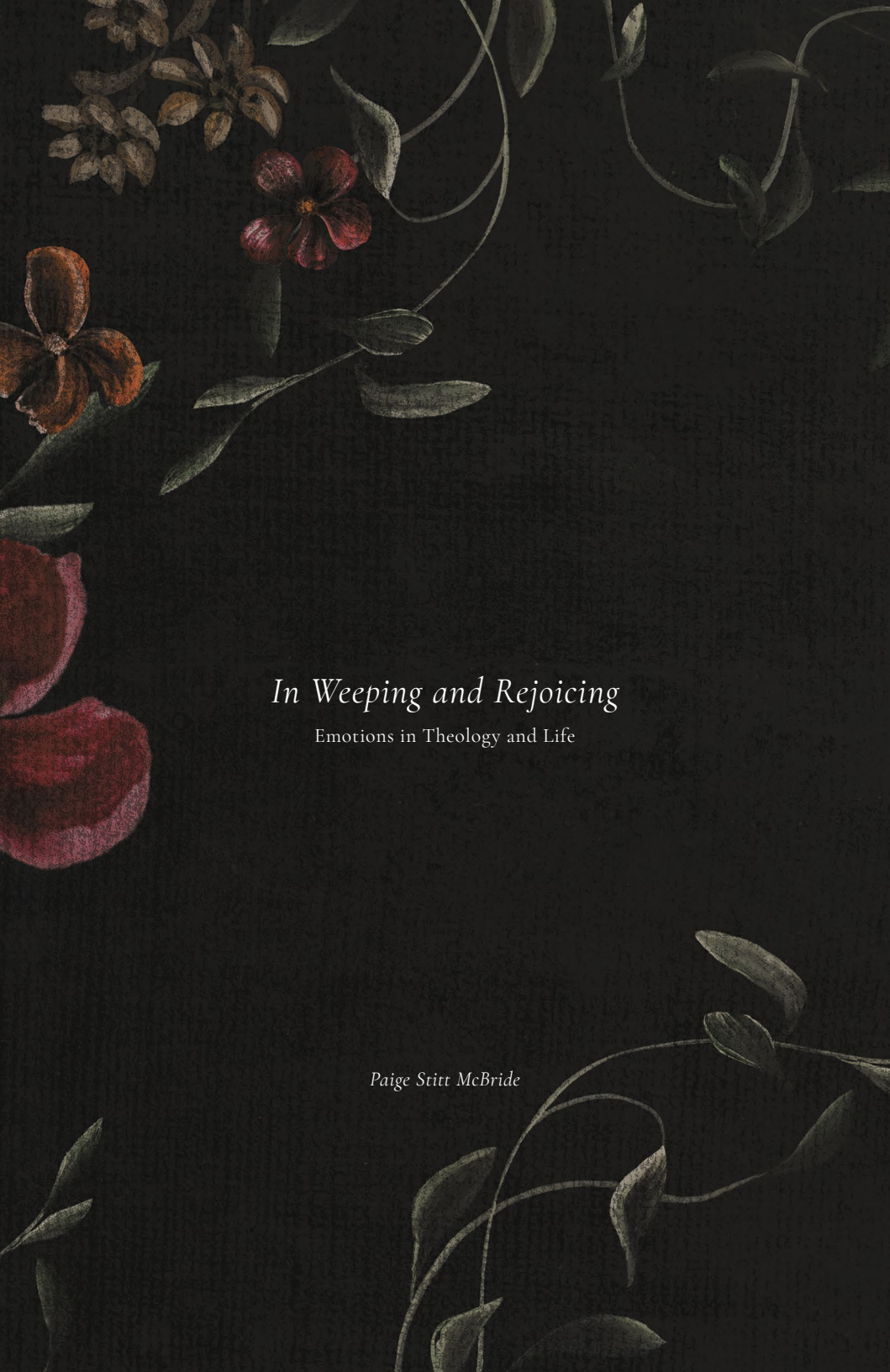

In Weeping and Rejoicing

Emotions in Theology and Life

Paige Stitt McBride

Dear Reader,

This book provides challenging and honest truth for your mental health journey from a non-clinical perspective. God can use many modes of healing to bring about our wholeness in the area of mental health—whether through wise counsel, modern medicine, biblical truth, and more—and the words you are about to read provide a Scripture-centered framework as you pursue these various avenues. Whether you struggle with depression, anxiety, or are wrestling through complex feelings, we encourage you to seek out professional guidance to pair with the truth you glean from this book. You are also welcome to explore mental-health related articles on our blog, WHEN, for additional insight.

We are cheering you on as you begin this journey!

