

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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SAVOR EVERY MOMENT AND GIVE GOD THANKS

5 Exercises to help shift your focus from challenges to blessings

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

"God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in."

Does your daily life mimic a juggler trying to keep multiple plates spinning? Our lives become busier with each passing year. We take blessings for granted and become problem-focused. We eventually lose our joy. Our marriages wither under negativity, and we find little time or reason to praise God.

We become happier, our marriages improve, and we give more praise to God when we intentionally savor every moment.

What does it mean to "savor every moment?" When we savor something, we take delight in it. We appreciate it. It becomes more significant. When we focus on good or happy bits of our lives, we become happier. When we become happier, we become more pleasant; we become someone with whom others enjoy spending time. When we focus on God as the giver of good gifts, we thank him. To savor every moment means being grateful for blessings found in each and every moment.

We begin this journey when we practice refocusing from challenges to blessings. Here are five exercises that will help our focus. We need to SMILE:

- S** – Stop and appreciate the world.
M – Maximize our gifts.
I – Identify the silver linings in our clouds.
L – Look for good in the people around us.
E – Exalt God.

Stop and appreciate the world

God gave us this world. This statement can morph into a sobering obligation, instead of a reason to appreciate the gift and the Giver.

Many people savor some things already. We might relax into our soft bed with an "Ahhhhh." Some will delight in the first sip of good coffee. Instead of hurrying past life, consider all we can enjoy. Consider the softness of rose petals. The colors of fall. The glitter of fresh snow. Every time we practice paying attention to enjoy the world around us, we increase our gratitude. And we praise our God.

Maximize our gifts.

God gives each of us gifts. He gives us talents and purposes (1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Adam named all the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). Was Adam stressed about finding the *right* name for every single animal? I imagine he felt purpose because God entrusted him with the job. I also imagine he savored the moments--taking the time to laugh at monkeys' antics and feeling awe watching a jaguar run. I imagine he truly savored spending that time with God.

What are your talents and passions? What is your work? Paul said, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17, NIV). When we use his gifts, we bless others and are blessed in return.

Identify the silver linings in our clouds.

James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2, NIV). That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? At the very least, it sounds almost impossible, but it isn't.

We identify silver linings easier using intentionality, practice, and faith. Finding and focusing on any bit of goodness in hard times brings reason and depth in times of trouble. At the very least, we can appreciate that any of our trials will help us grow closer to God, if we let them. King David wrote, "Those who look to [God] for help will be radiant with joy...Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!" (Psalm 34:5, 8).

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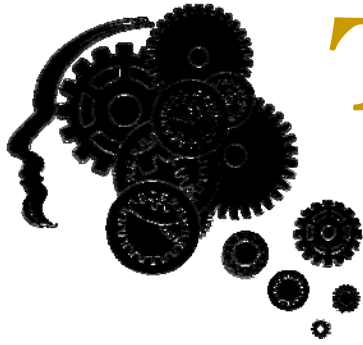
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The Anatomy of an Emotion

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

Emotions are tricky things. They come in a variety of “shapes” and “sizes” but there are no instructions on what to do with them or how to make sense of them. Emotions such as fear, anger or guilt can be like un-invited dinner guests that won't leave even after you started turning out the lights! Emotions such as love, joy and peace can be like an unexpected bouquet of flowers, showing up on a day when you thought all was lost.

Emotions are messengers. They have something to say to our body, soul and spirit. Before you can really hear the voice of the emotion and discern its message, it helps to understand what the emotion is made of.

Emotions can be traced back to an identified incident or event which triggered a thought. Most people can identify what was happening when they felt angry, happy, scared, etc. This is referred to as the “incident” or “trigger”. Immediately following the incident, a thought appears. If we had a cartoon thought bubble over our heads we would be able to see exactly what thoughts appeared at the time of the incident or just afterwards. As our thoughts develop, our brain becomes activated. If we had electrodes hooked up to the brain, we might actually see the brain light up in different ways, depending on what event just happened and what thought popped up.

Next our body may respond with a quickened heart rate, rising or dropping body temperature, increased blood pressure, etc. Our face may give us away through manifestations such as crying, tightened brows, or wide eyes. We may have an urge to do something such as yell or throw something, and we may, at times, actually act on that urge. All of these things give way to the emotion we are “feeling”. The feeling is actually the *last* thing that happens in this process.

Let's take a look at an example.

Incident: You said you were going to take me out to dinner. When I came home, I found a note that said you had gone fishing and you never mentioned the dinner.
Emotion: Hurt

Most people stop here, making interpretations of what happened and reacting to how they feel. It's really not that simple. There's actually A LOT more to the hurt. Let's fill this in a little more.



