

# JESUS & EMOTIONS

A CREATIVE JOURNAL FOR FAMILIES



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# Introduction for the grown-ups



We all grow up feeling different emotions, and many of us learn to differentiate between feelings like joy, sadness and anger. The adults around us during childhood help by putting values on our emotions and showing us what is acceptable (spoiler alert: adults don't always get it right!) But if you're anything like me, you might not have spent much time really getting to know your emotions or understanding why they are there. It's only as an adult I've begun to realise how important our emotions are for our well-being and for being able to live the kind of life Jesus calls us to.

I wanted to mention a few things in this introduction for you, as grown-ups, to keep in the back of your minds as you explore this journal with your children:

## 1. Emotions are not good or bad, they just are

Everybody is born with the full spectrum of emotions and the potential for these to help us through life. Emotions are not to be judged, blamed or buried, but we can learn to listen to them and handle them well. Not learning to manage our emotions well leads to experiences which make us label emotions as "good" or "bad".

## 2. Emotions are as much in your body as in your mind

We often have a false dichotomy between mind and body, whereas, in fact, they are inseparable: the Bible and modern science are in agreement on this. When we feel something, it happens in our body too, not just in our mind. And our "physical" sensations - like hunger or pain - are in our minds as well as in our bodies. We can therefore learn to understand our emotions by listening to our body. Managing our emotions is often physical, whether it's via physical movement like exercise, or using creative expressions such as dance or drawing.

The purpose of this journal is for you as families to learn *from* Jesus, together *with* him, about emotions. To explore how to live a more honest and healthy life, enjoying the peace he promises us. Be flexible in how you use this resource depending on the age or personality of your children - find what is helpful and save the rest for another day! For more in-depth insight, look at the resources below, and if you find yourself unearthing larger than expected emotions or trauma, seek out professional help to guide you into healing.

Jesus said:

**"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."** (John 10:10 NLT)

It may be true that there's an enemy who wants to steal your joy, kill your relationships and destroy your peace. But the deeper truth is that Jesus has won the victory over evil, and offers us his good life, the one we see him modelling in the gospels. He wants us to live an emotionally healthy life where our emotions get to do their jobs without being buried or hurting others: a life lived to the full.



## Recommended resources

These resources have not been footnoted in the text as it seemed disruptive for younger readers, but I highly advise you to continue your exploration using these. Reading widely is helpful in making up your own mind, especially as these experts sometimes disagree.

*"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality"* by Peter Scazzero (2006)

*"Own Your Emotions"* by Frida Kristina Nilsson (2020) and [www.ownyouremotions.org](http://www.ownyouremotions.org)

*"It's Not Always Depression"* by Hilary Jacobs Hendel (2018)

*"Rising Strong"* by Brené Brown (2015)

I recommend the Bible teaching of John Mark Comer, <https://bridgetown.church/teaching/> especially his sermons on Joy, December 2019. If you have not watched Pixar's movie *"Inside Out"* (2015) yet, it gives a great introduction to the topic of emotions and their functions.

# Meet your emotions!

HELLO!

## Fill in the missing words:

- When my favourite toy breaks, I feel .....
- When someone says something mean to me, I feel .....
- When I see my friend that I haven't seen for ages, I feel .....
- When I can't sleep in the dark room, I feel .....
- When it's nearly my birthday, I feel .....
- When I catch the smell of a bin, I feel .....
- When someone gives me a hug, I feel .....

There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise! The things you might have written down - like sad, scared, happy - are called emotions.

God has given everybody emotions, and he has put them inside us to help us out in various ways.

In this book we will focus most on four core emotions:

JOY

SADNESS

ANGER

FEAR

Can you spot them in the picture?



I need you to see us. And call us by our names. OK!?

I'm afraid you'll need to learn to handle us

As emotions, we're not bad or good, we just are! We're here to help you work out what's going on in your life. Happy news, eh?

I'm sad to say that sometimes we can behave in unhelpful ways

You will also be able to spot some other emotions that might pop in from time to time in this book: Excitement, Surprise, Shame, Curiosity and Disgust.

Your emotions are a bit like a group of friends - sometimes one of them takes a lead and another follows; sometimes they get into conflicts and sometimes they play and have fun together!

Your emotions are a bit like colours: just like mixing blue and red makes purple, the emotions can mix and be a little different at different times. There is no one palette of colour that is right for everybody all of the time.





The emotions on the previous page are shown as different colours. You may think of your emotions as other colours: that's fine!

Can you think about what emotions are swirling around inside you right now and try to draw them here or on a separate paper just using colours?

