

Understanding Emotions Part 3
~ Hope; Joy and the need for Self-Control

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In the Christian life, we talk a lot about our need to know God. It is vitally important. If you're going to be in a relationship with anyone, you need to get to know them. If we're going to relate to and walk with God, we need to continually grow in knowing Him. But sometimes, our need to grow might overwhelm us. As we've talked about understanding our hearts since Christmas, we have discovered there is so much to learn about ourselves from God's perspective.

So I want to begin today with some assurance from another direction. It comes from theologian J.I. Packer who wrote a little book called *Knowing God* way back in 1973. But even though the book is about *Knowing God*, Packer himself identifies something that's more important than knowing God.

"What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that he knows me. We are inscribed on the palms of his hands according to Isaiah 49:16. We are never out of his mind. All our knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing us. We know Him because He first knew us and continues to know us.

He knows you and me as a friend, one who loves us; and there is no moment when his eye is off us, or his attention distracted from us, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.

This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort—the sort of comfort that energizes — in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of you and me in love and watching over us for our good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to us is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about us, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about us, in the way we are so often disillusioned about ourselves. No discovery about us can quench his determination to bless us."¹

So with this reality in mind - that God knows us - we can turn back to our need to understand our heart and emotions from His perspective. We can look at this not as a test that we hope to pass so that God will accept us; but as a gift from the one who already knows the best and worst about us yet continues to flood us with His love.

¹ *Knowing God* (20th anniversary ed., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 41–42,

God reveals His perspective and wisdom to us in the book of Proverbs. We have seen Proverbs help us understand our hearts, desires and temptation. Today, we're completing a mini 3 part series on understanding our emotions. Next week we will begin our journey through the so called 7 deadly sins and look at the possibility of transformation away from each of them.

Today we're looking at hope and joy both as emotions and indicators of the state of our heart. Then we will use the second half of the message to think about the need for self-control regarding our emotions. My hope is that you will be encouraged and see ways to grow in hope, joy and self-control because of the strength of the Lord. So let's start today in Proverbs 13. I will give you a moment to find that in your Bibles. If you don't have one, please use the one in front of you or underneath your seat. You will find Proverbs 13 on page 465.

Proverbs 13:12 states **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."** To hope is to expect, believe or feel that some desire will be fulfilled. Or it may be something we long for and trust will bring us joy when it happens. We hope we can go on that trip we're thinking about in the summer to give us rest. We hope to get into that school so we can continue to progress in our area of passion. We hope the person we like will like us back so we can get into a relationship. Or we hope things will come together so we can get married, or buy a house or retire or succeed. We hope our kids will find their way through the challenges of teenage and young adult years to maturity both spiritually and emotionally.

Sometimes, our hopes go unfulfilled. This can lead to the heart sickness identified in the first part of this proverb. Our hopes get deferred or delayed or denied. That person we liked does not like us back. The trip this summer won't work out. We didn't get into the school we wanted. We weren't able to buy a house or proceed with retirement. Our kids stumble in their journey towards maturity. Our plans for success failed.

Sometimes they actually come true. A hope becomes reality. We did get into the school; the other person likes us; we get to go on the trip or start retirement or experience success. Our kids take another step towards maturity. It's like a breath of fresh air or a connection to a tree of life. It's like we experience ongoing joy and satisfaction because something we hoped for actually happened.

Some of you know that I cheer for the Calgary Flames. I remember back in the 1980's hoping that the Flames would one day win the Stanley Cup – the championship trophy for hockey. Through those years, the Edmonton Oilers had a

powerhouse team. They won 4 Stanley Cups in the 80's. So if you were alive back then and an Oiler's fan you had your hopes fulfilled. Each year I hoped Calgary would win. But every year my hope was not fulfilled until 1989 when they the Flames won their only Stanley Cup. I remember how unreal it felt to actually have that hope realized. But ever since then, my hope has been disappointed or deferred. Now it's one thing to be disappointed over a sport's team's lack of success. That's pretty minor compared to relationships, marriage, schooling, work, kids and retirement and a maturing spiritual walk in others.

