

# the emotions of god

*Making Sense of a God Who  
Hates, Weeps, and Loves*

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# I

## emotions are divine

*The works of the flesh are . . . enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger  
. . . but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.*

GALATIANS 5:19-20, 22 ESV

WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME YOU REMEMBER CRYING?

For me, I was nine.

I was watching *Brian's Song*. The made-for-TV movie (1971) was based on the true story of two Chicago Bears running backs, Brian Piccolo (James Caan) and Gale Sayers (Billy Dee Williams).<sup>1</sup> Despite obstacles of race and a running back rivalry, their friendship blossomed as they became not just teammates, but the first interracial roommates in the history of the NFL. Piccolo helped Sayers recover from a knee injury, but after Sayers' recovery Piccolo began to struggle physically. Eventually Piccolo was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

After Sayers is given "The Most Courageous Player" award, he declares, "I love Brian Piccolo, and I'd like all of you to love him too. And tonight, when you hit your knees, please ask God to love him." Piccolo died shortly afterward at age twenty-six. I wept at the tragedy of a life cut short by cancer.

Since ABC rebroadcast the movie every year, I annually repeated this ritual of tears. But I was always embarrassed about

getting emotional, so I would turn away from any family members watching with me. If there was a blanket or pillow handy, they were used as barricades to prevent my tears from being seen by my two brothers. Unfortunately, uncontrollable sobbing makes covert weeping difficult.

Why did I attempt to hide my tears? I'm not sure, but I know I didn't like the feelings associated with tears—weakness and vulnerability. I don't remember my father expressing much emotion, and I hadn't seen many examples of men crying. Things have changed a little in the past five decades in terms of public expressions of emotions, but in many contexts, emotions are viewed negatively, and this perspective impacts how we view our emotional God.

#### “LOUD CRYING HE MAKES”

“Away in a Manger” is one of the most popular Christmas carols. I may not need to remind you of the words, but I will anyway, just for the second verse.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
 But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
 I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,  
 And stay by my cradle til morning is nigh.

Why doesn't baby Jesus cry? The cattle are lowing (mooing), so bovine bellowing seems to have woken him. What do babies do when they are woken up on the middle of the night? They cry . . . unless, apparently, they are divine. While I don't remember it, I'm pretty sure I cried as a baby long before watching *Brian's Song*.

While the biblical text is silent on any possible nocturnal noises that may have been uttered by the little Lord Jesus, the carol's lyricist silences him, depriving him of any emotional outburst.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to determine the reason an infant cries. Hunger may be a factor, but emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness are often a primary

cause—a child often calms down when comforted, even before being fed. If the Gospel writers provide us no hints about the behavior of baby Jesus, why do we sing that he didn't cry? I think it goes back to our view of God. We aren't comfortable with an emotional God. It's unsettling.

If people didn't find the portrayal of the stoic swaddled Savior compelling, this carol wouldn't be so popular. Emotions were deemed beneath baby Jesus, not just by the carol's lyricist, but by the millions of Christians who love and sing this song every Christmas.

While I believe that, like all human infants throughout history, baby Jesus cried, I don't want to ruin this song for people. My goal isn't to stop carolers from singing it, but merely to question what it implies about emotions and appropriate divine behavior. As we'll see throughout this book, the God of the Bible often expressed emotions. Big Lord Jesus cried on at least two occasions (Lk 19:41; Jn 11:35), and, according to Hebrews, he was even known for weeping (Heb 5:7). As a man who cries regularly (twice publicly in the past two weeks—in the Covid spring of 2020), I find great comfort in the image of a Savior who weeps, as an infant or as an adult. We are called, after all, to follow Jesus (Mk 1:17; 2:14; 8:34). Sometimes this will involve weeping.

Our God is an awesome God, and part of his awesomeness is his emotional-ness. Emotions are divine. Just as we have needed to update the archaic language of many classic hymns, this carol is due for a slight revision.

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
So little Lord Jesus, loud crying he makes.*

That's better. He's little but makes a loud noise—lungs worthy of a future preacher.

The negative perspective on divine emotion of this carol is tragically not unique. If it were, we could dismiss it as an anomaly. But

many Christians, including biblical scholars, theologians, and pastors, ignore the many passages in Scripture where God is described as displaying certain emotions. Emotions are divine, but we have an irrational fear of an emotional God.