The team at Hosanna Revival

About This Book

In Weeping and Rejoicing is a book designed to equip readers to think about their emotional life through the lens of Scripture. Confronting the difficult questions of mental illness, emotional responsibility, and emotional idolatry, author Paige Stitt McBride guides readers through a biblical-theological understanding of emotions that prepares them to develop a diverse and God-honoring emotional life.

After defining the larger role of emotions within spiritual formation, Paige leads readers through reflections upon a variety of common human emotions—joy, sadness, fear, peace, shame, anger, and love—all of which have their proper place in the Christian life. Readers are given a definition of each emotion, then cautioned against common distortions of it, and finally are equipped with spiritual habits and disciplines that will foster a godly expression of it. May God be glorified!

In Weeping and Rejoicing: Emotions in Theology and Life

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To my mother, who prayed for me through my years of depression, gently correcting and challenging me in emotional stubbornness.

To my father, who is a consistent source of contagious joy for our family even in a sad world.

And to my husband, who daily bears the burden of my emotional struggles and is truly faithful to me in weeping and rejoicing.

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A Note from the Author

Many might assume that to have written a book on emotional spirituality the author herself would have already conquered the crazy highs and lows of emotion, overcome the grips of depression, and subsequently entered into a life of stable emotional maturity. But I must confess that I have done none of the above. This book is a humble attempt to share with the body of Christ the rich teaching of the Scriptures as it pertains to our emotions. But I write as an emotional pilgrim myself, one with my own struggle with depression and my own track record of emotional instability.

And it is for this very reason that the truths of this book are so precious to me. This book is a result of my conviction that, despite the fact that we will all remain imperfect on this side of heaven, it is the Scriptures' promise that God desires to transform and sanctify every nook and cranny of our lives. It sure does feel like a slow transformation, but it is nonetheless a sure transformation. I can testify that the truths of this book are slowly allowing me to experience emotionally and vividly the great truths of the gospel more and more. "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). May it be.

One

ARE MY EMOTIONS VALID?

Are My Emotions Valid?

A typical visit to a counselor today might go something like this: You tell the counselor about your struggles and they respond with something along the lines of "I want you to know that your feelings are valid." This standard therapeutic approach is but a symptom of a larger cultural shift, the rise of what Philip Rieff dubs "the psychological man."[1] As historian Carl Trueman puts it, "psychological categories and an inward focus are the hallmarks of being a modern person . . . each of us finds our meaning by giving expression to our own feelings and desires."[2] We often call this concept "authenticity." Individual authenticity is committed to fostering unashamed expression. One can easily see how this psychological understanding of identity shapes common practice in counseling. Trueman describes it thus: "Traditionally, the role of the therapist in any given culture was to enable the patient to grasp the nature of the community to which he belonged," but in modern society "therapy ceases to serve the purpose of socializing an individual. Instead, it seeks to protect the individual" from

1 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 45.

2 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph*, 46.

society which smothers the individual's ability to "simply be herself."[3]

This shift in our understanding of identity has led to an increasingly commonplace assumption in modern, western culture, namely that it is wrong to "invalidate" another person's emotions. To do such would be to hinder a person's authenticity and personal fulfillment. By equating our feelings to our identity, we end up believing that to invalidate someone's emotions is to reject the person. We are told that we must unconditionally validate other people's emotions. While many will contend that this "validation" does not necessarily involve approval, it is hard to see how affirming someone's emotions as "valid" could mean much else. As it is, the general expectation has become that we not only *recognize* the reality of a person's emotion, but that we *affirm* the reality of their emotion. We do not just tolerate people's emotions, we celebrate them.

Emotional validation has become our culture's default. We do not really make rational arguments as to why all emotions are valid; we just assume all emotions are valid. We assume that one person does not have the right to tell another how to feel. We assume that no one can judge another person's feelings. We assume that no one should shame another for having certain emotions. We even assume that a person's mode of emotional expression should never be stigmatized. Put simply, we tend to assume that emotions cannot be "right" or "wrong" and therefore all emotions should be validated.

The problem is that many Christians today assume this cultural consensus is the biblical consensus, but I want to suggest that there are some important differences between how the Scriptures think about emotions and how our culture thinks of emotions. While unconditional emotional validation may sound "Christian" because of its superficial appearance of kindness and

3 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph*, 47-48.

compassion, it is ultimately opposed to a biblical understanding of personhood, emotional wellness, and Christlike love.

In order to discuss how the Bible should inform our approach to emotions, we first need a working definition of "emotions." Philosophers have long since debated whether emotions are a physiological or cognitive phenomenon. Of course, emotions involve both our bodies and our minds. That being said, this book will focus on the spiritual-theological dimension of emotions. I am not a trained therapist nor a psychiatrist; I will leave that work to those who are qualified. But as a Christian thinker and an everyday believer, I am responsible for having a functional *theological* definition of emotions because the Scriptures do address our emotions in such terms. The Christian cannot *solely* look to scientific data when it comes to understanding emotions. We must also look to the Scriptures. The following is an attempt to do just that.