So how do we deal with disappointed hopes? It is wisdom to recognize that the reality of deferred hopes is one that can never be fully remedied in this life. Tim Keller puts it like this. "When our longings are fulfilled, life flourishes briefly as if back in paradise where we have access to the tree of life. But we will only know full satisfaction in the new heavens and new earth. Revelation 22:2 talks about the tree of life spread throughout the New Jerusalem bearing 12 kinds of fruit. There will be abundant satisfaction and fulfillment of hope in the next life with Christ. But we obtain that tree of life not by our efforts but by Christ's. Keller writes, "The cross became a tree of death for him so that we could have the tree of life by faith."

So this gives us a clue how to address disappointed hopes. **Address the heartsickness that comes with deferred hope(s) by redirecting hope towards Christ and all we have in Him.** The hope of future life with Christ in eternity can help us face disappointed hopes today. Yes, we experience deferred, delayed or denied hope today. But from a spiritual perspective, we're still living the wilderness. We have not yet reached the Promised Land. But we do have a guaranteed inheritance with an amazing life coming in the presence of Christ. So that future hope can keep us going today.

But what if that doesn't make a difference? Then we need to examine the deepest hopes in our heart. If Christ is not our most cherished hope, we will experience continual disappointment. But when we cherish Christ above all, we can look forward to life with Him forever, while enjoying His presence with us today. So if you're disappointed today because some hope has not been fulfilled in your life, bring that Christ. Share it with Him. But maybe you need to redirect your deepest hope to Him. Then you can walk today with His companionship while looking forward to an eternity of fulfilled hope amidst abundant trees of life.

Next let's turn to Proverbs 15:30. This one raises the emotion of joy. **Proverbs 15:30 – Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart; and good news gives health to the bones.** Everyone wants to be joyful. But how do we get it?

What do we need to experience it? Most of us put our joy in the hands of life going well. So if something works out, we're happy. If it's a nice day out, we rejoice. If others treat us well, we're joyful. If we have no problems, life is great. It's not wrong to celebrate and be joyful when we experience external blessings.

But so much of the time, life is not like that. We live in northern Alberta. There's not going to be a lot of nice days in January and February. So if our joy depends on a nice weather day, we're not going to be very joyful these months. Sometimes things don't go well or people treat us poorly. So is joy only possible when life goes well?

Not according to this Proverb. You can **Receive joy in your heart by receiving people with light in their eyes.** "Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart." So what's this talking about? Well it's not science fiction thing where literal light comes out of people's eyes. We speak of eyes shining, gleaming or brightening. We don't mean light comes through them. We can see how a person is really doing by looking at their eyes. Someone said the eyes are a window to the soul. So if someone's eyes shine, it reveals some sort of wellness in their soul. When someone with shining eyes comes to us it can bring joy to us. If they bring encouraging news, that can bring joy to our hearts. So we learn relationships are important to a life of joy.

But there's something deeper here when we take into account the whole Bible. The Apostle Paul tells us that we can have a joy not based on circumstances. Listen to Philippians 4:4 and then 10-13. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (NIV) Which sounds like it is possible to experience a joy independent of adversity.

So this kind of joy requires thoughtful meditation on what God has done for us and will do for us. This joy comes through the ultimate message – the gospel – which literally means "the news that brings joy." If we believe in Jesus, we have received the ultimate messenger with light in their eyes. We have seen his great light and his light will reflect out of our eyes. So we can receive joy when we receive others with His light in their eyes. But we can experience that ultimate joy when we think about and ponder all that we have in Christ.

So there's a couple ways to receive joy apart from circumstances. Receive people with light in their eyes. Receive the Gospel which is the news that brings great joy.

