

The Antidote: Impulsivity, Psalm 130, 4/16/23

My wife and I are watching the show **Alone** on the History Channel. Premise is they send 10 survivalists alone out into the harsh wilderness completely isolated from human beings to compete who will last the longest. They can only take 10 items with them from an approved list. Which got me thinking, if I could only take one book of the Bible with me, which book would I take? Easily it would be the Psalms. Because the Psalms address virtually every human emotion we can experience in a gloriously beautiful and painfully broken world. But they don't just meet us where we are in joy or pain; they lead us like a shepherd to the source of true life: God himself.

The Psalms offer us a **"Gospel-Centered 3rd Way"** to deal with our emotions and feelings.¹ One approach: **Religious approach. Detach from your emotions.** Emotions are bad. And so we stuff those down and ignore them. And that makes sense, because we can't admit the reality of our own darkness and rawness... especially if we believe God's acceptance is tied to our behavior. Some of our religious experience whether at home or walking into church, is that you check all those emotions at the door- Happy is the only acceptable emotion. Doubt? Fear? Sadness? Anger? You check those at the door. Like Tom Hanks in *League of Their Own*... Are you crying? There's no crying in church! See religious people get very good at faking it. "I'm not angry, I'm not afraid, I'm not bitter, I'm happy and God is good."

Secular Approach. Identify with your emotions. Emotions are not only good, they are YOU. This is the coddling of emotions... We no longer ask the question, "What do you think about _____?" Instead we ask how do you feel about _____?" There is a sort of sovereign, rule of emotions and feelings in our culture today. You are how you feel. And if anyone questions the validity of that feeling you can expect outrage.

But the Psalms present us a unique Gospel 3rd way. Not detach from your emotions, not bow down to your emotions. Instead they show us how to **pray our emotions**. Not just pray about, but actually express them in all their darkness and rawness to the living God, we pour them out in his presence, and in doing so find an **antidote[title slide]** for the aches and longings of our soul.

So in this 8-week series we are going to address through the Psalms an array of raw emotions and feelings that are common to the human experience: fear, hopelessness, bitterness, shame, revenge, uncertainty and today we are going to look at the **antidote to impulsivity** and the emotions behind it.

impulsivity: actions without foresight that are poorly conceived, prematurely expressed, unnecessarily risky, and inappropriate to the situation.² Now we are all susceptible to acting on impulse sometimes- this is why we have a rule in our house: never go grocery shopping while

¹ From www.gospelinlife.org, from the Songs of Jesus series.

² Definition according to *American Psychological Association*.

you are hungry. But there are some of us here that can look back over our lives and see a pattern of impulsive decisions that have brought considerable regret and even some of you where it has train wrecked your life. The NY Times called impulsivity an “all-purpose plague” that is linked to high levels of job and relationship turnover, acts of violence, and all kinds of addictions- overeating, gambling, alcoholism, smoking, and other substance abuse, sex addiction, and financial ruin.³

And if our own tendencies weren’t enough, our technology puts impulsivity in our pockets- the average iPhone user touches their phone 2617x a day.⁴ We can order late night takeout, access porn, place bets on the Sixers, and order that must have pair of shoes all on demand, all with a swipe of a finger.

According to a recent survey, 89% of American adults have succumbed to impulsive online shopping. Interestingly, more men admitted to impulsive online spending than women. And yet after the purchase, these shoppers said they experienced 45% regret, 20% concern that they don’t have the money, 10% resulted in a fight with a spouse.⁵ Interestingly there’s an app for that: Icebox replaces the buy now button on Amazon and other sites automatically with a button that says Icebox which puts the item in a “freezer” automatically for 30 days before you can buy it. Elbow the person next to you, you need this!