Robert C. Roberts, a Christian philosopher, offers a uniquely Christian understanding of emotions in his book *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*. He makes the claim that "the mental states that we call emotions" have three distinct properties in the New Testament:

1. They are morally important.
2. They are commanded.
3. They are shaped by the concepts and narrative of grace.[4]

Let us investigate each of these assertions and glean how they might contribute to our understanding of emotional validity.

4 Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 9, 14-31.

Emotions Are Morally Important

Roberts notices that many biblical virtues (moral "excellencies") can rightfully be considered emotions. For example, joy, grief, and compassion are all familiar emotive states that Christians associate with spiritual maturity; some of them we know as "fruit of the Spirit" from the Scriptures. Roberts calls these mental states "emotion-virtues" because they fit definitionally into both categories. Joy, for example, is typically thought of as a "feeling." It is an emotion. Yet as a fruit of the Spirit, joy is also a virtue. It is a good moral habit or quality. If some emotions can rightfully be listed among the Christian virtues, then they necessarily are moral in nature. In other words, if the emotion of joy is associated with spiritual maturity, then joy can be considered right rather than wrong.

C. S. Lewis observes that before the advent of psychological man in modern times, people assumed emotions could be congruous or incongruous to reality. He writes, "because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order, therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it)."[5]

Objections to such an argument might go something like this: "But you cannot control your emotions, so how can they be right or wrong?" or "How can you say someone is sinning just because they feel a certain way?" or finally, "God created us as emotional beings, does not he want us to be honest about our emotions rather than trying to 'fake it'?" These are good and understandable questions.

It may first be helpful to show that naturally we do not always think emotions are morally neutral. Take an extreme example.

5 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing Co., 2015), 19.

Say a woman cheats on her husband and feels no remorse; in fact, she is happy and enjoying that her husband is finally feeling the rejection that she has felt from him for years. Most people would intuitively push back on this woman's emotional response to her adultery. It seems clear to us that she *should feel* sorry for what she has done and she *should not* be happy that her husband is suffering. A less extreme and more relatable example might be a child mourning the loss of a parent. The child might begin going to therapy and the therapist notices that the child is not experiencing much, if any, emotional turmoil over the death of their beloved parent. The therapist, whether Christian or not, is likely going to see this as "unhealthy." They may gently try to show the child that it is good for them to grieve the loss of their parent. The child should feel sorrow and should not suppress grief.

Both of these examples prove that there are cases where many people are comfortable using the words "should" and "should not" concerning someone's emotions. Whether we put it in more clinical terms like "healthy" emotions, or in more moral terms like "right emotions," both are getting at the same idea. Some emotions are proper given the situation and some emotions are not. Not only that, but an improper emotive reaction can be indicative of poor character and proper emotive reaction can be indicative of virtuous character. It is reasonable to assume that the woman who feels no remorse after committing adultery has poor character, just as it is safe to assume that the person who feels compassion for the poor has some amount of good character. Clearly, if Scripture includes emotions within the category of fruit of the Spirit, there are at least some emotions that can be morally evaluated.

Emotions Are Commanded

Roberts' observation of the biblical data is that emotions are commanded. If we are ready to concede that at least some emotions are of moral nature (i.e., they can be right or wrong), then it

would make sense that the Bible contains commands regarding emotions. Just as the Bible establishes moral imperatives when it comes to our actions, it also establishes moral imperatives when it comes to our emotions. Paul can command the emotion of joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, he commands joy just like he commands prayer and thanksgiving, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" and even reasons that the command for joy "is the will of God in Christ Jesus" for the church. He commands the Romans to "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). James elicits a rather harsh command regarding emotion saying, "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom" (James 4:9). All of these instances are written in the imperative form, meaning that they are all commands. We have to let the biblical evidence speak: God can command certain emotions.

The inverse is also true: God condemns certain emotions. Think of the several instances where God commands his people not to fear.[6] Or consider Colossians 3:8 where Paul commands the church to put away their old sinful lifestyle, including their "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk." An emotion like anger is included in the list of active sins like gossip and bad language.

The fact that God can command and condemn some emotions may seem unjust because of the objection listed earlier; namely, we often do not control our emotions. If emotions are not really a choice, how can we be punished or praised for them? Is that not like God punishing me for my height or giving me a pat on the back for my hair color? Roberts' final assertion about the New Testament's understanding of emotions will help us respond to this valid concern.

