6, 7, humility, weighed down; a steadfast heart
- vv. 5, 11, the chorus of the psalm; carry a song with you that is rooted in truth; may God be lifted up
- vv. 7-9, be intentional about praise; don't be satisfied with staying down
- vv. 3, 6, Selah—in depression and despair, pause to take a breath; a moment to contemplate these principles

Keep eyes on the Lord, like Peter walking on the water.

Remember also that David had a chance to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24), but his confidence in God was stronger.

- Psalm 34: The refreshment of the cave

This psalm is one of praise, though the title shows that David's journey of despair began all the way back when he feigned insanity. David had learned something in the cave, and it gave him a new message. God can take our cave experiences and turn them into recovery centers that help others.

- compare Ps. 147:3, He binds up the brokenhearted
- v. 3, a call to magnify the Lord; v. 8, a call to trust the Lord

Peter loved this psalm. He quotes an extended passage from it in 1 Peter 3:10-12. The disciple who denied his true self by denying the Lord had come to love the psalm written by one who had denied his identity too. Find a psalm that is helpful for what you are experiencing.

The recovery after these cave experiences did not mean David no longer had discouragements.

- actually went back to the Philistines and pretended he had defected to their side as a traitor (1 Sam. 27)
- perhaps his lowest point was 1 Sam. 30:1-2 when the Amalekites took all that he and his men had
 - ...his own men threatened to kill him (1 Sam. 30:1-6).
 - ...but David encouraged himself in the Lord and sought communication with the Lord (vv. 6-7)
 - ...past experiences in the cave were applied to this new round of despair

Because God takes us through pain, we can use those experiences to strengthen our faith and the faith of others.

Thursday: Helping friends who hurt

What are some principles for helping the grieving and depressed? What are pitfalls to avoid?

- The brokenhearted are of special interest to God.

Isaiah 61:1, a context of the Lord's beautiful deliverance of Israel and His future comfort for them

...but this is the character of Christ's ministry, too. This was in a way *fulfilled* when He was present (Lk. 4:17-21). This character was evidence that He was indeed the Christ, Mt. 11:4-5

...therefore we know that binding up the brokenhearted is God's special interest and Christ's character. He has felt the same: the prophetic feelings of Christ, brokenhearted because of reproach, Psalm 69:20. He is "the God who comforts the downcast," 2 Corinthians 7:6

- It is difficult to help those who grieve and are depressed.

Exodus 6:9—Moses had a direct promise of help from the Lord; yet the people could not receive it

... anguished spirits (internal) and cruel treatment (external)

Physical wounds can be overcome, but who can bear a wounded spirit? (Proverbs 18:14)

Internal wounds, like those from gossip, go very deep (Prov. 18:8, repeated in 26:22)

- Avoid common mistakes:

Our experiences are not the same as everyone else's; avoid saying, "I know how you feel"

Rather than give advice right away, just listen; Job's friends sat with him for a week

Avoid assumptions: Elkanah and Eli, 1 Samuel 1:8, 13-15 (notice Hannah's emphasis on prayer, though)

Don't use simplistic, bumper-sticker platitudes: "remember that the innocent don't perish," Job 4:7

Rom. 8:28, "All things work together for good," is not always helpful;

but "nothing can separate us from God's love" can be very encouraging, Rom. 8:35

Inappropriate comments: Job's friends were miserable comforters, Job 16:2; God agreed, Job 42:7-8

Insincerity: Absalom only wanted attention, 2 Sam. 15:3-6

Too much talking: multitude of words vs. refraining lips, Prov. 10:19

Silence at the wrong time: a time for silence, but also a time to speak, Eccl.3:7

In our sorrow, realize that we can't depend on others to help us. Job's friends did not help him.

But when *others* sorrow, we should be willing to be used of the Lord to do the *difficult work* of helping them.

- Use scriptural models:

The Lord Jesus helped two disciples—

They were sad. Jesus came near; went with them; asked why they were sad, 24:16-17. When they responded He simply said, "Tell Me more," v. 19. It's not deceptive to ask a question if we already know the answer; it's helpful to let sad people talk. Then He expanded their knowledge with new thoughts.

We comfort one another—

Past comfort from the Lord equips us to comfort others, 2 Cor. 1:3-4

Guilt about the past is common. We cannot change the past but can affect the future, Phil. 3:13-14

Friends and companions are inherently a comfort, Colossians 4:8, 11

Avoid condemnation, Rom. 14:13; we are not the Lawgiver, James 4:12.

...sometimes depressed people feel that they are beyond rescue;

...it can be helpful to say, "Anyone in your exact same situation would feel the exact same way"

...this is true because someone in that exact situation would *be* that person

The resurrection and the Lord's return are inherently encouraging, John 16:22; 1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11

Fear and worry about the future are common. The Lord knows what we need, Mt. 6:32, 7:11

Be willing to help. It can be a burden, but sometimes an outside party is necessary, Gal. 6:2, Phil 4:3

Good news can be refreshing, Prov. 25:25

Friday: Growing from pain

We all will sorrow. How did resilient believers respond to pain? How can God use it to help us grow?