What is the emotion behind our impulsive behavior? Well there are several, but deep down it stems from a feeling of unfulfilled longing and emptiness that we are trying to fill. Our hearts are not neutral. Humanity in our rebellion from God has a knack for attempting to fill our emptiness apart from God. *Jeremiah 2:13 My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.* It’s a powerful word picture isn’t it. Imagine being incredibly thirsty and you come upon a freshwater brook, just pouring out water. But instead you decide, no I got this- I’m going to dig my own well until I hit fresh water and so you work hard and get 15ft down and you finally hit water and at first it looks good, but every time you go for water its dry again, and yet you still go over and over again to cure your thirst. This is the picture of impulsivity.

But Psalm 130 offers an antidote to the impulsivity of trying to drink from broken wells and coming up empty and unfulfilled: **the Discipline of Waiting on the Lord.** *Psalm 130:5-6 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. ⁶ I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.* Now how many of you enjoy waiting? No, me neither. We don’t like waiting. We want what we want, and when we want it which is 5 minutes ago. And we’ve done almost everything we can in our culture to eradicate waiting. Just in my lifetime we went from no internet, to Dial-up to cable, to high-speed, 5G, 10G...we’ve traded depth of character for efficiency of time.

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/05/health/when-impulsiveness-turns-dangerous.html>

⁴ John Mark Comer, *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p.36

⁵ <https://www.finder.com/impulse-buying-stats>

But ancient followers of God like the Psalmist considered waiting essential to developing into a person of godly character, trustworthiness and depth. And I find this still to be true today, you show me someone who has developed the discipline of waiting and I will show you a person of depth. But it's not just about waiting, because we can wait at the doctor's office or the DMV or to heal from an injury and not develop into a person of depth, but of grumbling. There is a way to wait that is a strong antidote to impulsivity that the Psalmist models. So let's go deeper into Psalm 130 and identify **3 Keys to Developing the discipline of waiting on the Lord.**

Key #1 Wait anchored in the Gospel.

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; ²Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. ³If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? ⁴But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

The imagery the Psalmist uses here is being out at sea, in the depths getting tossed by the waves. And the context tells us what is tossing him is a struggle with sin of some kind. Impulsive sins make us feel that way, like we are getting hit by the waves and we can't stand our ground. Notice how vulnerable he is with God about his weakness and struggle- he's desperate of God's help and mercy. What is it that gives the Psalmist such confidence that he can be this vulnerable with God, ask for His help and be confident he will receive it? He is anchored in the gospel. "If you Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?"

You know the old school filing cabinets before info was kept in the cloud? I remember as a kid going into my dad's office and seeing a few enormous filing cabinets and I'd pull out those big drawers and thumb through hundreds of folders. When we one day stand before God imagine if he pulls out an enormous filing cabinet of every single sin we ever committed. Who could stand? Of course the answer is nobody. Now here's the frightening reality. God does keep that record of our sin. **Revelation 20:1,3 "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened...and each person was judged according to what he had done."** God is righteous and just. Ah, but the Psalmist also knows God as one who is merciful and provides every sinner a way to receive full forgiveness so that our record of sin is not held against us. He closes this Psalm with a beautiful anticipation of the Gospel: **V. 8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.** The Psalmist recognizes, we can't do this ourselves, we can't stand before God, but God will do the work of redemption himself, for us. Oh friends this is the gospel proclaimed hundreds of years before it was accomplished. The Psalmist through the Holy Spirit anticipates the coming Messiah, Jesus, the one in whom we receive full forgiveness who accomplished our redemption himself by paying for it on the cross, the files are shredded so that we can stand not condemned but righteous, forgiven and accepted.

When we are discouraged by the crashing waves of impulsive feelings and actions we need to pray the gospel like the Psalmist. **Key #1** The Gospel anchors us so that when the waves of impulsive feelings come and we are tempted- on one hand- we don't have to try to grit our teeth and deny that we are struggling- we can be completely honest before God knowing that there is forgiveness and mercy in Christ. And on the other hand- we don't have to give in to our

feelings and allow sin to reign because he gives us the power to stand against the waves in the strength of Christ. Friends- anchor in the gospel!

