

The Psalms and our Emotions

The book of Psalms is centrally located in the Bible. It is a collection of 150 prayers and is essentially God's "prayer book" for His people. It contains a diversity of prayers, such as prayers of praise, thanksgiving, supplication, and lament. Because of its passionate and poetic nature, the Psalms in ancient Israel and throughout church history have been sung. For some Christian churches, the book of Psalms is valued as "God's songbook."

I grew up in such a church. My home church belongs to a small reformed denomination called the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Church. The historic distinctive of the ARP Church was Psalm singing. In the morning worship of my youth and college years, we sang out of the Psalter, which, in my opinion, comprised some of the most unmelodic tunes in the history of church music! During the Sunday evening worship, we sang the Psalms out of the "Bible Songs," which featured a few melodious tunes.

Obviously, I have strayed from these historical musical roots. Yet, my hope is that more traditional hymn and contemporary Christian songwriters would use the Psalms for their texts. The book of Psalms is so filled with poetic passion and is wonderful for singing in personal and public worship.

More than any other book in the Bible, the Psalms give us an anatomy of the human soul. How do we spiritually respond to painful realities and process accompanying feelings of grief, anger, sorrow, and doubt? The Psalms give us words to express when sorrow and pain leave us speechless. God's Word teaches us how to journey through debilitating human emotions with His hope.

How do we deal with emotional pain? Some of us are taught and learn to suppress, deny, and cover up our feelings. We have been taught to "be tough, don't cry, or wear your emotions on your sleeve." Essentially, live a life of pretense and superficiality and call it courage. In some Christian circles, expressing feelings of sorrow, doubt, and uncertainty reveal spiritual weakness and a lack of faith. This approach is unbiblical and really unhealthy.

Today, the current word on emotions is to embrace your feelings. How you feel, more than any other index in your life is who you are. "This is how I feel, and there's nothing I can do about it." A husband leaves his wife. "I feel unhappy in

our marriage. I want to be happy. I must follow my feelings.” This approach is unbiblical, unhealthy, and personally and socially harmful.

God, in the Psalms and particularly in the brokenness and frailty of the Psalmist, teaches us to express and pray our emotional pain in God’s presence and seek Him and His soul healing.