

## FACTS > FEELINGS

He was a musician. He was a singer. He was a worship leader. His songs sung by believers all over. His songs sung by generations of worshippers. They are included in the greatest hits of praise of all time. He fathered a long line of singers and musicians with a legacy of worship.

And yet he came to a moment of crisis in his life. He calls it the day of his trouble. He felt that God didn't love him anymore. He felt as though God had turned his back on him. He questioned the very goodness of God.

Feelings are powerful. They can change the course of our lives. They become the lens through which we see everything. They empower us to empathize with other people, and lead us to compassion. However, different kinds of feelings can also make us cruel and callous.

Feelings allow us to experience the most exquisite of pleasures and yet stab us with the sharpest of pains. Science tells us that feelings also affect every other area of our lives – our physical health, our mental health, and I would add to that our spiritual health.

Feelings are often the most powerful force in our lives. Remember though, feelings are God's idea. He created us as emotional beings. He gave us the ability to rejoice and grieve. He gave us both hope and fear. And all feelings have their proper place and in their proper place, they serve us well.

But we are fallen people. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* And sin has touched every part of our being. This includes our feelings and our thinking. Because of our own brokenness, our feelings don't always serve us. They bully us. They force us to do their bidding. They can knock facts out cold and bring the truth trembling to its knees.

We are at the beginning of a series called Greater Than. We are looking at 10 Biblical truths that are greater than what the world tells us, and these are spiritual equations that equal true joy.

The first greater than we want to explore is this: FACTS > FEELINGS. We don't mean this is some coldhearted "facts versus feelings" sort of way. You've perhaps heard the expression "facts don't care about your feelings." And there is a certain truth to that. How you feel about something doesn't change the truth about something.

But some people wield this idea like a weapon. They make you FEEL like your feelings don't matter. But as followers of Jesus we should always wield the truth like a scalpel to heal, and not a sword to wound.

A lot of this is a knee-jerk response to what is going on in our culture where feelings have become the thing that matter more than anything else. You can't ever do anything that might ever offend someone's feelings. Writer Audrey Lorde speaks for many when she says, "Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge." It looks good in a meme, but it's pure

poppycock. Another bit of Instagram wisdom I've seen bouncing around, "Always be true to your feelings because the more you deny what you feel the stronger it becomes."

Do you hear what that's saying? It's saying that feelings must always be listened to. They must always be obeyed. We must always be in tune and in touch with our feelings. That's ludicrous. If I did everything my feelings told me to, I'd be the most selfish monster. Imagine if everyone did everything their feelings told them to?

We can listen to our feelings, but we can't always obey them. We have to learn to control our feelings without them controlling us. This brings us back to FACTS > FEELINGS.

This doesn't mean feelings don't matter, but we have to get them in the right priority. Facts and feelings don't have to be enemies. The problem is our feelings can deeply influence how we see the facts. When our feelings become the primary lens through which we see all the facts, it leads to all sorts of problems.

This is how two different people look at the same set of facts and feel very differently about them. You have a mother and a father. Dad grew up as a star athlete. Went to college on a basketball scholarship. But he married a girl who was hot, but not athletic at all. She was into much more cerebral pursuits. Together they have a son. As he grows, he shows little interest in sports, but is instead drawn the creative arts.

Dad thinks he disguises it, but he can't hide his disappointment. He keeps encouraging his son to at least give sports a try. As hard as he tries, Dad just can't get excited by his son's latest recital. Meanwhile, mom is beaming with pride. She thinks he is the next Mozart and visions of Juilliard dance in her head. Same set of facts, different feelings. Because they have different thoughts about the facts.

### **DAMAGING THOUGHT PATTERNS**

The first step in fixing our facts and feelings imbalance is identifying where our thought patterns have gone wrong. Here are some damaging thought patterns which can cause us to misinterpret the facts, and short circuit our feelings.

#### **Black-or-White Thinking**

One is to see everything in black-or-white categories. Shades of gray do not exist; it's all or nothing. You go into work on Monday and you have a bad meeting. Immediately, you think, "I'm just not cut out for this job. I can't do this. I'm a complete failure."

One evening as you're trying to go to sleep staring at the ceiling a fleeting thought passes through your brain, "What if God doesn't exist?" Immediately, you think, "I'm not a good Christian. A good Christian would never think that. God could never use me." Then this black and white thinking drags down your whole mood.

### **Generalizing**

This is when you paint with a very broad brush. Something bad happens and you convince yourself that's what will happen every time. You ask someone to volunteer for something at work, and they turn you down. You begin to think, "I can't ask anyone to do anything. They will always say, 'no.'" You think of yourself in these broadly general terms. "I always mess things up. I'll never be a good Christian."

We also pigeonhole others in very broad categories. She's a gossip. He's braggart. He's a redneck. She's a soccer mom. It's kind of like highschool where everyone is either a jock, a brain, an emo, a stoner, or a loner.

