

GET REAL

EMOTIONAL AUTHENTICITY



BIG IDEA: One of the most important aspects of the Spirit-filled life is the concept of yielding all areas of our lives to God's gracious control. However, we seldom include our emotions as one of those areas. It is difficult to understand the complexities of our feelings, and when we do they often seem too painful or confusing to deal with.

This study will help your group discover the beginnings of fully yielding to the Lordship of Christ regarding our emotions—learning to be honest with ourselves, God and others. You'll explore what a biblical response to our emotions looks like.



DESIRED LIFE CHANGE: One result of this study will be an increased desire for emotional authenticity with fellow group members and with God, following the example of David in Psalm 55. Hopefully, they will take steps toward bringing their emotions into the light of God's truth.



AUDIENCE: This lesson is designed for students who have begun to experience the Spirit-filled life.



LEADER'S PREPARATION: Read Psalm 55 two times from two different translations if possible. You will notice that not all of Psalm 55 is printed in the lesson because we wanted to focus on the emotions of David in his prayer. Work through this leader's guide answering all the questions and trying to anticipate the responses of your group members. This lesson can be a stepping stone to help your group develop deeper intimacy with each other and the Lord; therefore, when possible, use personal examples to illustrate and demonstrate vulnerability and honesty. This lesson is just an opening for a very complex and challenging topic.



AT A GLANCE

As your group interacts in this study, they will think . . .

This is my **WORLD:** I have many emotions, but don't know how to understand or respond to them in light of walking in the Spirit.

This is my **NEED:** I need to see that God cares about my feelings and can help me deal with them appropriately.

This is my **ANSWER:** As David did in Psalm 55, I need to be honest about my feelings, and at the same time, entrust them to God, who knows and cares.

This is the **DIFFERENCE:** If I can practice being honest about my emotions with myself, others, and God, I will be better able to experience God's presence and influence in this area.

This is what I'll **DO:** I will begin to look inside myself and honestly bring my emotions before God. I will also seek to be more authentic with someone I can trust.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?



Part of being a Christian is enjoying the freedom to be honest about all of our feelings, good and bad. However, even people of great faith experience struggles with their emotions. Why? It takes time and sound teaching to mature in this area, because emotions are complex and painful, and because there are many voices advising us to deal with our emotions in wrong ways. Healthy emotions are crucial for healthy relationships with God and

others. We experience isolation from each other and from God when we fail to learn how to be emotionally authentic. The scriptures address this issue with specific examples of godly men and women honestly expressing emotion. We want to bring the principles of scripture to bear on this difficult issue, helping people to apply the idea of the Spirit-filled life to their feelings.

1 **DEBATE** "What do you think about this statement?"

2 **FREE ASSOCIATION:** What emotions come to mind when you hear the words "Final Exams" or "Rape," or...?
-fear; anger; comfort; anxiety ...

3 **STATE:** Children are notoriously candid about what they think. Here are some quotes from children who were writing letters to God.

FOLLOW UP QUESTION: What would you say to God if you could be totally honest and get away with it?

-I wish you would get me a job when I graduate; Can you get rid of my roommate?; I was disappointed that it rained today; Tell me who I'm going to marry...

4 **ASK & DISCUSS**

they don't have anything to lose; they don't think about the effect their words have on others; they haven't learned to cover their feelings; they are told not to feel a certain way; they learn self control; they develop defense mechanisms because of fear


FOLLOW UP QUESTION: Where do we learn about feelings?

-family, friends, negative experiences


5 **DEFINITION OF EMOTION:**

"Emotions are...reactions of an individual to important events in his or her life. These reactions involve special kinds of feelings, widespread physiological changes, impulses to action, and, sometimes, overt behavior." (Robert Plutchik, "Emotion", *Software Toolworks Multimedia Encyclopedia*, (Grolier, Inc., 1992).


6 **STATE:** Feelings can be confusing or mysterious, and we don't always know the best way to deal with them. Some people don't seem to show much emotion at all. Others are like the children we just heard from—always showing some kind of emotion. We all experience events that bring about emotions in us and we all react differently. Let's look at what happened to Vince and Sarah, and how they dealt with their emotions in response to a disastrous situation.