So now we've looked at emotions in general – 3 weeks ago - from the book of Proverbs. And we've look at some specific emotions – 2 weeks ago - like anxiety, loneliness, guilt. And today, hope and joy. Let's now talk about self-control with respect to our emotions.

What is Self-Control? Obviously – controlling the self. But how can we control our selves? How can our self, control our self? Which part of self, controls the out of control part of self? We probably mean something like our rational self needs to exercise control over our emotional self. Or our mind may need to control our passions. But what if we adopted a different definition arrived at after long study of the Proverbs. What if self-control is **the critical ability to recognize and choose the most important over the urgent, over what we feel like doing?** If that's self-control, then that would play out something like this. Say you're out at a mall and you see a sale on a TV that you've always wanted. It's on sale for 300\$. You have 350\$ in your account for spending. But you need 250\$ for your family groceries. You have this emotional feeling that urgently wants to buy that TV for 300\$. But if you buy it, your family will have way less groceries than what's needed. So it's more important to use the money for the groceries than for the TV. If you choose groceries, you've exercised self-control. You chose the important over the urgent emotional outburst. So let's think about self-control in the realm of choice.

What do the Proverbs have to say about self-control? **Proverbs 16:32 – Better a patient person than a warrior; one with self-control than one who takes a city.** Notice the word “better?” It actually extends into the second part of the verse. “Better a patient person than a warrior; better one with self-control than one who takes a city.” So this Proverb claims **Self-control is better.** But better than what? Say you were asked, “Who is more important; a warrior or a patient person?” How would you answer? Or consider the second part of the verse. Who is more important – a person with self-control or a person who takes or conquers a city? Well if we think in terms of importance, we might choose the warrior who takes the city. But if we think about the harder path, this Proverb claims it's harder to be patient or self-controlled than it is to be a warrior or conquer a city. So it's harder to master yourself than it is to master others in a battle or even conquer a city.

If you don't believe that, think about people throughout history who conquered cities or great challenges but could not conquer themselves. They could not control their tempers or tongues or their emotions. US General George Patton won great victories for the Americans in World War 2. But he couldn't control his temper or words. So he alienated people and lost his command. Many music or movie stars have the world at their feet in adoration. Yet their lives are cut short by overdoses, reckless choices or despair.

Self-control is better. It is good. Yet we now live in a world that tells us "self-control is bad or unhealthy. You need to follow your heart! Following one's passion, feeling your anger and be spontaneous all the time." Yet again so many famous celebrities who have done this shipwreck their lives. Yes emotions are good and by God's design. But they need some governance by God's Word and not just our own thoughts. So first we need to recognize that self-control is good. According to Proverbs it is better.

But we might think, "Well, I live a mostly self-controlled life." So I don't need to get too concerned about it. Well consider **Proverbs 25:28 - Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.** Citizens of ancient cities depended on the city wall to protect them from robbers or invaders. So if it broke down, the city would likely fall. A person who lacks self-control faces similar danger. Keller writes "If you can't control your tongue or temper, you will say things that can't be unsaid or taken back. If you can't control your sexual desires, you will ruin relationships. If you are impulsive and unwise, not thinking things through, you will make rash decisions. If you can't say no to people, you will overpromise. Then you will either be exhausted and over extended or have a life filled with disappointed people and broken relationships.

Now we might think this Proverb describes the person who lacks self-control in many areas of life. After all, it says "the walls are broken down" implying multiple breaches. So we might comfort ourselves by saying "most of our life is under control. There's just that one area that we struggle in." But a city invader did not have to knock every piece of a wall before they conquered the city. The wall needed to be broken in just one point to let the enemy in. So **Lack of self-control in one area is a life-threatening problem.** So we need to think about where we're most vulnerable. In what area of our lives do we lack self-control?