### **WHY DON'T WE WANT TO ASSOCIATE EMOTIONS WITH GOD?**

When it comes to God and emotions, we have two problems. First, certain emotions are commonly viewed negatively, such as hate, anger, and jealousy, which are particularly problematic to associate with God—and yet the Bible frequently does just that. These negative emotions don't fit with how we think God should act. There is a tension between the textual portrayal of God and what we “know” to be true of God. How are we to understand a God who hates, gets angry, and is jealous?

Second, emotions are often perceived to be irrational, uncontrollable, and confusing. We don't want to associate them with God (“no crying he makes”). We feel more comfortable with a God who is rational, predicable, and comprehensible, so biblical texts that describe God with human emotions are often discounted. We do this to protect God's honor, but since the God we find in the Bible is in fact highly emotional, our de-emphasizing his divine emotions doesn't honor him—it distorts his character. As we will see from the psalms and elsewhere, the emotional side of God is not to be hidden but praised.

Let's examine some of the ways emotions are viewed negatively. While there are negative emotions (e.g., hate, anger, jealousy), many emotions are generally perceived positively (e.g., love, compassion, joy). Despite the perception of these positive emotions, there is still a negative bias against emotional behavior in general. There are at least three factors that contribute to this negative perspective on emotions.

***Emotions seem irrational.*** Emotions cloud our ability to think reasonably, and in our enlightened world where rationality is king, anything that inhibits reason is bad. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gives voice to this perspective from the mouth of his famous detective, as Sherlock Holmes says to John Watson, “The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning.”<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, Holmes’s brain was never encumbered by emotions.

Because we think of God as purely rational, and not controlled by emotions, when his emotions affect him, it doesn’t make sense. When God saw the wickedness of the humans he had created, before he told Noah to build an ark, the text says God regretted making the humans (Gen 6:6). Why would an omniscient God regret creating humankind when he knew what they were like and what they would do? It seems irrational. Apparently, God needs to learn to control his emotions, which leads to the next problem.

***Emotions seem uncontrollable.*** Emotions can be so difficult to control, so unpredictable; they become dangerous. Emotions can prompt us to do stupid things we later regret. In the film *Captain Marvel* (2019), Yon-Rogg (Jude Law) repeatedly warns Vers (Captain Marvel, played by Brie Larson) about how she needs to control her emotions, “There’s nothing more dangerous to a warrior than emotion.”

When we read the story of Uzzah and the ark (2 Sam 6:1-11), we wonder why God chose to smite poor Uzzah in anger when he was trying only to help by preventing the ark from tipping over. On an initial reading of this story, it seems like God can’t control his anger.<sup>4</sup> For people who grew up with angry, abusive parents, the biblical portrayal of an angry God could trigger traumatic memories. They experienced plenty of uncontrollable emotions when they were young. They want nothing to do with an unpredictable God of wrath.

***Emotions seem confusing.*** We don’t understand emotions. Some of us don’t even know what emotion we are feeling. We’re just upset. Why do these types of situations make me feel so uncomfortable?

When I was fourteen, I vividly remember the first of several times that I was dumped by a girlfriend. (One reason I remember it so clearly is that deep emotions make deep impressions on our memories.) I went out to the woods to be by myself. I sat down on a tree stump and cried. I was hurt, but what made it even more difficult was that I didn't know what to do, what to say, or who to talk to. What was I feeling? I just felt bad. I'd never felt like that before. I told no one because I was confused.

Emotions are confusing, particularly when it comes to God. Why does a God of love hate people (Mal 2:3)? Why does God say he is jealous (Ex 34:14)—isn't he fully content just being God? What does it mean for God that he delights or rejoices over his people (Is 62:4)? We want God to be predictable, but the God of the Bible is mysterious, sometimes confusing, and often emotional.