Incident: You said you were going to take me out to dinner. When I came home, I found a note that said you had gone fishing and you never mentioned the dinner.

Thought: I'm not important to you. I can't rely on you. I don't measure up. I'm forgettable.

Brain/Body response: Face is flushed, body temperature increased, stomach dropped.

Face: Flat face, tears well up in my eyes. I look down.

Urge: Yell, scream, and throw something.

Action: Grab a pint of ice cream and watch TV.

Emotions you are “feeling”: Hurt, Sad, Angry

Once I take the time to pull apart the feeling and all that comes with it, I can see what thoughts were triggered by the event. I also discover there is more than just the feeling of hurt.

We cannot control our feelings. Many times emotions come without warning and when we least expect it. We can get better at listening to what our feelings are telling us. The Bible gives us clear and specific instruction to “take every thought captive” (2 Corinthians 10:5). When we do this, we may discover a very different and unique relationship with our emotions.

Thought: “I'm not important to you.”

Response: “I believe I *am* important to him, and I *know* I *am* important to God (Jeremiah 31:3). I don't

know why he forgot about dinner. I can ask him when I see him.”

Thought: “I can't rely on you.”

Response: “I was planning on our dinner together and I was let down. I want to rely on my partner. I am going to have to bring this up to him if I want to have a good relationship with him.”

Thought: “I don't measure up.”

Response: “I am enough because God says I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13-16). His forgetting of dinner is a reflection of *his* choice, not my worth.”

Thought: “I'm forgettable.”

Response: “That's not true. Just because someone forgot about a plan we made does not mean that I am forgettable as a person. I am on the mind of God and that's pretty incredible! (Jeremiah 29:11).”

Next time you are having a particularly strong emotion, ask yourself these questions:

What's the name of the feeling I am experiencing?

Anger, sad, fear, joy, shame, guilt?

What happened prior to this emotion?

What went through my mind after the incident occurred? What did I tell myself? What did I believe was true based on the event?

Do I need to do something in response to this feeling?

Father God, what truth do you want me to know?

What we think matters and will powerfully impact what we say, do and how we feel.

You and I may have a completely different response to the exact same event, because we have a different narrative in our thought bubble. Do you ever wonder why other people don't feel the way you feel? Their emotion may have a different anatomy compared to yours, and yours is worth investigating! ■



Kathy Krentkowski is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and Licensed Mental Health Counselor and sees clients in our Evergreen Park, IL & Schererville, IN locations.

Upcoming 2019 Marriage Workshops



Marriage 101: How to do Marriage Well

- Jan 12
- Mar 9
- May 11
- Aug 10
- Oct 5

Marriage 201: Marriage Tune-Up

- Feb 9
- Apr 6
- Jun 1
- Sep 7
- Nov 9

Time: 9:00am - 4:00pm

*Continental breakfast will begin at 8:30am

Cost: \$100 per couple

*Includes continental breakfast, lunch, & all materials

NOTE: There is a \$25 non-refundable registration fee

Each Workshop is limited to 10 couples!

For location information or to register, visit chicagochristiancounseling.org/communityCalendar.html

Questions? Call 800.361.6880



An invitation to reflect...



The Birth

■ by Erin Davis, MSW, LCSW

I want to take you on a journey today...a journey of a young woman who has a promise before her, but is walking a hard road...

Imagine yourself now, walking on the dirt roads of Bethlehem. You are 9 months pregnant, tired, poor, and clinging with all your life to a promise. You have been walking all day. You are cold, dirty, and miles from home; from all things familiar. You are in a strange town looking for shelter. You are knocking, knocking, and knocking...no one answers. Those that do turn you away sharply...no warmth in their eyes. They look right through you...you are just another insignificant body that they have no room for. The tension in the still night is unnerving.

You are reminded of Gabriel...you are hanging on his every word because the life is draining from you as you keep walking. Your body aching as you slowly creep on...feeling alone, rejected.

Your mind is grappling...searching for his exact words. "He told me I was highly favored. He told me not to be afraid...that my child will be great, the Son of the Most High...his kingdom will never end! The most important promise right now though, the one that you almost forgot with all the anticipation of this coming King, was that He, the Lord, is with you." These are the simple words that resonate in the deep places...the ones that keep you from throwing your hands up. You feel your breath even out, your muscles relax. The tightness in your chest loosens up. He told you that no word of God's would ever fail. You feel something strengthen within you...almost like a new sense of adrenaline to finish the final steps of a race.

And then you feel it...a strange pain riddling through your body...concentrated in your abdomen. You know...it has begun. A crazy, almost wild excitement overtakes you...you can't tell if it's joy, exhaustion or terror. You have no place to stay...where will you give birth to this King, your son, your most treasured promise?