6 See Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 8:1; Isaiah 41:13; Jeremiah 42:11; etc.

Emotions Are Shaped by the Concepts and Narrative of Grace

In Acts 5, the apostles are thrown into a public prison for their involvement in preaching the gospel. After being released, the text tells us that they left "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). Clearly, this is an example of how a person's emotions are shaped by their worldview. It is only because the apostles had come to know the great story of God's salvation in Christ that they rejoiced in their suffering. No such emotional response would be possible without such a gospel-informed worldview. Our emotions are related to how we are inclined to interpret the world around us.

This leads us to Roberts' definition of emotions as "concern-based construals."[7] To say that emotions are "concern-based" means that an emotion is always rooted in a desire or interest. For example, the farmer rejoices at rain because of his concern for his harvest and ultimately his livelihood. His personal concern shapes his emotional reaction to a specific situation. To say that emotions are "construals" is to highlight their interpretative nature. Again, think of the farmer. He interprets the rain in a positive manner because of his personal concerns. But say you are a woman who struggles with seasonal depression. A dark rainy day is not good news for you. The woman interprets the significance of rain differently because of her specific context. Our emotions involve some amount of interpretation; we take in certain data and assign to that data a certain meaning or significance. This is why two people can approach the same situation and have completely different emotive reactions: they interpret the situation differently based on their perspective.

What may seem confusing about this definition of emotions is that we normally think of emotions as gut-reactions or reflexes, not as thoughtful interpretations of data. This is true. That is why Roberts chooses the term "construal" rather than interpretation.

7 Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions,* 11-13.

Construal refers to a sort of automatic or involuntary perception of an object. He uses the analogy of eyesight.[8] When you look at something, you interpret it immediately. You do not have to think about processing the data, you just do it. You do not carefully combine all the data to determine after careful investigation that it is your mother standing in front of you. You just immediately see your mother's face. This is the typical way we experience emotions; they "happen to us." Just like we do not really choose to see our mother's face when we look at her, we often do not really choose to feel sad when we find out we lost our job. We perceive the significance of the situation immediately and intuitively.

Nevertheless, we are still responsible for our intuitions. In fact, our immediate evaluations of situations are particularly reflective of our character. They reveal the beliefs and affections within our minds and hearts that are so deeply ingrained we do not even have to think about them because they are automatic. These intuitive beliefs and assumptions make up our worldview, one for which God holds us responsible. And that worldview will inevitably shape our emotions. Therefore, to say that we are responsible for shaping our worldview according to the gospel is also to say that we are responsible for shaping our emotions according to the gospel. We shape them so that, eventually, we might naturally and immediately construe our situations in terms of the truth God has revealed in his Word. The goal of this book is to equip us for such a project: a sanctification that so deeply invades our entire person that we level out old "ruts" of emotions that at one time came so naturally and conversely dig out new "ruts" in our hearts that make gospel-emotions as natural as water flowing through a well-dug canal: they just happen.

So what does all of this have to do with our original discussion on emotional validation? If the Scriptures teach that many emotions are morally important reflections and expressions of our character (Roberts' 1st point), that some emotions are

8 Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 24–26.

commanded and some are condemned in the Scriptures (Roberts' 2nd point), and that a gospel worldview has the power to shape our emotional responses in the long-term (Roberts' 3rd point), then there may be times when a Christian must not "validate" certain emotions.

But because of the fragile nature of this topic and because poor mental health is an increasingly common struggle, one should be very cautious about how one talks about emotions with others. The best place to start is within ourselves, for "how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:4). If we ever want to encourage gently and exhort our brothers and sisters in Christ toward emotion-virtues, we must first do that for ourselves, lest we ignore Jesus' solemn warning: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

May we yearn not for mere validation of our emotions but for the transformation of our emotions, and may this book be the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning to do so!

A Note on Mental Illness and Self-Help

Before we begin to consider what emotional training should look like, two considerations are in order. First, we need to address the topic of mental illness. Second, we need to distinguish between self-help and gospel-based transformation.

Mental Illness

In his two-part blog entitled "Can Jesus Heal Mental Illness?" biblical counselor Heath Lambert suggests that "mental illness is atheistic language for problems that have to do with life lived

before the God of heaven and earth."[9] Such a statement is likely quite jarring for many Christians who would consider mental illness a very real struggle, even for the faithful. But in Lambert's opinion, "[o]ur culture believes that mental illnesses point to biology and require medical intervention. Those of us in the biblical counseling movement are the only ones who know that the construct of mental illness actually has to do with problems of the heart and require the gospel of God's grace for healing," and therefore it is "Jesus alone" who can deal with the kind of problems that we call mental illness.[10]

What is one to make of such a bold assertion? First, though it is true that the term mental illness originates in clinical psychology rather than biblical theology, this certainly does not mean it is essentially "atheistic." Christians have always used terms from other fields of study to help denote certain phenomena that the Bible might not name though they are present in the text. Historically, the church has used technical terms from philosophy like "nature," "essence," and "person" to articulate the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity. However, the term Trinity is not found in the Bible. Does that mean it and the technical terms used to explain it are "atheistic" language? Of course not. The word Trinity has non-biblical origins and the ideas "essence" and "personhood" have non-biblical definitions, but they can be rightly applied to the Scriptures.