*Is God impassible?* Because emotions are generally perceived to be irrational, uncontrollable, and confusing—we don't want to associate them with God. The theological rationale for denying God is emotional is based on the idea of divine impassibility, the view that God is unaffected emotionally by human behavior. Instead of speaking of emotions, scholars sometimes speak of God's passions. Even though the issue of divine impassibility is relevant to this discussion of God's emotions, I will not discuss it in depth. Discussions of the topic quickly become highly theological, philosophical, and abstract, which may be fascinating to theologians and Bible scholars, but not so much to folks who don't read Hebrew, Greek, or Latin.<sup>5</sup> While many people I respect affirm it, divine impassibility is not a doctrine I subscribe to because of the overwhelming amount of biblical evidence—as we will see in this book—which describes the God of both testaments as affected emotionally by the behavior of humans.<sup>6</sup>

*“Feelings are your enemy.”* We find a negative perspective on emotions in many other contexts. Old Testament professor Jack Deere writes about his experience in theological education, “In one of my



first classes, a professor said to us, 'Liberals feel; we think.' The students roared. The message was clear, *Feelings are your enemy. They cloud your mind and endanger your faith.* I embraced that message.<sup>7</sup> Deere's story feels hyperbolic, but after living in the world of theological higher education for twenty-five years, I can relate. While it is perhaps less so now than in the past, traditionally, emotions have been viewed as an enemy.

When theological professors perceive emotions negatively, they won't connect them with God. Biblical texts that portray God emotionally will be ignored, de-emphasized, or discounted. Professors won't teach about divine emotions to seminary students. This legacy of not teaching texts that don't fit a certain theology will then be passed on to the next generations of professors, pastors, and Sunday school teachers. As a result, the folks in the pew rarely hear about the anger, the sorrow, or the joy of God.

### **A STORY, OR A DRAMA, BUT NOT A SONG**

A subtle way emotions are de-emphasized in the teaching of the church is by highlighting prose narratives and ignoring poetry. Typically, the psalms and prophetic poetry of the Old Testament have higher concentrations of emotive language than prose narratives. When the Bible is summarized in books or churches, the narratives are emphasized, and the poetry is often ignored. The Bible is summarized as a story, or a drama, but not a song.<sup>8</sup> The makers of *Brian's Song* realized there is emotive power in characterizing Piccolo's life as a song.

When children are taught in Sunday school they learn about the heroes of the Old Testament: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Ruth, David, and Esther. But children rarely learn about heroic prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Habakkuk, and Haggai, who speak for God in poetry. Over the course of almost six decades of listening to sermons, I've heard far more coming out of narrative

texts than poetic or prophetic texts. I've certainly preached more sermons from narrative than poetry.

In this book, we'll be discussing texts throughout the Bible, but much of the time we'll be looking at poetic books to understand how and why God expresses emotions. For example, God's emotions come to the fore clearly in the book of Hosea. Here is what I say elsewhere about Hosea, "The emotive poetry depicting God's heartbreak over the trauma of his broken relationship with his people is unmatched anywhere else in Scripture."<sup>9</sup> Castelo lists God's emotional expressions in Hosea, "God's indecisiveness (Hos 6:4; 11:8), anger (Hos 8:5; 13:11; 14:4 [14:5]), hatred (Hos 9:15), love (Hos 11:1; 14:4 [14:5]), compassion (Hos 11:8), and wrath (Hos 13:11)."<sup>10</sup> Brueggemann states, "The plenitude of images (in Hosea) is daring, offensive and evocative. . . . Hosea dares to take us inside that complex interior life of Yahweh and thus to be exposed to a range of divine impulses not elsewhere available in Israel's ancient text."<sup>11</sup> I confess I have spent little time reading, studying, or teaching the emotionally rich book of Hosea. I suspect that I'm not unique in this regard.

Poetry is where divine emotions are expressed most vividly and dramatically. By ignoring poetic texts, pastors, teachers, and seminary professors are, to use the language of Paul (2 Tim 3:16), depriving their audiences of learning—of profiting—from all inspired Scripture about the emotions of God and God's people.

## **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT AND WORKS OF THE FLESH**

A variety of emotions appear in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh (Gal 5:16-26). Paul lists nine fruit of the Spirit and fifteen works of the flesh, many of which would be described as behaviors not emotions (e.g., drunkenness, self-control). Here I'll only mention the ones that are more emotional in nature.

Positive emotions are fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and are often associated with God, for example: “joy” (*chara*), “kindness” (*chrēstotēs*), and “love” (*agapē*). Ideally, followers of Jesus will be guided by the Spirit into manifesting these fruits in our lives.

Paul contrasts these spiritual fruits, with fleshly works. Several emotions commonly perceived negatively are works not of the Spirit but of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). Despite their fleshly nature, three of these works of the flesh are surprisingly associated with God: “hatred” (*echthra*), “anger” (*thymos*), and “jealousy” (*zēlos*). Paul warns us against these works—but what about when God hates, is angry, or is jealous? What are we to do with that?