You scream out to Joseph...he looks at you and just knows. He can sense the desperation in your voice. He scrambles ahead for a few minutes and comes back with news that he has found a place. It's meager and dark and cold, but he can make a fire and gather some straw...and you would be together. You just can't wait to be off of your feet, so you agree...holding on to him tightly...gritting your teeth between contractions. This promise feels so heavy, so hard. You don't know if you have what it takes...if you can really do it. The words come again "He is with me." You drink them in and they give you the nourishment you need to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

You finally arrive to your destination. Joseph wasn't lying, this is pretty bleak...this stable...a place only animals would sleep, but your weariness melts at the sight of a soft place to lay your head...somewhere to rest, but also to war with the fire raging in your insides. Something within you tells you that this battle has just begun.

The pain feels like it is going on forever. Suddenly, you feel so far away from home...far away from the generations of women who know how to do this...who could help you through this. Joseph looks calm on the outside, but you can see it in his eyes and his posture—he is terrified...not knowing how to soothe you...direct you. God where are you?? I need you!!

This time your spirit hears it: I am with you...ok, He is with me. I'm not alone. You take this promise and cloak yourself with it. What feels like hours later, just when you think that you can't take it any longer, you feel a strange and sudden urge to push. You grab Joseph by the arm and shake him awake. He's completely disoriented...straw in his hair...you don't care...it's time! All you want is to meet this child, your baby, the one given unto you, but not really yours.

You push, once, twice, thrice, and on the 8th push...He emerges. Joseph catches him...the atmosphere around you changes...sweet relief...but also something more...something so eerily peaceful. ...like a cool breeze after a hot day of work. It wraps around you and cradles you as you look upon your son...God's son. Your heart is filled with joy...an unspeakable joy that you can't put into words. You grab Him and pull him close to your heart...your skin touching...your heart beating as it never has before.

When you finally tear your eyes away from him for a second, you look again at your surroundings. This is hardly accommodations for a King, but a God who could pick you, a humble, poor, servant...He must have known. Maybe this kingdom will look different...a king born in a stable...a Son of the Most High birthed among the animals. Something about the thought of this crazy paradox makes you feel free...more connected and yet more free.

You wrap him in some cloth that you find and put him in a manger. You can't stop looking at him...He is so incredibly beautiful, you can't put your finger on why, because there are no especially appealing features. You know in your spirit that the promise is here...He is the promise that will not fail.

Later there were shepherds and angels...gifts of plenty...but what you remember most is that this life came from you...a life that would be called the son of the Most High. These are the treasures that you pondered in your heart. ■



Erin Davis is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and sees clients in our River Forest, IL location.

This reflection is based on the following Bible passage: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-19



An invitation to reflect...

This reflection came about from a desire to understand the humanity of the stories in the Bible. Often, I would read scripture looking for a promise of certainty to stand on, instead of as an invitation to reflect. When I see the humanity of the experiences of Mary, Joseph or even of Jesus, the words take on new life and meaning. I begin to explore, question and discover more in myself and my experience with God. When I read these with clients, I use them as tools of exploration...to notice what God is eliciting in them. What do they feel in their bodies, or what word or phrase jumped out at them? ~ Erin Davis MSW LCSW



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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Look for good in the people around us.

Sometimes we need to refocus on the good in the people in our lives. We struggle with this when we focus elsewhere—like keeping our plates spinning or staring into our storms.

Many marriages struggle because the spouses can no longer see—or even remember—anything good in the partner. When did we last delight in our spouses? We see past problems much easier when we see more of the blessings. And thank God for the gift of friendship and love.

Exalt God.

We miss the point when we enjoy the good gifts without thanking the Giver. Paul said, "Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8, CEV). The more criteria our thoughts meet, the better off we are. The only focus that meets all the criteria? God himself.

So practice your **SMILE**. Remember we travel a *life* journey; don't expect perfection in a day, or even a week, or month, or year. It's important to not give up or shame ourselves because we can't find a silver lining. Be careful to not slip into idolatry. Keep your focus on the Giver, while delighting in his gifts.



Become happier, improve relationships and give praise to God by intentionally savoring every moment. ■

***Please understand that this is not a cure for significant depression. Looking for the good in our spouses will not heal abusive relationships. Please seek help from a qualified, Christian professional.*

Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.

New Staff

We are pleased to welcome two new additions to our professional staff. To learn more about them, visit chicagochristiancounseling.org/ourstaff.html



Nancy Dawkins, MSW, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Orland Park, IL location.



Maria Jensen, MSW, LSW
Licensed Social Worker
Plainfield, IL location.