This means that a Christian could certainly use the secular term mental illness without adhering to an atheistic worldview. While it is true that many secular psychologists assume a worldview entirely contrary to the biblical one, we can still use their terminology to refer to the same phenomena while maintaining our biblical-theological worldview. Just like I can use the word

9 Heath Lambert, "Can Jesus Heal Mental Illness? Part 2 The Healing of Jesus." Last Updated March 16, 2014. *Association of Certified Biblical Counselors:* https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/can-jesus-heal-mental-illness-part-2/ (October 20th, 2023).

10 Lambert, "Can Jesus Heal Mental Illness?"

emotion in such a way that fits with the biblical data, so too can I use the term mental illness in a way that fits with the biblical data. Certainly my understanding of emotion will be distinct from an atheist, but I can still use the term. The same applies with the term mental illness.

But is Lambert right that what people normally think of as mental illness is actually just a construct for a purely spiritual-religious problem? I would suggest not. The Bible itself teaches that sin's entrance into the world did not only affect the moral order of God's creation, but it also disrupted the natural order of God's creation. God cursed the ground alongside humanity and the body suffered just like the spirit suffered (Genesis 3:17–19). As Paul puts it:

> The creation was subjected to futility . . . in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Romans 8:20-22)

That God subjected creation to futility means that God's curse has rendered the physical creation disordered, dysfunctional, and sometimes seemingly pointless. Though some semblance of order still remains due to God's grace, creation is not what it used to be. The ground still bears fruit, but it is only "in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Genesis 3:17, 19). And so all of nature "has been groaning," waiting to be freed from its "bondage to corruption."

This disorder applies specifically to our human bodies. Our "outer self is wasting away" (2 Corinthians 4:16). Our bodies suffer from the fall, which is why we have diseases, disorders, and illnesses. This is why we age and, ultimately, perish. To pit theology and biology against each other is to create a false dichotomy. Our theology should inform our biology, not eliminate it. Theology

tells us that our bodies are broken just like our souls. Biology gives insight into how that physical disorder manifests.

Therefore, we do not need to choose between emotions as a bodily reality and emotions as a spiritual reality. God created a human being as a physical-spiritual unity. Neither aspect of human life operates freely from the other. Our bodies and our spirits go together. Neither should be ignored. And therefore, the Christian should have no trouble acknowledging that their bodily issues can contribute to their emotional issues. Just as a Christian should not object to someone suggesting they are feeling down because they have not been sleeping or eating well, they should not object to someone suggesting a hormonal imbalance is contributing to their emotional struggle. If there is evidence that our emotional turmoil is related to a physiological pathology, then we should by all means seek a physiological solution. Just like you should go to the doctor when you have a broken arm, you should go to a mental health professional when you have a mental illness.

But Lambert's concern does remind us of an important truth: We also need to realize that our emotions are not completely analogous to a broken arm. A broken arm has nothing to do with our personal spiritual maturity. Our emotions do. Otherwise, the Scriptures would not address them in such terms. Therefore, Lambert is right to caution against thinking that our mental illnesses are only a matter of bodily malfunctioning. Our emotional wellbeing is more akin to our general well-being. Human flourishing requires both the body and the spirit to operate according to their design. And so do our emotions. We can acknowledge biology's role without neglecting theology's role.

To neglect theology's role in emotional wellness is a serious danger. For no matter how balanced our hormones may be, no matter how physically healthy we become, we will never experience full emotional wellness without a robust theological vision of the world. While thoughtful Christian experts in medicine and

psychology are essential for making good decisions in regards to our mental health, the theologian has an indispensable role to play as well. The goal of this book is to bring to light the essential role of theology in emotional development.

I will leave the psychology to the psychologists and certainly encourage those who suspect they need medicinal treatment to speak with a doctor, but I cannot leave the gospel at the door when entering into conversations about emotions. As someone who has personally struggled with the burden of depression, who has intimate knowledge of the feeling of inescapable sadness, I cannot say it enough: Our emotions are not some mechanical, non-spiritual machine in our bodies. They are not purely a medical phenomenon. Our emotions have an essential spiritual, theological shape as much as they have an essential biological shape. We make our doctor our pastor when we expect that a pill is *all* it will take to conquer mental illness. A pill may certainly play an integral role—and it has for me for many years—but a pill is never all it will take. Jesus is my healer, healer of body and soul, the healer who inspires the skill of doctors and the wisdom of theologians, both of whom are vessels of his mercy and transformation for me in my journey to put my emotions in their proper place. Praise be to God!

