

## #262 “The Feelings of God”

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Sometimes our minds can gloss over the eternally wonderful truths that God loves His children and that He is the God of all comfort. Perhaps some of us were raised in churches in which God was taught to be an authoritarian, distant, emotionless, stoic, and unapproachable figure. Maybe some of this thinking is rooted in passages such as 1 Timothy 6:16 which says, speaking of the Father, “Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.” It is true that God is spirit (John 4:24) and thus invisible. He is unapproachable by any weak, fallen, and imperfect being, but Christ has torn down the veil and enabled believers by way of His intercession (Hebrews 7:25) to be able to boldly and confidently approach the throne of grace where God the Father dwells (Hebrews 4:16). We can enter His presence with thanksgiving in our hearts and His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4) because Jesus has opened the door to intimacy with God. He, our great High Priest, has made it so that we can enter the Holy of Holies by taking our requests directly to God Himself. When He glorifies us and gives us new bodies free from sin and corruption (1 Corinthians 15:53-54, Ephesians 6:24), we will live in the light of the Lord God every day in heaven and be illumined by it (Revelation 22:5), we will see the face of God in Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:4), and we will worship and serve God and the Lamb (Revelation 22:3) as we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). It is important to understand God’s holiness, for it reveals man’s sinfulness to him. But it is also important to recognize that in Christ we are made new and holy, and He makes a connection, a friendship, and a relationship with the Father possible. Unapproachability becomes nearness (Psalm 73:28) in and through Jesus Christ.

We must recognize that Jesus Christ has revealed the Father to us. Jesus says in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” Thus, our view and understanding of God the Father must be shaped and guided by Jesus. In John 11, Lazarus, a man whom Jesus loved, died. Mary, Lazarus’ sister and the one who had previously anointed His feet with ointment, came to Jesus, fell at his feet, and said in verse 32, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” This is where it gets really emotionally insightful. Verse 33 says, “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.” He then asked in verse 34 where Lazarus was put to rest, and they beckoned Him to come and see. Then, in verse 35, two powerful words are recorded, “Jesus wept.” Those are loaded words for us when we seek to understand the nature and character of God. Jesus, and thus the Father also, given that they are one, feel sadness and grief when we who are loved by God feel sorrow and grief. This is part of what it means that we have a Savior Who can sympathize (Hebrews 4:15), and it helps us to understand just how God is able to comfort us (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). **After all, it is not necessarily comforting just to know that God sits up in heaven on a throne in paradise listening to us pray when we hurt. But to know that He weeps when we weep, mourning with those whom He loves when they mourn, is a significantly different and more potent picture of the reality and relevancy of His love.** In verse 38, we see again that Jesus was “deeply moved within.” For some reason, perhaps from what we have been taught about God in the past, perhaps from being raised by earthly fathers

who struggled to be emotive, or maybe simply because of our lack of trust, we struggle to see God as being emotionally expressive. Being emotional is not inherently a bad thing; if it was, God would be sinning by being deeply moved. Letting our emotions overtake our understanding of truth is wrong, but feeling, being passionate, rejoicing with the truth and with others who are rejoicing is part of how God made the human spirit (Romans 12:15).

In addition to feeling sorrow and grief, Jesus also felt compassion. In Matthew 9:36, we read, speaking of Jesus, “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” He doesn’t sit up in heaven as an emotionless Judge Who eagerly and joyfully condemns people to hell. No, He was willing even to give up His own Son to reach out to people in love. But God also feels anger as He according to His justice must store up wrath for those who reject His Son and His ultimate demonstration of love (Romans 12:19). The Lord saved Noah and his family, but He was grieved over the rest of humanity because of the hardness of their hearts. Genesis 6:6 says, “The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.” Even believers can grieve the Holy Spirit by sinning against God and refusing to trust and obey. Ephesians 4:30 says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” **So clearly God can feel grief and sadness. That is not a heretical thing to say as if feeling sadness or grief is unbecoming of His deity. It is not a sign of weakness but of completeness. It is the necessary overflow of His heart of compassion.**

Perhaps thinking of this in reverse is even more helpful. Not only can God feel grief, but He can also feel happiness. Psalm 22:8 says, “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, *because He delights in him*” (emphasis mine). Do we know that if we are children of God and are walking in His ways that God delights in us? It might be easy to think that God is happy about our obedient acts, which He is (Psalm 37:23), but it is even more true that He is happy with us just on account of that fact that we are His. Just as loving parents delight in their children just because they are their children, so God delights in His spiritual offspring. Psalm 35:27 says, “Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant.’” God is happy to see us prosper spiritually as we grow in sanctification, and He is happy to see us enjoy the good gifts that He gives us in life as we thank Him and worship Him. The fact that God can feel happiness also implies that He can feel the opposite.

God weeps with us and even suffers with us (Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24), but He also delights in us. **In fact, it is His joyful exhilaration with us that moves Him to tears when we hurt.** It is His delight in us that moves Him to train us in righteousness (Proverbs 3:12). Because of His favor toward us, He encourages us to do good so that we can be spiritually prosperous. **For some reason, knowing that God delights in us actually goes a long way to helping us understand the fundamental truth that He loves us.** God is not content to simply take our lives in from a bird’s eye view, so to speak, merely conducting occasional fly-overs to see if we are staying in line. Of course He is always on the throne, and certainly He always sees all. **But He is actually involved, available, emotionally attached and invested, and intimately acquainted with all our ways (Psalm 139:3), not simply because He is all-knowing but because He is present and plugged-in to our hearts.**

This all makes sense when we remember that our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 says, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” *Given this spiritual connectedness, how could He not feel what we feel, and how could we not be impacted by what He desires for us and by how much He delights in us?*