So how do we gain such self-control? **Proverbs 18:10-11 - The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it a wall too high to scale.** In ancient

cities, the wall provided a measure of safety in attack. But even safer was the fortified tower. These two proverbs reveal that everyone has a place of ultimate security. We say to ourselves, “if I have that, I’ll be safe.” Notice the wealthy trust their wealth to be that fortification. But notice what it says about wealth’s ability to protect in verse 11. “The wealth of the rich is their fortified city. They imagine it a wall too high to scale.” They think wealth insulates them from life’s assaults. It does provide some insulation. But it cannot insulate from death. But every wealthy person dies. Wealth cannot prevent some tragedies or illnesses. Wealth is vulnerable to loss.

How different for the righteous person. The name of the Lord is a fortified tower. The righteous run to it and they don’t imagine that they’re safe. They are safe. What does it mean to run to the name of the Lord as a strong tower? It means to rehearse and remember God’s names. Each one describes some attribute of Him that gives us hope or protection. Then instead of panicking when tough times come or losing control of ourselves, we can rest in the fortification of Gods’ name and presence. **Trust God’s Name and Strength to gain self-control over your emotions.**

This Proverb asks us to think about where we run for safety or fortification. Who or what do you trust as your ultimate tower or strength? Where do you turn when you feel threatened or insecure? Your phone, a game, a drink, porn, a drug, escape?

The wealthy trust their money/riches/possessions. So if their wealth is threatened by a market turn down, loss of job, personal or corporate bankruptcy, then they can panic. Some trust power. That could be power at work; school; social group; family; class. As long as they have power, they feel safe. But when that power is threatened, they fear or begin to threaten or come on strong to exercise power. Some trust their Beauty or Status for security. So if they feel insecure or threatened, they might run to social media to post something and get likes or go to a social setting where they might get affirmation for their beauty. Others trust their brains for security. If they get the right education or gain the right knowledge or they get the right grades, then they’ll be safe.

But to honor, trust in and please God is the greatest security. Instead of trusting in wealth for security; trust in the name of the Lord. That releases us to give away more of our wealth to the Lord’s work.

It also enables us to persevere in times of financial hardship – because the Lord has promised to provide us with food and clothing. Trusting the Lord’s name instead of wealth also frees us to speak up about unethical practices at work even if it costs us our job because the Lord is a strong tower who will provide for us.

Instead of trusting power for security, we can trust in the Lord's name. That frees us from being fake. We can be who we are without playing power games. This frees us from trying to dominate other people to get our way. It also frees us from the fear of others with power. Even if they play power games with us, we can stand with Christ at our side.

Instead of trusting our beauty or status, we trust in the name of the Lord. This frees us from the relentless pressure to maintain beauty or fight for status. We can be freed from making our happiness and joy dependent upon the fickle opinions of people online or at some social event. We can be free to be us; to discover satisfaction with the ordinary; to respect people for who they are not measure them for their status or beauty.

Instead of trusting my intelligence or education, we can trust the Lord to take us where He wants us to be. We can be content with not having the most prestigious position or placement and instead rest in where the Lord has us.

Run to the name of the Lord as your strong tower and it is much more likely that you will receive power to choose the important over the urgent thus exercising self-control. This is key for our entire emotional life. Run to Him as your strong tower – then with His wisdom and strength, discover the important over the urgent.

Now I know there's a lot here and we've barely scratched the surface of Proverbs. But let's enjoy that in just a few Proverbs, we can already see the deep wisdom of the Lord. There is so much more of Him to be discovered through His Word. Yet more important is that He knows us. He knows what we need to learn and where we need to grow one day at time. If we keep Him at the center of our lives He will lead and shepherd us to a deeper knowledge and relationship with Him.

So will you come along with me now as we speak with God and express our heart's to Him?

"Lord, the more you are on the periphery of my thoughts and feelings, the less self-control I have. The more you are in the center, vividly before the eyes of my heart and attention, the more I can control myself. Lord, grab and hold my attention, moment by moment, so I can live as I should."