Self-Help versus Gospel Transformation

In addition to the dangers of buying into our world's tendency to isolate emotions from spirituality, there is also the danger of buying into the false confidence of the popular self-help movement. This book is not a self-help book. This book does provide everyday practices to promote emotional wellness, but it does so within a completely different framework than the self-help genre. Self-help is based upon a faulty notion of the human problem and its solution. The human predicament does not involve mere behavior adjustment. The human predicament cannot be solved simply by making better choices. The human

predicament is deeper than that. It is a matter of the heart. Our hearts are inherently opposed to godly transformation; by our "unrighteousness" we "suppress the truth" that would ultimately change our lifestyle (Romans 1:18). Therefore, lifestyle tips and tricks will be insufficient without a new heart that is willing and able to embrace the truth. It is not that we are struggling in our sin and just need a little boost of confidence. No, we are "dead" in our sins (Ephesians 2:1) and need to be reborn as a wholly different person (John 3:3-6).

And this is the gospel: that in Christ we are reborn as a wholly different person. Not that we helped ourselves, but that God helped us when we were helpless. And this gospel is the foundation for every other idea written in this book. We do not have the power to transform our emotional life in and of ourselves—Christ does. It is his will that we be fully sanctified and transformed. As Paul blessed the church, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

The Bible tells us that those who are saved by the fully sufficient help of Jesus Christ are thereby empowered to begin to "help" themselves. As Paul described his transformation as an apostle, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). You see, all the hard work that appeared to be Paul's own doing was in reality the deeper workings of the grace of God. Therefore, the ideas and practices of this book are based on that premise. We cannot save ourselves, but we can participate in the saving power of Jesus everyday by keeping his commands and following his ways. As Paul said, "I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Colossians 1:29).

Training My Emotions

Approaches to Emotion Training

We have discussed how western culture has grown to demand unconditional emotional validation. This is in fact evidence of emotional idolatry. All things are to serve our emotions and our emotions are to serve nothing. Such a notion would make emotional training completely irrelevant or "inauthentic." However, there is also an opposite mistake when it comes to thinking about emotional training. This is the mistake of assuming that emotions are either unimportant or just downright bad. Christians who are frustrated by the emotional idolatry that surrounds them may swing to this opposite extreme by thinking that emotions are inherently unspiritual or animalistic. C. S. Lewis makes the astute observation that some of us who pride ourselves in being "objective" and "scientific" like to think we are above emotion and sentiment and instead are committed to reason and rationality. Emotions are beneath us. We think of them as a kind of propaganda that tries to manipulate us into believing things that are irrational. For those of us who tend toward this mistake, we ironically end up believing the same thing emotional idolaters believe: we do not need to shape our emotions at all. But instead of validating our emotions as in emotional idolatry, we claim we just need to ignore them and listen to our heads.

C. S. Lewis considers the dangers of this kind of attitude in his book *The Abolition of Man*. He writes that those who would substitute emotional education for purely rational training "honestly misunderstood the pressing educational need of the moment."

> They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda . . . and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite

> tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity . . . *the right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments*. By starving our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes (emphasis added).[11]

Just as dangerous as emotional idolatry is emotional neglect. Formation of mature individuals is not simply an intellectual project, it is also an emotional project. To be a whole person is not just to understand or identify that which is right and good, it is to love that which is right and good. Even the demons recognize God as God, but they do not *love* him as God (James 2:19). Their unbelief is of an emotional nature. It's not about the raw data.

In fact, Lewis contends that we would rarely act in accordance with what is true and good if it were not for our emotions. For "without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism."[12] Thus our reason is not enough to stop us from acting on our bad desires. We must develop proper emotional dispositions to temper our sinful instincts. Lewis gives the example of playing cards. You have the option between two opponents. The first is someone who does not believe in objective morality, but nonetheless hates cheating. The second is a moral philosopher trained in ethics, but he has never felt an ounce of guilt cheating his way through life. Which opponent would Lewis choose? For him, the answer is simple, the first opponent who does not have a rational understanding of ethics but does have an emotional understanding of ethics. Lewis believes that he is much less likely to cheat than the shameless yet sophisticated moral philosopher because, in this case, emotion is more powerful than reason.

11 Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 13-14.

12 Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 24.