VERSION 1.1

GET REAL


DEBATE

All of our feelings are legitimate—we don't need to feel guilty about our emotions.


TELL IT LIKE IT IS


"Dear God, ... Did you really mean to do unto others as they do unto you? If you did then I'm going to fix my brother."

"Dear God, ... Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy."


"Dear God, ... It rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about you that people are not supposed to say, but I hope you will not hurt him anyway."

"Dear God, ... If we come back as something, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her."

"Dear God, ... My brother is a rat. You should give him a tail. Ha ha."
—Hample and Marshall, *Children's Letters to God*, (New York: Workman Publishing, 1991).



FREE ASSOCIATION

Madonna	Marriage	Commitment
Democrats	Church	Seeing a scary movie
Afternoon nap	Family	The dentist
Rape	A+	Money
America	A dark alley	Blind date
Chocolate chip cookie dough	A letter from home	



In the light of [a friend's] honesty and love, and through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, I began to be honest with myself and with God. The tough exterior I had developed started cracking, and I began to experience the pain I had neither wanted nor allowed myself to feel. This was hardly pleasant, but acknowledging the presence of hurt in my life was my first step toward finding comfort... Why can't we see the reality of our lives? Why are we afraid to turn on the lights?

—Robert McGee, *The Search for Significance*, (Houston: Rapha Publishing, 1990), p.4.

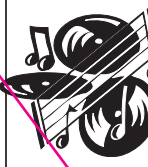

DISCUSS

Why are children so honest about their feelings? What happens to us in that regard as we grow older?


TOOLBOX

-  THINK
-  OBSERVE
-  CLOSE-UP
-  WRITE
-  DISCUSS
-  FEELINGS
-  BRAINSTORM
-  REFERENCE
-  PASSAGE
-  ARTICLE
-  BIG IDEA
-  CROSSROAD

1 READ



IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

When Vince and Sarah heard that U2 was coming in concert to Collegeville, they determined that two tickets were worth a month of dollar movies and dinners in the Union. Finally, the night arrived, and they headed for the arena with *Zooropa* blasting on the radio inside Vince's *Escort*. Forty-five minutes before the concert they would meet Lee, Sarah's brother, at Gate 12 with their third-row tickets . . . they could hardly wait. An hour and a half later, they were still waiting. Lee never showed.

As they walked away from the arena, Sarah tried to make things better by cracking a joke about the great acoustics in the *Escort*. This was the last straw for Vince, whose anger had been building from the moment the concert was set to begin. He erupted in full force, demanding to know why Sarah hadn't called her brother just before they left—"You're always so irresponsible! I was looking forward to this for weeks, and you don't even care that we couldn't get in!" It was a long ride home. Vince stared at the road with his jaw clenched thinking of ways to get even with Sarah's brother. Sarah put the seatback down and tried to ignore her splitting headache.

DEFINITION

STUFF: act of burying emotions to avoid pain

SYMPTOMS OF STUFFING EMOTIONS:

- Isolation from others
- Depression
- Headaches and colds
- Excessive sleeping, eating or exercising

What emotions or feelings do you think they had in common?

What emotions or feelings might have been unique to each of them?

Why did they respond differently in this situation?

Would you tend to respond more like Vince or Sarah?


What do you think is the right way for Christians to respond?

DEFINITION

VENT: act of over-expressing emotions in harmful or inappropriate ways.

SYMPTOMS OF VENTING EMOTIONS:

- Outbursts of anger, grief, etc.
- Inappropriate vulnerability with others
- Loss of intimacy with others (they may avoid you)
- Depression



THE REAL DIAGNOSIS:

It's difficult to understand our emotions, whether they rule us with an iron grip or are a complete mystery to us! Underneath both extremes lies a common central issue: **our refusal to entrust our emotions to God.** The unfortunate result of "stuffing" or "venting" is that we don't experience God's grace meeting us in the middle of the storms of life.

REFLECT

As Christians, can we maintain both intimacy with God and honest (real) emotion at the same time?