To summarize, when it comes to God and emotions, we have two problems. First, because emotions seem irrational, uncontrollable, and confusing, we don’t want to associate them with God. Second, negatively perceived emotions like hate, anger, and jealousy are works of the flesh, but the Bible connects them to God. So far, we’ve looked at the downside of emotions and an emotional God. The rest of this chapter will focus more on the upside of emotions, and why it is good that our God is an emotional God, but first we need to define emotions.

## WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

What are emotions? While we all have them, and we generally know what they are, emotions are still difficult to define.<sup>12</sup> In the appendix to his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, titled, “What Is Emotion?” Daniel Coleman observes that psychologists and philosophers have “quibbled” over the meaning of emotions for “more than a century.”<sup>13</sup>

Emotions are feelings, particularly strong ones, that are prompted by circumstances, moods, and relationships.<sup>14</sup> They’re distinct from reasoning and knowledge. While theologians use the word *passion* for emotion, outside theological circles, passion often connotes strong, or barely controllable emotions. These definitions provide a

good starting point, but as is often the case, it's a bit more complicated, particularly as we observe how emotions are expressed in Scripture.

*Emotions involve actions.* Neuroscientists, psychologists, and philosophers define emotions differently because of the distinct nature of their disciplines. Likewise, we will reflect here on how emotion is understood biblically. For example, in the Bible, emotions are often inextricably tied to actions and behaviors. They aren't pure feelings in one's head or heart. We see several examples of this linkage in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus equates being angry with a brother to insulting a brother, and these behaviors are comparable to murder in that they are both liable to similar punishments (Mt 5:21-22). For Jesus, there isn't a clear distinction between feeling angry and acting on that feeling to harm others. A few verses later (Mt 5:43-47), Jesus takes a familiar saying, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy," and gives it a shocking twist. Jesus tells them to love their enemies, which doesn't just involve warm feelings, but concrete actions like praying for enemies and greeting strangers. A few verses after that (Mt 6:24), Jesus speaks of hate and love in the context of service to a master. If one has two masters, only one will be served and loved, the other will be despised and hated. Once again, the emotions of love and hate manifest themselves in tangible behaviors, in this case intense loyalty and disloyalty.

Jesus concludes the Beatitudes with a command to rejoice and be glad (Mt 5:12). Throughout the Gospels, feelings of joy are connected to rejoicing and praising (Lk 6:23; 10:20; 15:6, 9; Jn 3:29; 16:22). In his *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis explains this linkage, "We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment . . . the delight is incomplete till it is expressed."<sup>15</sup> Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, churches were prohibited from meeting, which meant believers were unable to gather to sing and praise. It was painful to lay down our

delight in corporate worship of God, but we did it to love our neighbors and keep them safe.

We don't need to move outside the Gospels, to find other examples of emotions connected with actions. When Jesus saw a leper, he didn't just feel compassion, but it moved him to heal the man (Mk 1:41). When Jesus saw Mary weeping over her brother Lazarus's death, his compassion and grief prompted him to weep, which in turn led those watching to comment, "See how he loved him!" (Jn 11:32-36). In Scripture, emotions are felt, acted on, and witnessed.

***Emotions can be rational.*** At this point, let's revisit and revise the three negative statements that were made earlier about emotions. First, emotions can be rational. In *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Coleman cites research from neurologist Antonio Damasio who concludes, counterintuitively "that feelings are typically indispensable for rational decisions; they point us in the proper direction, where dry logic can then be of best use."<sup>16</sup> It is rational to feel fear when facing a severe threat like a wild animal. While camping on our honeymoon at Tuolumne Meadows at Yosemite Park, there was a bear rummaging around outside our tent. It would have been irrational to not feel fear in that context. Screaming in panic would have been irrational and counterproductive, but alertness and caution prompted by fear could have saved our lives. (However, while scuba diving in Florida, I once spotted a shark, but I wasn't afraid—all my diving buddies were between me and the shark. They would have made a tastier snack than me.) It is totally rational to feel love for my spouse of thirty years, and I certainly hope it isn't irrational for her to love me too. It makes sense to love spouses. I dare you to tell a friend, "It's irrational for your wife to love you." Let me know what he says. Emotions aren't purely rational, but neither are they purely irrational.