Before the subject for the day, there were some questions to answer:

- 1) Are there medical considerations for depression?
 - All healing comes from the Lord; seek wisdom, Proverbs 1. Also, seek counsel, Proverbs 11.
 - Clinical and medical diagnoses, post-partum depression, post-traumatic stress, or other circumstances may require professional advice. Lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, habits) would be first. James 5:14-15 illustrate the work of medicine and prayer with “elders,” helpers, mentors, those with discernment.
 - Not all depression is because of sin.
- 2) A question about proper and improper guilt
 - True guilt comes from the knowledge of a transgression against God. There is also the emotional sense of guilt which may or may not be correct. (Sometimes there is no emotional sense of guilt when there should be, too.)
 - A misplaced feeling of guilt can cause discouragement and depression. To help those in this situation, we can point out the actual definition of true guilt, and if there is no transgression then we can help move past the emotion.
- 3) What response can be given to “miserable comforters”?
 - It’s probably best to listen. Even David allowed Shimei to curse him, saying, “Perhaps the Lord wants him to say this” (2 Sam. 16). God can teach us something even through those we don’t think have anything to say.
 - But then assess the truth. Later Shimei was very repentant because he had been wrong. Don’t be swayed by unhelpful or incorrect statements if the truth of God says something else.
- 4) How do we know when it is our place to be the one to provide comfort?
 - First, it’s excellent to ask this question because most people aren’t even interested in getting involved. Comforting those who hurt is a challenging spiritual work.
 - Pray. Make sure there is a relationship with the hurting ones (though helping strangers is not impossible).
 - Assess your own motive. The principle is, “Do I want to have dominion over their faith so they will do it my way? Or do I want to be helpers of their own joy and faith?” 2 Corinthians 1:24 provides these two options.

- Becoming resilient believers when we have pain.

How can we persevere and even grow in our pain?

Our struggles come because we are in a fallen world and also (sometimes) because of our personal behavior and failures. In addition, there is the work of the enemy to bring doubt and discouragement and trouble. So why are we so surprised when trouble comes?

It’s because we have misplaced expectations. One of these is the belief that problems should be taken care of and removed. We believe happiness is a proper goal in and of itself for our lives. These expectations are not aligned with Scripture, so we need a renewed mind in this area.

Psalm 62:5-8

When anguish comes, it’s too late to develop resiliency. We need to meditate on passages like this so we learn who God is now: our expectation and our hope is from Him.

Romans 8:26-39

Who is God? What is my relationship with Him? This passage is like “Theology 101” to help us understand God’s characteristics and promises towards His people. What we don’t know in verse 26 is answered by what we do know in verse 28 and onward.

...*Christ’s example*: mocked by unbelievers who said His suffering proved that God didn’t want Him anymore, Matthew 27. But Psalm 22:7-11 shows that He never gave in to that false thinking Himself.

...*Job's example*: although he was in the furnace, he knew God would bring him out as gold, Job 23. A metal worker is attentive to every detail and does not just shove a lump into the furnace and walk away!

Another misplaced expectation is the belief that suffering should have ended. Yet Paul was told from the moment of conversion about the things he would suffer for Christ's sake, Acts 9.

...2 Corinthians 1:8-9, despaired even of life

...*but* they already had the "sentence of death" in themselves; also trusted the God of resurrection

These are external pressures. What about internal pressures?

The conscience recognizes failures by design. But for the Christian, the doctrine of justification is God's great answer. 1 John 1:9 says that He is both just and faithful. He knows what to do when we confess, and He always does it. This is the answer for our consciences so that our feelings are brought in line with truth.

"The devil is a liar. He knows your name but calls you by your sin. God knows your sin, but He calls you by your name."

It can even be considered an act of pride to keep talking about what we did in the past when God has already forgiven us for that.

Regarding suffering, Joseph trusted God in his trials.

We know he truly did suffer, because his sons' names, Ephraim and Manasseh, are references to what he had endured.

In prison "the word of the Lord tested him," Ps. 105. Would God keep promises made in Joseph's youth?

Joseph trusted the word of the Lord in the prison; the trial lasted precisely as long as necessary for God to use Joseph in Egypt.

Isaiah 40 opens the second half of Isaiah's prophecy, and it's all about who God is. He is...

self-sufficient	omnipotent	omniscient	wise
sovereign	peerless	transcendent	eternal
holy	infinite	omnipresent	unchangeable
	longsuffering	faithful	

Then chapter 41 has reasons to fear, but God says, "I am with you!" Once we know who God is, that promise really means something.

Suggested reading:

The Knowledge of the Holy, A.W. Tozer

The Great Salvation, F. B. Hole

Psalms 77

Asaph is filled with complaints and trials in the first part of the psalm.

But verse 10 is his line in the sand: "This is my weakness," he says. He refuses to continue down that track. He determines to remember God's deliverance—even if he cannot think of God's faithfulness to himself at the moment, at least he can remember the stories about God's power in the lives of others

2 Corinthians 10:3-6, bringing our thoughts into the captivity of Christ—not only for spiritual battle but also for personal victory over sorrow

When it's our flesh that causes the trouble, the battleground is in our minds. It glorifies God when we overcome in that battle. (Remember again that not all depression is due to the activity of the flesh.)

2 Corinthians 4:7-11

perplexed, but not in despair, and so on

get anchors in place before we become perplexed; then they will keep us from the waters of despair

Romans 8:18, the old English says "I reckon"—that is, I consider, assess, determine, conclude...

Paul had considered things and determined truth: suffering is temporary and is nothing compared to glory

1 Peter 1:3-7

vv. 3-5, a living hope, a reserved inheritance, an active power to keep us—God’s power through faith

vv. 6-7, greatly rejoice—despite trials “if need be”

...who decides that?

...It’s God’s perfect plan, so that our precious, genuine faith produces praise at coming of Christ

C. H. Spurgeon, the great British preacher of the 1800s, battled discouragement and depression all his life since his 20s. Yet he continued to serve the Lord all his life, too. We can still live for the Lord in the tension of this battle.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39