

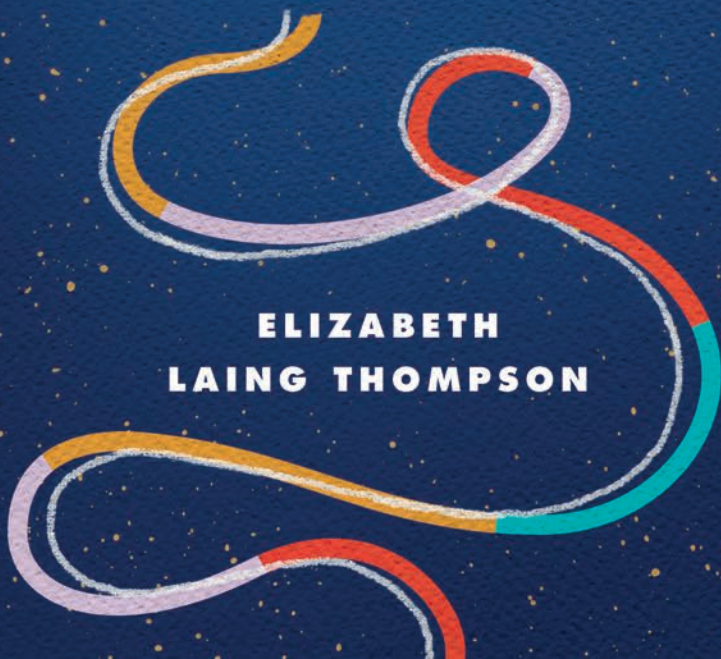


(MOSTLY)

DISCOVER WHY EMOTIONS ARE AWESOME AND

ALL THE FEELS

HOW TO UNTANGLE THEM WHEN THEY'RE NOT



ELIZABETH
LAING THOMPSON

If you've ever felt overwhelmed by your emotions (and who hasn't?), *All the Feels* will help you experience new freedom, joy, and purpose in your emotional life. Elizabeth offers heart-healing hope, delivered in a delightful mix of engaging stories, true confessions, and biblical insights that make you go, "Wow!" Stop letting your emotions get the best of you—and learn how to experience all your emotions in ways that will revolutionize your relationship with yourself, with others, and with God.

KAREN LINAMEN BOUCHARD

Author of *Just Hand Over the Chocolate and No One Will Get Hurt* and other inspirational books for women

Elizabeth Laing Thompson has written an interesting, insightful, and easy-to-read book about a very complex subject. The amount of thought and prayer that she has put into this project is obvious. I highly recommend *All the Feels* to anyone who wants to learn how to identify, process, and manage their emotions in a healthy and righteous manner.

MARY M. SHAPIRO, PHD

Licensed clinical psychologist

Full of laugh-out-loud stories, practical help, Scripture-based prayers, and powerful reflection prompts, *All the Feels* is one of the best books on emotions I have ever read. An experienced "big feeler" and student of the Bible, Elizabeth Laing Thompson will help you identify the type of feeler you are, the blessing to be found in feelings, and how to keep feelings in their proper place in order to live an untangled and authentic life. So whether you roll out the welcome mat to each and every feeling or try to shove them all in a closet, *All the Feels* is a must read!

JENNIFER MARSHALL BLEAKLEY

Author of *Joey* and *Pawverbs*

Dissect any given hour of my day and you'll discover a cornucopia of emotions abounding inside my heart, because *all the things* produce *all the feels* within me. As a result, I often struggle with how to handle my feelings, wondering why God wired me the way he has. But *All the Feels* has helped me untangle the blessedness of all my big emotions by looking at them through the perspective of my bigger God. I no longer believe godliness equates to an emptiness of emotion. I feel because the God who designed me for godliness experiences *all the feels* too. I highly recommend this book for tangled-up hearts everywhere, because Elizabeth Laing Thompson has given us the means to harness our happy and our heartache the way God intended. So enjoy your emotions. Keep feeling all the feels, because our God is doing the same.

TRACY STEEL

Speaker and author of *A Redesigned Life: Uncovering God's Purpose When Life Doesn't Go as Planned*

As someone who has thoughts that overwhelm me and emotions that often overtake me, I found *All the Feels* so uplifting to read! Elizabeth just gets it, and because she knows the struggle firsthand, she is able to provide practical tools along with biblical application in order to help someone like me defeat the battle that often rages within. Her stories will have you saying, "Me too." And her insight will have your heart and mind saying, "Thank you."

