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Proverbs 23:26

At the Movies: Inside Out

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Proverbs 23:26 New Revised Standard Version

My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.

Inside Out is a movie about the emotions that influence us. We will see joy, sadness, anger, disgust and fear inside the head of 11-year-old Riley, a young girl whose family has just moved from Minnesota to San Francisco. She has left her school and her friends and is pretty upset about it.

MOVIE CLIP – CHAPTER 7

We see the emotions that influence Riley’s life. There is joy, sadness, anger, disgust and fear.

I remember my first church job interview. It was to be the intern pastor at Oak Lawn UMC when I was at student at Perkins School of Theology at SMU. I was meeting with the SPRC committee, like the personnel committee, and one of the people asked me why I was so happy. I was not quite sure how to respond. Was this a trick question? Is it like when you are asked what your faults are and you have to think of something that isn’t really bad, like I work too hard? Or I care too much?

So, I told this person that I didn’t know why I was so happy. I was 22, this was my first church job interview, and I had no idea what he wanted me to say. After the interview, he took me aside and he looked at me very seriously and said, “I wanted you to say because of Jesus.” I said, “Oh, okay.” I don’t know why I am so happy. Sometimes I think it is a defense mechanism or nervousness, but apparently also because of Jesus.

Are we our emotions? We don’t choose whether we feel fearful or angry, it just comes out of us. What we do with our joy, what we do with our sadness, what we do with our anger, our disgust and fear, that is our choice.

Early in the movie Riley’s parents are really stressed. Her dad’s job is in jeopardy and their moving truck is lost somewhere in Texas. Riley’s mom tells her that she has always been their happy little girl. And they need her to be happy. I think Riley’s mom was trying to help, help her be strong, help her focus on the positive, but Riley was really having a hard time and she was sad. And her mom is telling her to stuff her sadness. So Riley tries not to be sad, and as a result that is when her emotions start causing trouble. When we stuff our emotions, that is when we get stuck. Sometimes we need to be sad. We need to be fearful, we need to be angry, we need to be disgusted. If you stuff all those feelings into a closet, there will come a time, completely out of your control, when the closet door flies open and all that ugly comes out.

In the church sometimes we get this idea that we can only be happy. We hear that we need to stop our anger, we need to reject our fear, but our emotions are a gift from our Creator God. When Riley is finally able to cry and to embrace her sadness, then she is able to find peace. In John’s Gospel Jesus is at the Last Supper and he says, “you will weep and mourn but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (16:20-22). I might disagree with Jesus on the childbirth thing, but he does seem to have some insight there. Weeping and mourning and pain.

We aren’t supposed to be happy all of the time. And when we embrace our sadness and our anger and our disgust and our fear, then God is able to help us navigate some of life’s darkest turns.[[1]](#footnote-2) This week I have been listening to a podcast called The Road Back to You and Pastor and writer Nadia Bolz-Weber shared a quote from John Calvin. “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God.” The more we know ourselves, the more we know about God. The more we embrace ourselves, the more we embrace God.[[2]](#footnote-3)

We are going to feel the way that we feel. We don’t choose whether we feel fear or anger, it just comes. But what we do with our feelings is our choice. There will be people who tell us that we shouldn’t feel the way that we feel. They might say don’t be sad when you experience disappointment. They might say don’t be angry when you have been betrayed. They might say don’t be afraid when you don’t know the next way to turn. We might get the idea that being happy is better, so hide your anxiety, hide your sadness, hide your uncertainty, hide your fear. We have to allow ourselves to be who we are. We are broken and blessed. And we can’t do anything for God to love us more or love us less. We don’t have to hide who we are to be loved by God. We don’t have to hide who we are to be more holy before God.

In that podcast Nadia Bolz-Weber said we are sinner and saint, both at the same time. But Christianity isn’t about something we do, it is about something that is done to us. Real spirituality is letting God do for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves. We have to get out of the way so we can open ourselves to God’s redemption and God’s grace because God’s love is here. Underneath our anger, underneath our fear, underneath our sadness and our joy, underneath our personality, we find who we truly are as sons and daughters of God. We are all called to holiness, to having an open heart and pure intentions. All of us.[[3]](#footnote-4)

God doesn’t need us to be happy all the time. If we are sad or unhappy, we aren’t a bad Christian. We don’t have to shove down our sadness or our fear to follow Jesus the Christ. We are going to feel emotions and being a Christian doesn’t mean I always have to have a smile on my face. The Bible tells us to rejoice a lot, but Paul also tells us to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Jesus embraces all of his emotions. Jesus is arguing with the religious leaders of his day in Mark’s Gospel and they are talking about the Sabbath and Jesus looks at the Pharisees with anger and in deep distress at their stubborn hearts (3:5). He is angry. A little later in Mark, Jesus has just fed 4,000 people and the Pharisees ask him for a sign. Jesus in his disgust asks why this generation asks for a sign (8:11)? He is disgusted. At the tomb of Jesus’ friend Lazarus, Jesus wept. Jesus is sad. In Luke 22 Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and he is so full of anxiety and fear and the Bible tells us that sweat is dripping off his body like drops of blood (22:44). Jesus is afraid. In Luke Jesus sends out the disciples and he tells them to go into the world and experience the power of God, and they come back and they share everything they experienced and the Bible tells us Jesus is filled with joy (10:21). Jesus is filled with joy, anger, sadness, disgust, and fear. Jesus embraces them all.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We think that by denying our feeling we are in control. But when we deny our emotions we are denying our dependence on God.[[5]](#footnote-6) To deny our emotions, to deny anger, sadness, joy, disgust, and fear, is to deny a gift from God. Our feelings and emotions are a vital part of our faith. Our emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable.[[6]](#footnote-7)

I visited the VA hospital on Friday and when I called before to find out what room I was going to, the phone message said Welcome to the Dallas VA Medical Center. If you are having a medical or mental health emergency, call 911. If you are having thoughts of suicide, push 7 now and you will be connected with a suicide help line. Before patient information, before the address of the hospital, before anything else, they were concerned about suicide. We try to hide our addictions, we try to hide our financial insecurity, we try to hide when our marriage is failing, but maybe we need to be like the VA hospital message and share what is going on.

“My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26). A parent is trying to help his child walk in the way of life. The Proverb doesn’t say give me your joy, it says give me your heart. We are to live a heart-filled life, and that means that our emotions, our sadness, our fear, our anger, our disgust, our joy, are real and good and holy. It is up to us to do the work to figure out why we feel sad or fear or anger or disgust or joy. We have to do the hard work of working through our grief or our sorrow as we trust in God’s love.

I remember talking with a pastor who had been a pastor his entire life and he was nearing retirement. He told me that after you put your heart out enough times and it is stamped on and hurt, then you are hesitant to put your heart out again. So, we hold onto our vulnerability, we isolate ourselves because we don’t want to get hurt. We are afraid to be our whole selves, and that breaks God’s heart. Sadness, fear, joy, anger, distrust, we are called to give God our whole heart, all that we are, and know that God loves us.[[7]](#footnote-8) The gift of sadness, the gift of fear, the gift of disgust, the gift of joy, the gift of anger. May we take time to love ourselves and to love ourselves well. Remember, the more we embrace ourselves, the more we embrace God. By knowing ourselves, we come to know God.

1. http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/3084 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://theroadbacktoyou.com [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://theroadbacktoyou.com [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Paragraph taken from http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/3084 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/3084 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://ginghamsburg.org/sermons/resources/3084 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Consulted this website: <http://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/pixar/what-parents-can-learn-from-inside-out-about-a-dangerous-mistake-we-make-with-children-s-emotions.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)