We can all relate to this in some way. There are plenty of instances in our lives when we do things based on our emotions and contrary to reason. Our emotions are powerful, and therefore, they matter. They play an integral role in forming a flourishing individual. We must reject the notion that our emotions determine reality, but we also must reject that our emotions are subrational obstacles that we need to avoid or tear down. Put simply, our emotions are not the most or least important thing about us.[13]

So how exactly do our emotions contribute to our well-being? Lewis follows Plato's notion that emotions can be "organized by trained habit into stable sentiments."[14] These "stable sentiments" ultimately determine how we naturally feel and act. In other words, emotions can become dispositional through habitual training. To say that an emotion can become dispositional is to say that we can become inclined to react emotionally in certain ways. To use our terms from earlier, our worldview will make certain emotions automatic and intuitive. And therefore, emotions are not best transformed in the moment, but rather through longer-term training that embraces a biblical worldview and therefore builds up "stable sentiments" or emotional dispositions.

Think of a professional baseball player. As the ball comes hurling toward him from the pitcher's mound, he automatically knows when and how to swing. He cannot, in the middle of his swing, begin to change his form. Once he begins swinging, he is on route; nothing can stop him. His muscle memory kicks in and he simply does what he is trained to do. It is hard to imagine that he is "thinking" all that much as he hits the ball. But this does not mean he is not responsible for the outcome of his swing. As a professional baseball player, it is expected that he is training day in and day out to perfect his swing so that when

13 Alasdair Groves, "Your Emotions Aren't the Most (or Least) Important Thing About You." Last Updated May 6, 2019. *The Gospel Coalition:* https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/emotions-important/ (October 20, 2023).

14 Lewis, *The Abolition of Man,* 25.

he does step up to bat in the game, he hits a homerun. It is in the hours of practice outside the game that a player perfects his form and learns his strategy, not during the game itself. Training, by definition, happens outside of the context of actual play. It prepares for actual play.

So while it is true that when the player steps up to the plate and swings it comes naturally to him, it only comes naturally because of the intense training that has happened before that moment. Surely when he was in tee ball, his swing did not look like it does now. But after years of dedicated training, *what is natural has become what is right.*

Emotional training is similar. It will not do us much good to try to change the course of our emotions in the heat of the moment. In the moment, our emotions are largely automatic, much like a baseball player swinging at a pitch. But the way in which we naturally respond to these situations is inevitably determined by the way we train our emotional muscles outside those actual moments. Just like the batter who hits a homerun, we only will naturally express proper emotions when we have done our fair share of training outside the context of those situations which prompt our emotional reactions. Just like the hitter begins with poor form in tee ball and slowly trains his way to a game-winning swing, so too Christians begin their walk of faith as emotional infants who over years of gospel training are transformed into emotionally-mature adults.

Our basic premise, then, is that training off of the field prepares us for a kind of "effortless" performance on the field. This means that we need to flex our emotional muscles outside the moment of "performance" (real-life instances that elicit an emotional response from us). We develop intentional practices that shape our emotional intelligence so that when we go out into everyday life and are bombarded with situations that tug at our emotions, we naturally respond with godly emotions.

The practices suggested in this book are aimed at developing certain emotional dispositions but are not really designed to course correct in the heat of the moment. These practices are things we do beforehand (and continue after) that prepare us to respond to life in biblical ways. There are a number of practical things we might try to do "in the moment" to help stabilize our emotions. Yet, those tactics often disappoint. Most of us will find that we cannot rationalize our way out of our feelings while we are feeling them. We cannot help but feel the way we feel.

Our emotions are like water flowing through a valley. If I pour water at the top of the mountain, it will always flow down into the valley. It is impossible to stop the water from trickling down the mountain. The only way to change the course of the water is to change the landscape upon which it flows. Before you ever try pouring out the water, you need to dig out a new channel in the mountain, creating an environment where water will naturally flow. Only after you have done the hard work of filling in the valley and digging out a new streambed in the mountain will the water flow in a different direction. Similarly, we cannot expect different emotional reactions when we never change our "emotional landscape." There are certain "ruts" in our hearts that are formed over time which will determine the way our emotions "flow." Until we address those ruts—filling in the bad ones and digging out new ones—our emotions will persist in their current form. Our emotional lives are transformed through the hard work of reshaping our minds and hearts so as to create a whole new system of irrigation for our fast-flowing emotions.

Strategies for Emotional Training

But this approach begs the questions of what kind of habits and practices can level out old ruts and dig new ones. There are two key components to this process: learning the truth and rehearsing the truth.

Learning the Truth

"There is a disconnect between my heart and my head." This is a common phrase used by Christians to describe the discrepancy between what we feel and what we claim to believe. We "know" certain things as Christians, but they often do not impact how we feel. For example, I know that my worth is not determined by what my peers think of me, but I sure do feel worthless when someone thinks I am a failure. Because of this common experience, many of us might assume that learning more "information" will not improve our emotional life. What is the point of focusing on information if it never makes its way down into our hearts?