### **Filtering**

This is where you filter out all evidence to the contrary to see only what you want to see. You may filter out anything positive see only the negative. You get a 90% on exam, or your kid comes home with a 90, and the first thing that you ask or your parent asks, "Why did you miss that 10%?"

This can work the other direction to. A girl starts dating a new guy and she becomes infatuated with him. All of her friends, and coworkers see lots of red flags, and they warn her, "I think he's bad news. You should be careful." But she filters out all the bad signs they see. She cherry picks only the good things she wants to see."

We can employ this kind of tunnel vision on anything, a new job, a house we want to buy, the college we want to attend. It can be very hard to objectively view all the facts, because we filter out the facts we don't want to see, and then get very emotionally bound to our view. And we are not happy with anyone that has a differing perspective.

### **Mind Reading**

No, we're not psychic, but we can absolutely convince ourselves that we know what someone's inner thoughts are about us, just based on one expression as you passed them in the hall. When you passed me in the mall without stopping, I immediately knew it was because you hated me. I heard later that you broke your glasses and were on the way to the optician, but I know better. We presume to know what their secret and hidden motives are, no matter what they say.

### **Telescoping**

Some of us have an amazing telescope in our minds. They can focus on the sins of the distant past and blow them up in size until we feel guilt, condemnation, and fear, even though we have laid them at the foot of the cross. They are forgiven and forgotten except in our own minds. Then when it comes to our present blessings and benefits, we turn the telescope the around, and it shrinks all the good things until they are nearly invisible.

## Perfecting

This is where you pressure yourself to achieve a level of perfect that you can never attain, or sustain. You have an ever-lengthening list of obligations, duties, and goals. You keep striving for the perfect day, the perfect home, the perfect yard, the perfect child, and the perfectly completed to-do list. Of course, this leads to frustration and resentment, because that perfection is never realized. Never satisfied. Never content.

Whether it is one of these negative thought patterns or one we didn't mention, such ways of thinking produce very negative feelings and they cause us to misinterpret the facts. If we always focus on the negative, if we imagine the future is hopeless, believe everyone hates us, or assume we have achieved nothing because we didn't achieve everything, these destructive thought patterns suck us in a dangerous downward spiral.

So, how do we go about renewing these thought patterns to transform our lives? Open your Bibles to Psalm 77. Usually, when we turn to the Psalms, we think of King David, but this is one of the Psalms written by someone else. This is one of 12 Psalms ascribed to Asaph, written either by him, or one of his descendants that were known as the Sons of Asaph.

Asaph was a Levite who ministered at the tabernacle as a musician. When David recaptured the Ark of the Covenant and returned it to Jerusalem, Asaph was among those appointed to "*raise sounds of joy*" on the cymbals. He's the musician I started off the sermon with. He must have been a pretty good percussionist too, because in the very next chapter in 1 Chronicles he is promoted to chief musician. King David commissioned him to be among those who worshipped regularly in the tent that was erected especially for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem. Asaph was again leading in praise when the Temple was dedicated, and Solomon had the Ark brought into the Holy of Holies.

Asaph left a legacy of worship for both his family and all of Israel. One hundred years later when King Jehoshaphat prayed for protection against invading armies, it was one of Asaph's descendants that gave a prophetic word. In another 140 years, during the reign of King Hezekiah, the sons of Asaph helped with the cleansing and consecration of the temple so the worship of God could be restored. In still another 80 years, after the young King Josiah found a long neglected book of the law in the temple, the young king was eager for Israel to celebrate the Passover once again. The singers were the sons of Asaph.

When the Israelites returned from their captivity in Babylon nearly 400 years after the dedication of the temple, among the returnees were 148 singers: the sons of Asaph, and when the foundation of a new temple was laid, it was again the Sons of Asaph who led the worship.

What a man and what a legacy! Singer, musician, worship leader, mentor, and the Bible even calls him a seer – a man of prophetic vision. Surely a man like this has got it all together? Surely, such a man lives has it all together when it comes to his feelings. Not so fast, Consider, Asaph's

experience in Psalm 77. What we're going to do here is walk through a way we can evaluate our thoughts in light of God's word to put our feelings and the facts in the proper perspective.

**Step 1: What are the facts?** We don't know what the exact situation is in Asaph's life is, but we know how Asaph describes it, he describes it as "*the day of my trouble.*" Check out the first three verses:

*I cry aloud to God,  
aloud to God, and he will hear me.  
2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;  
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;  
my soul refuses to be comforted.  
3 When I remember God, I moan;  
when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah*

A day of trouble is a general description that could describe a lot of different life problems. It could be health issues, a spiritual crisis, problems with his kids, an argument with his wife. All of those could be a day of trouble. Whatever it is, we know two things. It's keeping him up at night, and he can't find comfort. You ever have a night like that? He tries to focus his thoughts on God. He tries to meditate, but it's not working.

**STEP 2: What does Asaph think about these facts?** When he considers the troubles in his life, Asaph concludes God used to be good. Verses 5-6, "*I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, 'Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart.'*" Then my spirit made a diligent search."