Key #2 Wait with the Word of God

Psalm 130:5 *I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.* The Psalmist not only finds his anchor in the Gospel but the strength to wait on the Lord comes from fighting temptation with the Word of God. The Bible contains the power and the promises to fight our greatest impulses. Psalm 119⁹ *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.* ¹¹ *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* Do you know that the Bible gives what I call fighter verses to help you battle your impulses? And there are fighter verses for every wave of desire that attempts to toss you. Sexual temptation, over-spending, gambling, rash decisions, alcohol, anger. In the season of my life when I was being hit the hardest with the waves of temptation toward pornography- I had fighter verses committed to memory, I had them on my computer, written on my mirror and next to my bed. Like this one- 2 Timothy 2: ²² *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* Now Scripture isn't a magic pill. We read it and then suddenly our desires go away. No, the power of the Word comes when by faith we trust the character of its author- God himself, and we submit under its authority. That's when we activate the grace of God as power to overcome. And my experience has been, instead of acting on these impulses, when I wait on the Lord in prayer, praying these Scriptures back to the Lord in my weakness and vulnerability and ask for his help and mercy, the impulses begin to drift away and the emptiness or the longing I feel is filled with his living water. That's how it works. And the more we do that the easier it becomes. That's the discipline of waiting on the Lord in the power of his Word.

Key #3 Wait with Expectant Hope

I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. ⁷ *Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.*

Another vivid image of waiting: watchmen. In ancient times, there were no flood lights, security cameras, alarm systems. And so to protect a town or a city from potential threats, they would post watchmen along the wall of the city, especially during the darkness of the night. The picture is not only standing firm and faithful through the long night, but expectantly, that dawn is breaking, the light is coming and the waiting would be over. See it's a process, and in the process of waiting is how we develop the depth and resilience to overcome our impulses. The Psalmist is praying his expectant hopes to the source of his hope- the Lord, and His promises and there are two promises he puts his hope in.

His promise of **unfailing love**. Can you see how experiencing the unconditional love of God can help us with our unfulfilled longings and empty feelings? Isn't that what our hearts are often after? Not just us, our culture aches for love. I mean, it's what almost every pop song is about in some way or another. Do you know the #1 factor for a child to thrive and be healthy throughout their lives? The committed presence and love of a father or father figure. And the opposite is

sadly true. Do you think God is trying to tell us something? We need to know his unconditional love. And when we do, it fills our deepest longings for love.

His promise of **full redemption**. Ultimately, what enables the Psalmist to wait and not give into his impulses like a watchmen through the night, is the promise of a future of full redemption. By the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist is speaking of the coming day, when our struggle with sin, our struggle with temptation, our unfulfilled longings and feelings of emptiness will be a thing of the past. It's our full redemption we are waiting for. Yes, we've been redeemed by the first coming of Jesus, that is set free from the penalty and power of sin. But there is a day in the future, at the second coming of Jesus when we will be freed from the presence of sin. Listen to how Paul puts this in **Romans 8. ¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.**

²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. What enables Paul to wait well and the Psalmist to wait well is the expectant hope that it won't be long now. Jesus will return. Life is short. Eternity is long. What's a few more years or decades compared to eternity? That's the mindset that enables us to overcome our impulses toward sin.

It's a mindset that says, "I don't need to have all my sexual desires or relational longings gratified now- I will be fully satisfied in eternity." "I don't need to binge on sugar now when I will be at a feast in eternity." "I don't need that impulsive pair of shoes- when I will be dressed in all the splendor of God in glory."

Is there a struggle with an impulse that is tossing you like a wave right now? Are you in denial about it? Fighting it in your own strength? Or have you just resigned to the fight and said, well this is just me. The Psalmist is calling us to a better way, an antidote: the discipline of waiting on the Lord.

Wait anchored in the Gospel

Wait with the Word of God

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