***Emotions can be controlled.*** Second, emotions can be controlled. It isn't always easy, but it's not impossible. God commands his people

to love him (Deut 6:5; 11:1; Josh 22:5), to fear him (Lev 19:14, 32; 25:17), to delight in him (Is 58:14), to rejoice in him (Ps 97:12; Is 41:16; Joel 2:23). If emotions can be commanded, they can be controlled. We are commanded to “be angry, and do not sin” (Ps 4:4; Eph 4:26). Not only is God described as being slow to anger (Ex 34:6; Jon 4:2), but God’s Word encourages his people to be slow to anger (Prov 14:29; Jas 1:19). Even anger can be controlled. The fact that emotions are commanded and controlled suggests conscious reasoning affects our manifestations of them. I have a health app on my phone, which gives a small challenge each day to earn points. As I wrote this, the challenge for today was “Pause . . . when difficulties arise, it’s easy to let emotions control your actions. But if you pause to check in with yourself first, you’re more likely to respond thoughtfully rather than react emotionally.” Health apps think emotions can be controlled. But our control of emotions should not be misconstrued to become emotional suppression. Emotions are meant to be embraced. God commands love, fear, delight, and rejoicing because they are healthy expressions of our relationship with him.

*Emotions can be understood.* Third, emotions can be understood. They are often confusing and mysterious, but this doesn’t mean they are incomprehensible. Reflecting on how emotions can be rational and controllable helps us understand them. As we examine the many places that Scripture mentions emotions, we gain greater understanding about how not only to control them, but to express them, and to use them to bless others. As any of us who speak regularly with a close friend, a counselor, or a spiritual director knows, talking about emotions brings clarity.

## THE SEVEN EMOTIONS OF GOD

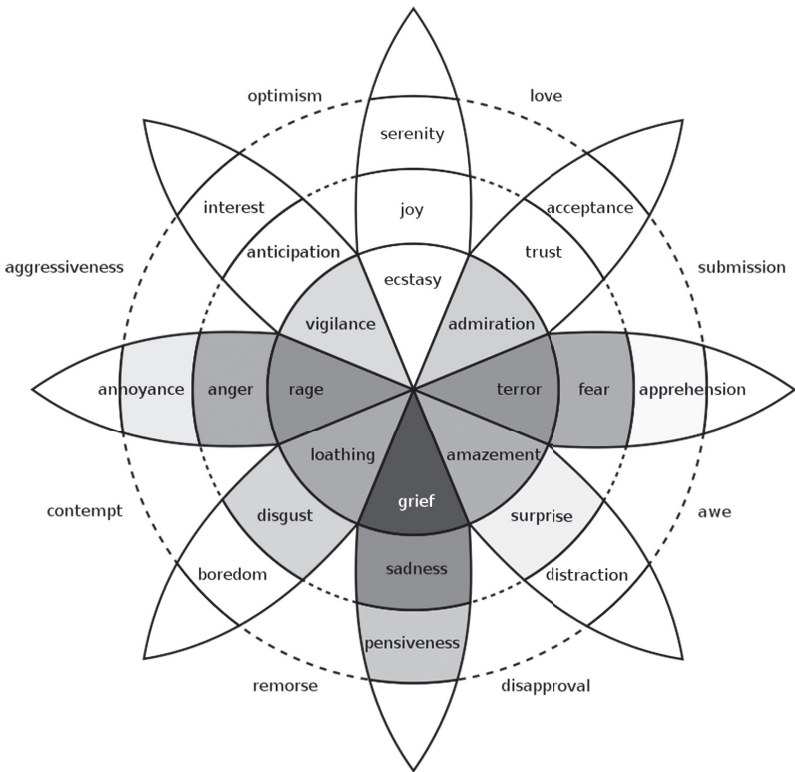
*The Emotions of God* will look at the seven emotions that are most frequently associated with God in the Bible. We will begin with three negatively perceived (“bad”) divine emotions: hate (chap. 2),

anger (chap. 3), and jealousy (chap. 4). The middle chapter is a bridge chapter focused on sorrow (chap. 5). We will conclude with three positively perceived (“good”) divine emotions: joy (chap. 6), compassion (chap. 7), and love (chap. 8).