ELISHA KEARNS

Blogger, speaker, and founder of Waiting for Baby Bird Ministries

In a world that often tells us our feelings are “too much” or “not enough,” Elizabeth offers a much-needed message infused with encouragement and anchored in God’s Word. You’ll finish this book equipped to live an emotionally engaged life, secure in the knowledge that the Creator of the universe designed your emotions for a purpose, on purpose.

HEIDI MCCAHAN

Inspirational romance author

All the Feels is not just for the big feelers. Elizabeth’s perspectives are transformative in helping us appreciate a new layer of God’s personality through those who feel big. As a steady feeler, I have been woven together by my mom, my son, and my friends who all feel big. *All the Feels* is a practical guide for learning to feel forward and appreciate emotion in ourselves, in others, and in our Father.

LAURA HOPE WHITAKER

Speaker and founder of Java Joy and hopesweethome.com



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**ELIZABETH
LAING THOMPSON**



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PART ONE

HOW SHOULD WE FEEL ABOUT OUR FEELINGS?





CHAPTER 1

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

I still remember the first time I read the phrase “all the feels.” I was scrolling through my Facebook feed, reading comments on a tear-jerker of a poem. A friend had written, “All the feels,” with a series of emojis: laughing, crying, laugh-crying. My heart gave a little hiccup, and I laughed to myself. *All the feels? Welcome to my world.*

Maybe, like me, you are a big feeler. A sensitive soul, you live with all the deep feelings all the time. You are captivated by beauty, devastated by loss. The first to love, the last to leave. When you dive deep (and you always dive deep), you may struggle to swim back to the surface. You live in emotional high-definition, noticing—and mourning—the ugly things of life, seeing—and savoring—every gorgeous detail in the beautiful. For as long as you can remember, you’ve sought to make peace with your powerful feelings, and you long for God to help you sort out your emotional life.

Or maybe you consider yourself a steady feeler: some mood

swings here and there, but most days you stay steady as she goes and avoid major melodrama. But sometimes. Sometimes life grows stormy, faith gets thorny, feelings become unruly—and you need guidance. You wonder how to marry faith and feelings: how to honor God when strong feelings come knocking, how to submit wayward feelings to his ways.

Or maybe you prefer thinking to feeling, and even picking up a book with the word *feel* in the title is already making you twitchy . . . but people keep urging you to “get in touch with your feelings” (go ahead, insert your grunt of protest here), so you’re reading even though you’re kind of in pain. As a reluctant feeler, you’re here to better acquaint yourself with your emotional side—we’re talking handshakes, not hugs—and figure out what role feelings should play in your life, especially your spiritual life.

Big feelers, steady feelers, reluctant feelers—we’ve all got feelings. And no matter how intensely or how often we experience strong feelings, our emotional life is a huge part—a defining part—of our Christian walk. Maybe it has never occurred to us that we can have any say in what we feel, when we feel it, and how long we feel it. Feelings have a mind of their own . . . right? Feelings just do what they do . . . right? Right—that is, unless we learn to take the wheel, giving our emotions some biblical direction and parameters, learning how to feel on purpose.

Figuring out what to do with our emotions—which ones to welcome and how long to let them stay, which ones to limit or avoid, and how in the world to achieve those superhuman feats—is a complex but necessary spiritual skill. One that’s essential to finding happiness and hanging onto holiness.

Me? I’m a big feeler—the word *big* being a laughable understatement. If feelings were weight lifters, mine would be a four-hundred-pound guy named Sven, legs the size of tree trunks, who can pull eighteen-wheelers across parking lots with chains clenched

WHAT KIND OF FEELER ARE YOU?		Almost always	Sometimes	Rarely
1.	I have difficulty separating facts from feelings.			
2.	I am easily overwhelmed.			
3.	People tell me I am too sensitive.			
4.	I experience mood swings.			
5.	I am profoundly moved by beauty or art.			
6.	I feel others' pain as if it were my own.			
7.	I easily put myself in other people's shoes.			
8.	I struggle to shake a mood when it hits.			
9.	Gut feelings and instinct play a role in my decision making.			
10.	I find it easy to connect with God in worship and prayer.			
SUBTOTAL				
TOTAL				

KEY

Almost always = 3
 Sometimes = 2
 Rarely = 1

RESULTS

22+ = big feeler
 15–21 = steady feeler
 10–14 = reluctant feeler

in his teeth. Honestly, I used to wish I'd been wired a little less emotionally. Especially when, as a newlywed, I'd get weepy about something—maybe it was hurt feelings or work stress or the ever-skyrocketing price of cereal, who knows?—and my new husband would look at me with a bewildered but affectionate twinkle in his eye and tease, “I never knew I married a sprinkler!” Ha. Ha. *Ha.* (Please read that laughter with an eye roll.)