Don't feel the need to draw characters or write words, just use the colours to show how you feel.



## Jesus and emotions

One thing we will discover in this book is that Jesus experienced the same emotions that we experience. In the Bible, it says that Jesus is able to feel sympathy for our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way like we are. That means he must have felt the temptation to do things like run away when he was scared, or hurt someone in anger, or gloat when he got something right, and so on. But even though he felt tempted to do those things, he resisted the temptation. He didn't let those feelings cause him to disobey God or hurt other people (Heb 4:15).

Jesus has told us many amazing things through the Bible, but he also *showed* us how to live. He showed us how to be fully human.

## Praying your emotions

Like Anger said on the previous page, emotions can be a little attention-seeking at times: we need to notice them and call them by their names. It's helpful to notice our emotions together with our friends and families, perhaps around this book, or at bed- or meal-times. We can also talk to God about our emotions - he really wants us to chat to him about how we feel. Talking to him about these things is part of what we often call 'praying'.

The Psalms, the book of prayers and songs in the middle of the Bible, is stuffed full of emotions! We'll be using these to reflect and pray later on. Look at the colour drawing you did earlier on. Hold the picture in your hands and pray something like the prayer on the right.

"This is how I feel today, God. Thank you that you know what these emotions feel like, because Jesus felt them too. Amen."



# Some final notes for the grown-ups

## Can emotions be harmful?

I hope you've enjoyed engaging with this book together with family or friends, and I hope that your relationships have been strengthened. Since God created us to be in relationship with him and one another, part of Christian discipleship should involve being aware of when our emotions harm our relationships. In your continued journey learning together about emotions, keep an eye out for this within your family relationships, and be aware of when emotions get involved with hurtful behaviours.

Much of the harm we cause one another comes from an excess or a lack of certain emotions. For example: We can feel too much fear of things that aren't dangerous, stopping us from living our lives and trusting God. We can have too much anger, causing us to explode all over others and hurt them. We can also have too little anger, allowing others to hurt us. Sometimes joy gets involved in gloating over other people's misery and sometimes excitement causes us to make bad decisions or be curious about things that are bad for us. Sometimes we can feel disgust over other people, when we really need to feel empathy and compassion. Many people get stuck in sadness and sometimes it grows into depression. It's also common to carry a toxic shame that makes us believe we are unloveable or bad in some way.

It may be helpful to take some time in your own personal prayer life to consider if you have an excess or a lack of any emotion. Invite Jesus to speak into this area of your life. For further help, I also recommend *"Own Your Emotions"* by Frida Kristina Nilsson, and the accompanying website [www.ownyouremotions.org](http://www.ownyouremotions.org) where you will find more resources.

In Jesus, we see how all his emotions flowed out of love. He did not suffer from excess or lack of emotions. Our goal is to grow more like him as we spend time with him, and as we have learned; this does not mean less emotional. A full human experience, as God intended, includes the full range of emotions.

## Do not be afraid

Some people believe that we can trace all our emotions to just two: fear and love. Perhaps this is why God repeats the command *"Don't be afraid"* dozens of times in the Bible. God does not want us to stop feeling the fear of falling off cliffs or of wild, dangerous animals! On the contrary, he loves us so much and wants to protect us, and he put that helpful fear inside us.

However, there is an unhelpful fear that he wants to free us from: he encourages Hagar to not be afraid when she finds herself chased out into the desert (Gen 21:17); Joshua to not be afraid to face the enemies in Jericho (Josh 10:25); Daniel to not be afraid in his captivity in an enemy land (Dan 10:19) and Mary to not be afraid of the unknown of giving birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:30). All of those people most definitely had reasons to fear. So, why does God give this command, over and over in Scripture?

Almost always, the follow up to the command *"Do not be afraid"* is *"... for God is with you."*

There is an interesting thought experiment that often turns up in self-help books or on inspirational websites and the like. It goes something like: *"What would you do if you weren't afraid?"* For many, this opens up a whole range of new possibilities, from daring to go to a dance class to changing career paths. For followers of Jesus, however, there's a deeper invitation available, and a possibility for freedom which is more than a thought experiment. The invitation is from the Living God, the relational Three-In-One, and it goes: *"Do not be afraid, for God is with you."*

**As you continue in your journey of emotional health together as a family, may you remember this: that you do not journey alone. That Jesus goes before, behind and alongside you. And may this be your deepest comfort whatever the future holds.**

**Jesus promises:**  
*"I will always be with you." (Matt 28:20)*

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Help your family explore their emotions in the company of Jesus. This journal combines stories, activities and insights into why we feel how we do, and how to stay emotionally healthy.



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