2 ASK

- a) frustration, disappointment
- b) Sarah: guilt, worry; Vince:rage
- c) They are male and female; Sarah stuffed her emotions while Vince vented his; that's how they always deal with similar situations; family background taught them their responses ...

3 READ: Both DEFINITION boxes.

4 ASK

LEADER'S NOTE: The last question leads into the rest of the study, or the third alternative to venting and stuffing. It shows that even in the Christian community there is a predisposition to "stuffing" in situations like this.


be joyful always; be a good example by always being in control and not showing negative emotions; somewhere in the middle between Vince and Sarah.

5 READ

6 REFLECT

LEADER'S NOTE: Give your group several minutes to think about the question. Depending on the ability of your group, you may want to ask for ideas about how this might be possible.

LEADER'S NOTE: In Psalm 55 David was expressing his emotions to God in a prayer. The main idea in this part is to discover how David was emotionally honest with God, holding up his whirling emotions alongside the rock-solid character of God. Psalm 55 reminds us that God can meet and minister to us in the middle of the storms of our life—the trials that

<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p>	<p>CONTEXT</p> <p>Psalm 55 and the majority of the psalms were written by David, an historic Jewish leader. David spent his early years in relative obscurity in the wilderness of Judah ... until God sent a prophet to locate the man whom He had chosen to succeed King Saul as the ruler of Israel. That man was David. Over time, the young man served as court musician for Saul, defeated the giant Goliath in battle, and became a general in Saul's army. David was a loyal subject, but jealousy of his popularity consumed the King and Saul determined that he would put David to death. Written while David lived as a fugitive from Saul, this emotion-packed poem records David's experience of unjust persecution, and the betrayal of a friend.</p>	<p>PSALM 55</p> <p>Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Thyself from my supplication. Give heed to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me. My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me; and horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. "Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in the wilderness. "I would hasten to my place of refuge from the stormy wind and tempest." ... it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together, walked in the house of God in the throng. ... As for me, I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me. God will hear and answer them—even the one who sits enthroned from of old—with whom there is no change, ... His [my enemy's] speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.</p>	<p>PSALM</p> <p>The word "psalm" comes from the Greek word psalms, meaning "poem to be sung to a stringed instrument." Many psalms are lyrics expressing the emotions of the poet, and intended for accompaniment by the lyre or harp or "stringed instruments." Another Hebrew title is Tephilloth, that is, "Prayers."</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>What specific feelings does David reveal in this psalm? Circle the words that describe those feelings.</p> <p>Which feelings in the psalm do you most identify with?</p> <p>How does David demonstrate faith in his prayer to God?</p> <p>What does David affirm about God in spite of his situation?</p> <p>Do you feel the same freedom to express emotion to God that David did? Why or why not?</p>		<p>THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE TO STUFFING AND VENTING: <i>Being honest with God about our negative emotions.</i></p> 

6 bring out the strongest of emotions.

READ

READ

READ

ASK

1 READ

2 READ

Emotional maturity is the result of a process. As you develop in emotional authenticity, look for progress in two areas:



HONESTY WITH GOD

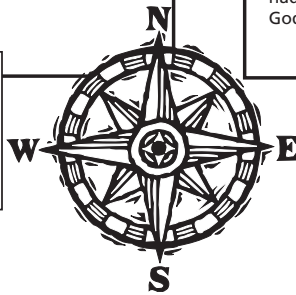
Put yourself in one of the following situations:

- Your parents are getting a divorce
- You failed a class
- Your sweetheart just dumped you
- You don't have enough money to finish school
- Your best friend from home was arrested
- A real life situation of your own...

Write your own Psalm 55. What emotions would you feel? What would you affirm about God in spite of the circumstances?



Growing in this area takes time. As we walk with God, He helps us day by day to bring every area of our lives under His loving authority. We become more like Jesus the longer we consistently entrust ourselves to Him.