If we examine other classic discussions of emotions, we find these seven emotions, as well as a few others.<sup>17</sup> I’ll briefly mention four standard lists (see table 1.1). Aristotle discusses the role emotions play in public speech in his classic work *Rhetoric* and lists ten basic emotions: enmity, anger, indignation, envy, kindness, pity, love, fear, shame, and friendship—seven of which are roughly comparable to five of mine.<sup>18</sup> In *The Expressions of the Emotions on Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin examines how emotional expressions affect biological behavior. Darwin’s list includes a wider variety of emotions than Aristotle (e.g., hatred, contempt, disgust, weeping, joy, tender feelings, love, fear, surprise, and shame), with parallels for all but one of the emotions discussed here (jealousy).<sup>19</sup> The psychologist Robert Plutchik visualized distinct types of emotions in a wheel: disgust, anger, sadness, joy, love, fear, surprise, and trust.<sup>20</sup>

Plutchik’s wheel includes eight “spokes,” with three levels of increasing intensity as one moves toward the center (for example, 1. annoyance, 2. anger, 3. rage), plus eight other bridge emotions hovering on the outside between each of these spokes—thus his model includes thirty-two emotional descriptors (love is one of his outer bridge emotions, so my table includes nine for him). His model includes equivalents for five of my seven (all except jealousy and compassion). The final classic list of emotions, and the shortest, is found in the 2015 Pixar film *Inside Out*.<sup>21</sup> The five emotions of *Inside Out* are disgust, anger, sadness, joy, and fear, each of which are personified in the mind of the main character, a young girl named Riley.

While there is variety among these four lists of emotions, all of the emotions focused on in this book appear in some form in at least



**Figure 1.1.** Plutchik's wheel

one list, and all except one (jealousy) are included in most of these lists. There are differences in terminology between my lists and these other four, but the basic emotion described is comparable. My terms are based on words found in standard English Bible translations. Hate is not identical to enmity (Aristotle), contempt, or disgust (Darwin, Plutchik, *Inside Out*), but they are all roughly synonymous, likewise for sorrow, weeping, and sadness. Three of the emotions that appear on several of these other lists—fear, shame, and surprise—are not attributed to God in the Bible and therefore won't be discussed.

Each chapter of this book will focus on one of these emotions. The chapter will define it, examine words the Bible uses for it, look



**Table 1.1.** Emotions in the Bible, Aristotle, Darwin, Plutchik, and *Inside Out*

| Chapter Discussed | Biblical term | Aristotle               | Darwin                    | Plutchik                            | <i>Inside Out</i> |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2                 | Hate          | Enmity                  | Hatred, contempt, disgust | Disgust                             | Disgust           |
| 3                 | Anger         | Anger and indignation   | Anger                     | Anger                               | Anger             |
| 4                 | Jealousy      | Envy                    |                           |                                     |                   |
| 5                 | Sorrow        |                         | Weeping                   | Sadness                             | Sadness           |
| 6                 | Joy           |                         | Joy                       | Joy                                 | Joy               |
| 7                 | Compassion    | Kindness and pity       | Tender feelings           |                                     |                   |
| 8                 | Love          | Love                    | Love                      | Love                                |                   |
| Not "Divine"      |               | Fear, shame, friendship | Fear, surprise, shame     | Fear, surprise, trust, anticipation | Fear              |

at how God displays it, and then discuss how we can follow God's example of expressing emotions in a way that blesses others. As we search the Scriptures to see where God is behaving emotionally, we discover a variety of synonyms used by English translations for a specific divine emotion. For example, passages that speak of God's wrath (Jn 3:36), his fury (Rev 19:15), or his indignation (Ps 102:10) are all related to his anger, and therefore could be discussed in the anger chapter.

At this point, we need to make a comment about the prioritization of these emotions, lest one think that all seven are equally attributed to God. Two of these emotions are connected to God in the Bible far less frequently than the others: hatred and jealousy. And three of them are associated with God more frequently: wrath, compassion and love. If there were "one emotion to rule them all," it would clearly be love, since all of these emotions are somehow manifestations of God's loving character. John captures this truth well in his refrain, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16).

## THE EMOTIONS OF THE PSALMS

While the book of Psalms is often skipped over when the Bible is summarized as a story, it has always been popular. One of the many reasons people love the psalms is they are filled with beautiful and intense emotional language, as the psalmist expresses passion for God, hate toward enemies, and joy over God's Word. The Psalms therefore serve as a good introduction to divine emotions.