This frustration is certainly understandable. Nevertheless, we must resist the temptation to deny Jesus' promise that "If you abide in my word . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). Often when the Scriptures employ the term "know," whether in Hebrew or in Greek, the word refers to more than simply being informed or having an awareness. For many biblical writers, to "know" something is to grasp it deeply, even experientially. "Knowing" is much more than comprehension; it is an intimate apprehension. It is the difference between truly knowing someone and "knowing of" someone. When Jesus declares, "And this is eternal life, that they *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3), he does not mean that simply being aware of God and his Son Jesus imparts eternal life. Rather, to "know" God is to have a relationship with God.

Returning to John 8, when Jesus promises that those who abide in his word will "know" the truth that sets them free, he is not talking about the kind of head knowledge that never makes its way into the heart. He is talking about an experience of and a relationship with the truth, a deep-rooted "heart knowledge." But how is it that one attains such a knowledge of the truth that sets them free? By *abiding* in Christ's word. To abide in Jesus' teaching is to remain in it, to ruminate on it. Simple comprehension is

not enough. Continually we must return to meditate on Jesus' teaching and "sit" in it. To abide in Christ's word is to study, clarify, and reiterate the teachings given to us in the Holy Scriptures.

In other words, if we want more than "head knowledge," we still have to start with head knowledge. We have to meditate on that head knowledge day in and day out. We have to talk about it, think about it, pray about it, read about it. As God told the Israelites:

> These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

The more we "abide in" the doctrines we claim to believe, the more we will truly know them and in turn the more we will embrace them in our heart of hearts. The truth will indeed set us free.

Therefore, this book will be thoroughly committed to the intellectual task of theology. Theology is itself the product of abiding in the Scriptures. It is the theologian's task to survey carefully the varied scriptural data pertaining to a certain topic, discover harmony and nuance in all that data, and thereby come to a deeper understanding of that concept in Scripture. Such a process challenges us to reflect upon, refine, and reiterate Scripture's teaching. And it is in that process that we begin to grow emotionally connected to the subject matter. Thinking and feeling go hand in hand. So this book is built upon the premise that thinking deeply fosters feeling deeply. We cannot expect to reach an emotional knowledge of God if we are bereft of a robust theological knowledge of God.

Therefore, for each emotion we consider, we will first attempt to define that emotion carefully. Based on our definition of emotions as "concern-based construals," I will use the language of vision to define each emotion. Calling an emotion a "vision" is to communicate concisely the automatic, intuitive, perceptive nature of emotions. When we feel things, it is because we "see" things a certain way. Each instance of emotion is a vision that intuitively evaluates a situation. Using the Scriptures, we will define each emotion through these categories of how we ought to see and evaluate the world around us. Then we will consider how the Scriptures expose and warn against the distorted ways in which we see and evaluate the world around us.

Rehearsing the Truth

Once we have done the hard work of thinking biblically, we will then consider strategies to act biblically. We will identify practices that "rehearse" the truths that we meditate upon. The idea is that acting like we believe something is often a key part of actually coming to believe it. If you live like something is true, it will become more true. You might believe in the scientific findings that enabled people to design planes that fly in the air, but nonetheless you are terrified to go on a plane. One way to challenge yourself to believe in the science you claim to believe in is to just get on the plane and go somewhere. Similarly, one way to reach beyond "head knowledge" about proper emotions is to "act" out those proper emotions. It is a sacred form of "fake it 'til you make it."

Each practice given in this volume embraces this sacred form of "fake it 'til you make it." If we want to learn joy, we should set up consistent patterns of "fake" joy in our lives so as to live into the truth of the good news so one day we start to feel naturally the joy of that good news. I use the word "fake" to say that some habits of joy are done even when we are not actually feeling

joyful. The more we rehearse joy through our habits, the more true joy will permeate our hearts.

This kind of "faking" is not an attempt to fool those around us into thinking that we are better than we really are. It is not a mask to hide our flaws and put up a false pretense. It is not a hypocritical strategy to protect our ego. Rather, it is a putting on of the new self that is truly ours in Christ. The righteous form of "fake it 'til you make it" recognizes that as we imitate Christ, we actually become more like Christ. Indeed, we become our most authentic selves by putting on righteousness. We do not shy away from Paul's command to "*put off* your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to *put on* the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). In other words, by "putting on" proper emotions we are not dressing up in a deceptive costume, but we are clothing ourselves in our family uniform! We are participating in that which is truly ours in Christ.

As we seek to conform our emotions to God's good design, we first meditate upon the truth about emotions and then we act out that truth about emotions. We first define them and guard ourselves against distortions of them, and then consider how we might develop them through habits. Let's get started!

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