



# EMOTIONAL

Managing stress and understanding your feelings to better care for yourself

## Congregation Conversations

It's easy to turn to unhealthy habits in response to stress in our lives. What role do healthy emotions play in experiencing the abundant life God calls us to live?

# Yelling at God

The gifts of rest and peace

BY TRACY HILTS

**H**AVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF yelling at God? Did you hold back from telling God exactly what you were thinking and feeling out of fear you'd be struck by lightning?

Robert was that way. He spent eight months watching as death came nearer to his wife of 48 years. Then, during one of my visits to his home as a hospice chaplain, he was facing the painful decision to put down his very sick dog. Robert asked me, "Why would God make me do this? And what makes it worse is that even now God hasn't let my body shed a tear." Robert shared that he'd been wanting and needing and praying to cry for over two years. I asked Robert if he ever told God how angry and disappointed he was.

Robert said, "I can't say those things *to* God! Wouldn't you know it but lightning would probably strike me."

Robert believed that God was not interested in his true feelings. Robert thought God only wanted obedience and would not tolerate a negative emotional response.

What a joy it was for me to introduce Robert to the Psalms! An entire book—150 chapters strong—filled with its authors questioning God and yelling at God and accusing God of abandonment. Yes, these psalmists also praise, thank and speak hopefully of God, but what I find most comforting is that they are not afraid to bring their deepest emotions into the throne room of the Most High. How did God respond to these heart cries? God made them the Bible's book of worship! Songs! Poems! Hymns! Repeated in God's presence where God savors these emotional expressions as worship! Hear from the worship book of Israel:



“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2).

“Hear my cry, O God;  
listen to my prayer.  
From the end of the earth I call to you,  
when my heart is faint”  
(Psalm 61:1-2).

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me  
(Psalm 139:1-5).

We worship an emotion-knowing, emotion-loving and emotion-honoring God. The Psalms clearly reveal that God wants us to grasp that God knows us and loves us in all our human complexities and calls us to come to God just as we are.

It’s still important to bring our pleasant emotions to God because the Psalms declare God wants to share

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those as well. We usually don’t struggle to share what might be called our “positive” emotions. But God wants us to bring our whole person. Why? When we bring our difficult emotions, God responds with two very powerful gifts—rest and peace.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus offers, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

When stress and the challenges of life weigh us down, Jesus offers to walk our emotional journeys with us to bring the restoration that comes with good rest. This doesn’t mean that our difficult or challenging emotions will go away. In fact, Jesus prepares us for the opposite. In John 16, Jesus tells us

that our walk in the world will be filled with tribulation. However, walking with Jesus will give us access to the courage we need to face each situation.

And here is where we can know the second great gift: peace. Jesus said, “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33).

At the end of my visit with Robert, I prayed for him to know God’s rest and God’s peace. Then Robert began to pray. He thanked God for wanting to know what he was feeling. Then, with his voice cracking he said, “I don’t like this, God. I don’t like this at all.” As Robert’s tears began to flow, I knew I was witnessing a man’s heart writing its own psalm.

And God received his worship.

*Tracy Hilts is a graduate of Biola University and Denver Seminary with an MA in counseling-chaplaincy. She is pursuing her ordination in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She serves as a chaplain with Pikes Peak Hospice and Palliative Care in Colorado Springs, Colorado.*