The Psalms are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament book.<sup>22</sup> While many factors contribute to this phenomenon, one reason for their popularity is their rich emotional language. In the prayers of the psalmist, God is frequently described emotionally, and all seven divine emotions examined here are mentioned in the psalms.

God hates (Ps 5:5; 11:5; 45:7).

God gets angry (Ps 6:1; 30:5; 78:21).

God is jealous (Ps 78:58; 79:5).

God is grieved (Ps 78:40).

God delights (Ps 18:20; 22:8; 35:27).

God shows mercy (Ps 25:6; 28:6; 103:4).

God loves (Ps 5:7; 25:6; 136).

According to the Psalms, emotions are divine.

This deeply emotive book teaches the people of God how to praise. Interestingly, the title of the book in Hebrew, *Tehillim*, means "Praises." The book of Psalms reveals that God's emotions are not to be ignored or hidden, but they are to be praised, sung, and shouted to the nations.

At this point, I should make a comment about names for God.<sup>23</sup> The name God is called by far the most in the Bible is Yahweh (over 6,800 times). All of these are located in the Old Testament, and most English translations render his name as "the LORD." Psalm 69 calls him "Yahweh" five times (vv. 6, 13, 16, 31, 33). Though Jesus is called many names in the New Testament (Son of Man,

Christ), the name he is called most frequently is simply “Jesus.” While discussing passages, I will generally follow the text, so I’ll often speak of Yahweh in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New. Names are important.

### THE EMOTIONS OF PSALM 69

While the psalms generally use rich, emotive language, there are a few psalms that stand out as particularly emotive, like Psalm 69. It is full of emotional language, mentioning all seven of the emotions that we will focus on in this book. The subjects of these emotional expressions include the psalmist (zeal, v. 9; sorrow, v. 10), the psalmist’s enemies (hate, v. 4), and people blessed by God (gladness, v. 32; love, v. 36).

But the person described with the most emotions in this psalm is God (emphasis added):

But I pray to you, LORD,  
 in the time of your favor;  
 in your great **love** (*hesed*), O God,  
 answer me with your sure salvation . . .  
 Answer me, LORD, out of the goodness of your **love** (*hesed*);  
 in your great **mercy** (*rahamim*) turn to me. (Ps 69:13, 16)

In a desperate cry for salvation, the psalmist appeals to God’s love (vv. 13, 16) and to God’s mercy (v. 16).

This will **please** (*yataw*) the LORD more than an ox,  
 more than a bull with its horns and hooves . . .

Yahweh will be pleased with praise and thanksgiving more than an ox (v. 31; I wouldn’t think the ox cares).

Perhaps the most powerful expression of divine emotions in Psalm 69 comes in the middle of a prayer of cursing in verses 22-28 (emphasis added).

May the table set before them become a snare;  
     may it become retribution and a trap.  
 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,  
     and their backs be bent forever.  
 Pour out your **wrath** (*za'am*) on them;  
     let your **fierce anger** (*haron 'ap*) overtake them.  
 May their place be deserted;  
     let there be no one to dwell in their tents.  
 For they persecute those you wound  
     and talk about the pain of those you hurt.  
 Charge them with crime upon crime;  
     do not let them share in your salvation.  
 May they be blotted out of the book of life  
     and not be listed with the righteous. (Ps 69:22-28)

Because of all the hate, scorn, and shame from his enemies, the psalmist prays for God's wrath to be poured out upon them and for his fierce anger to overtake them (v. 24). While the psalmist never explicitly uses the word hate here, the tone in this imprecatory prayer sounds hateful. The psalmist wants them to be trapped, darkened, bent over, deserted, indicted for crimes, and most dramatically, deleted from God's book of life.

While one might think Psalm 69 isn't merely describing the emotional life of God, but merely what the psalmist believes he is feeling, the fact that this psalm is included in the Word of God and is therefore divinely inspired means that God has authorized its usage for our lives of faith. So, what do we do with psalms like this that include curses? We will discuss the hate and anger of imprecatory prayers like Psalm 69 in chapters two and three, but at this point we can state that intense emotions are disturbing and sometimes they just need to be expressed. From Psalm 69, we can make three points about prayer and emotions.

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