So, what does Asaph find now? Nothing. Verse 7, "*Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable.*" Asaph believes that God has rejected him, and will no longer bless him. He thinks that God's very character has changed. Vs. 8, "*Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion.*"

This is dark. Asaph thinks God was great in the past (v. 5), but the present is bleak and gloomy (v. 7). He's battling in the trenches with despair. Don't miss this: even the most steadfast believers have days of darkness. It doesn't mean your faith isn't real. It doesn't mean God doesn't love you. Asaph's at a point here where we might not want him leading worship at a small country church let alone the temple. (vv. 7-9). But it's okay if you're at that point. We just don't want you to stay in this place.

**STEP 3: What is Asaph feeling?** We can sum it up this way. He is inconsolably distressed by his trouble (v. 2) and overwhelmingly perplexed when he even thinks of God (v. 3). He feels abandoned by God and pessimistic about ever enjoying God's love and favor again (vv. 7-9).

**STEP 4: Can Asaph change the facts?** Sometimes we have the power to change our situation. We can alter some of the facts affecting our lives. What about Asaph? Does he have any control over his situation? There's no evidence that Asaph could change the facts or that his situation changed. Whatever his situation is, he's stuck with the same set of facts. Does that mean he's stuck with these feelings?

**STEP 5: Can Asaph change the way he thinks about the facts?** You might not be able to change the facts, but you can change how you look at them. Here's where it gets interesting. Notice that Asaph's last complaint or question in verse 9 ends with the word *Selah*. Does anyone remember from several weeks ago what *Selah* means? That's okay, that's why we're reviewing it here. It means pause to reflect, take time to meditate. That's not just an instruction for us, that's for his own soul. He takes time to be quiet, to still his soul and calm down. He begins to reflect and meditate, to think differently about his situation, and when he does that, new thoughts begin to form, transforming his whole perspective and outlook.

In verse 10, he deliberately fixes his thoughts in a new direction, "*I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High God.*" Asaph is saying, "I'm not going to think like this anymore. I'm going to change my thinking." He firmly resolves in the next couple of verses:

*I will remember the deeds of the LORD.  
Yes, I will remember Your wonders of old.  
I will ponder all Your work,  
And meditate on your mighty deeds. (vv. 11-12)*

You want to know why we take time to remember through communion every week? This right here. Asaph is refocusing his thinking on God's powerful acts of providence through the centuries. That's what verses 13 through 20 are all about. Specifically, he notes how God sometimes leads His people through deep waters (v. 19) and sometimes through the wilderness (v. 20), but ultimately He leads them to the promised land (v. 20). This isn't just about thinking better; it's about believing better. It involves thought patterns in the head, but it also involves faith in the heart.

**STEP 6: What is Asaph feeling now?** Judging by Asaph's words in verses 13-20, there's a very different tone in his voice. He no longer questions God's existence, his character, or his providence. Instead his words are filled with praise.

*Who is so great a God as our God?  
You are the God who does wonders;  
You have declared Your strength among the peoples.  
You have with Your arm redeemed Your people. (vv. 13-15)*

Instead of doubt, there is confidence; instead of pessimism, there is optimism; instead of vulnerability, there is security, instead of distress, there is comfort.

The facts of Asaph's life have not changed at all, but his feelings have taken a 180 because, with the help of God's Word, he has changed his thoughts about the facts. We can see similar patterns of spiritual and emotional therapy in Psalms 42 and 43; Job 19; and Habakkuk 3.

You can use these same 6 steps in your own life. 1. What are the facts? 2. What am I thinking about these facts? 3. What am I feeling? 4. Can I change the facts? 5. Can I change my thoughts about these facts? 6. What am I feeling now?

You could also look at it as two movements. How did I get into this mood? Facts, thoughts, and feelings. Then how do I get out of this mood? Facts, thoughts, and feeling. The key is to identify the specific thoughts that drive particular emotions. If I think about loss, I'll be sad. If I think about failure, I'll feel guilty. If I think I'm too thin or too fat, I'll feel embarrassed. But if I think about God's blessings, I'll be thankful; if I think about beauty, I'll be inspired; if I think about God's sovereignty, I'll feel peaceful.

Psalm 77 is 3,000 years old, and yet it gives us the power to change our thoughts and feelings now, no matter what the particular facts of our circumstances are. Check this out. Science has found that 90% of our long-term happiness is not determined by the facts of our circumstances, but how you think about them.

I was listening to a TED talk by Shawn Achor, Harvard professor and author of *The Happiness Advantage*. He says "If I know everything about your external world, I can only predict 10% of your long-term happiness. Ninety percent of your long-term happiness is predicted not by your external world, but the way your brain processes the world." This is something God has been telling us for 3,000 years. That's amazing. You can trust God's word. You can trust that God knows you.

Imagine not having to be led around by your feelings like a fish on a hook. We have the power to change how we feel by changing how we think. Jesus tells us in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The thief has stolen enough of our joy. The thief has killed enough of our hope. The thief has destroyed enough of our peace. I say, enough! Let's live the life our Savior has given us. Believe better. Think better. Feel better. Live better.