For Further Exploration:
Study the following passages to see the ways Jesus handled emotions. Matthew 36:36-46; Luke 10:17-21; John 11:1-44, 15:11; Luke 19:41-44

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



HONESTY WITH OTHERS

"Sure I felt disappointment and anger. But I covered those unacceptable emotions. ... If I, a follower of God, allowed negative emotions to show, how could people possibly be attracted to Christianity? But the result was the opposite of my intent. My friends thought they'd need to be perfect Christians since that's the way I acted. And they knew they were far from reaching that exalted plateau. So was I. A caring friend helped me change. Jill saw through me. But instead of accusing me, she asked questions that helped me explore myself and my feelings. Then she listened closely and carefully to what I said. Her presence created a safe place where I could be myself. She talked about some of her own failings, and yes, even her emotional needs. The result was life-changing. Because I was able to be honest with Jill, I became more honest with others. I was able to show them my ragged edges, and oddly, though I hadn't intended it, others became more attracted to the gospel. They saw that Christ did not reject people like me who had faults and needs. They saw ... that God was at work even in emotions."

-Phyllis Le Peau, *Caring for Emotional Needs*, (Colorado Springs: InterVarsity Press, 1991).



How would you like to change in the area of emotional authenticity?

Is there someone you know that could help you explore yourself and your feelings?

ASK: "Are there any thoughts about this?"

3 ASK

I'd like to be able to identify when I am stuffing or venting; I'd like to be more honest with God about a certain situation; so and so hurt me last week - I'd like to tell them how I felt about it; I'd like to pray for a person like Jill in the story...

Encourage them to study Jesus' life and how He dealt with His emotions.

L E A D E R ' S R E S O U R C E



BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bold Love – Dan Allender
(NavPress)

Search For Significance – Robert S. McGee (Rapha Publishing)

Healing For Damaged Emotions– David Seamands
(Victor Books)



TOPIC CONNECTIONS

Related *InterACTA* small group studies: *Mad About You; Walk This Way; Under The Influence*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Spirit promises us joy and peace as we walk with Him (Gal.5:22), but we will never experience these non-circumstantial emotions if we are grabbing control of the emotional area, refusing to bring our darkness into the light of God’s truth. As we do this, the Spirit gives us **perspective** concerning the circumstances. He helps us to see not only the light, but also the darkness in clearer focus.

The Spirit also provides **self-control** so that we need not sin in our emotions. Honest, Spirit-filled living involves **acknowledging my emotions as valid, and God’s Word as truth**. This means being honest with God about how we feel even if it includes griping, yelling, crying, etc., and even if our feelings directly contradict what God says to be true.

By laying out our hearts before God, we are letting Him address our true self, warts and all. He will show us truth that we can believe and begin to experience. There may not be a quick solution to the paradox in my heart, but the Spirit gives me patience to live with it.

As we are honest about our emotions, we can allow questions to be raised about God’s character – questions like “Is God really loving? How could He be loving when He allowed _____ to happen?” Our candid questions about God can open us up to see His true nature **if we allow Him to answer the questions**. If we are willing to wait on Him for an answer, we can be certain He will answer. Again, the Holy Spirit supplies us with patience in this process.

Throughout this process of authentic living, **the Holy Spirit remains in control**. We allow the Comforter (John 16) to minister to us in ways not possible when we control our emotions. As we sense negative emotions, we give them to Him. When we sin because of our emotions, we confess, and ask Him to retake control, and change us. We continually ask Him to shine His light on any hidden darkness in our life so that we might be totally honest with Him (Psalm 139:23,24).

The results of honest, Spirit-filled living? The fruit of the Spirit, of course! As you look through the list in Galatians 5, some of the fruit obviously sticks out as being helpful in this process– Joy, Peace, Patience, and Self Control to name a few. These can be truly experienced when we are emotionally honest. These are non-circumstantial. Even in the midst of feeling grief or frustration, we can have an underlying joy and peace that transcends the situation.

O V E R V I E W O F M E E T I N G T I M E



Planning your group session

Allocating your time

INTERACTION AS A GROUP	INTERACTION WITH THE STUDY & WORD	INTERACTION WITH GOD	UPCOMING INFORMATION	OTHER IDEAS
Ice breaker? Refreshments?	Provided. Add personal story?	Worship / Praise / Prayer time?	Next meeting? Special event?	Music / Video?
_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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