What was I supposed to do with fear? With anxiety? With the way I hoped so hard I thought my heart might burst from the wanting? With the way I loved people by flinging my whole heart in, leaving myself wide open to soaring joy—and searing hurt?

What was I supposed to do with insecurity and gratitude and sorrow and loss and envy and anger and ambition and the list goes on forever? It took me half a million years to figure out where all my deep feelings fit into my Christian walk. To realize that our faith is exactly the place—the only place!—to process all our feelings.

As a woman who has lived every day of her life having All The Big Feelings All The Day Long, well—I volunteer to be your go-to feelings girl. Whether you have a sensitive soul with more feelings than you know how to name (much less process), a steady flow of emotions somewhere in the middle, or a logic-minded personality occasionally waylaid by feelings you need help interpreting, this book is for you. We've all got emotions. And we all need to learn how to identify, express, experience, and—yes, sometimes wrangle—our feelings.

In the pages to come you'll find scores of Scriptures and practical tips for how to deal with all the feels (even the kind you never asked for). You're feeling sad? Read on to find Scriptures and Bible-based strategies. You're feeling insecure? Keep reading. Angry? Anxious? Disappointed? Hopeful? Grab a cup of coffee and let's settle in for some conversation on relationships, confidence, and where God fits into that messy mix.

Where do all the Scriptures and strategies in this book come from? From a lifetime spent bringing intense emotions to God and learning—sometimes the hard way (translation: the melodramatic and miserable way)—to submit those emotions to him and his Word.

This isn't just a field for psychologists and doctors with lots of initials behind their names. Emotions are everybody's game. And I'm writing this book *because* I'm not a doctor. Not a psychologist, psychiatrist, or any kind of -ist (although I confess that on dark days I can be a pessimist). I'm just a big feeler with a big love for the Bible, a girl who's spent a lifetime seeking to align her emotional life with—and enrich it with—God's will and ways. Along

the way, I've assembled a stockpile of Scriptures and a toolbox of emotional practices that have made life in Christ—and life in general—better, deeper, and richer. I can't wait to share them with you. Of course, this book is no replacement for professional help. Sometimes we face emotional situations that require more than the pages of a book can offer. If you find yourself in a circumstance that requires additional support, I pray you seek whatever counsel and care you need.

Before we talk more specifically, step with me into a classic example, borrowed from my college years, of what goes on inside this head and heart of mine. Perhaps you'll relate (though for your sake, I hope you relate to a less dramatic degree).

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN THE LIFE OF A BIG FEELER

The student worship night has ended. While all the other college students hang out and have fun in the sanctuary, I've retreated to one of the Sunday school classrooms, the one with the pastel Noah's ark border, trying to catch up on schoolwork. Sitting cross-legged on the carpeted floor, I am a stressed-out island surrounded by a sea of school supplies: battered green backpack, barely-read copy of *The Odyssey*, Greek dictionary, notebooks, flash cards, pens, highlighters. *Behind, behind, I'm so behind.*

Guilt and shame swirl inside, an eddy with tornado potential. *How did I let this happen?* If I'd been reading a little every day like my professors told me to, I wouldn't be eight hundred pages behind and spending precious weekend hours cramming. Fear enters the mix as my old nemesis, Worst-Case Scenario Disorder, rears its ridiculous head: *What if I fail Greek Civ? I've never failed a class in my life, but there's a first time for everything, and if I fail I'm totally wasting Mom and Dad's money, and then they'll pull me out of school and I'll fall apart and lose all hope and ambition and end up scooping ice cream for the rest of my life and—*

“Knock, knock.” My thoughts blink off, momentarily stunned, a squirrel in the street.

The Boy is standing just inside the door. Leaning against the doorframe all casual and *I-know-I’m-cute-so-sue-me*.

My heart does a cartwheel.

Fighting the dopey grin that wants to hijack my mouth whenever he’s around, I spare him a tight-lipped, *no-I-don’t-think-you’re-the-most-beautiful-human-alive smile*, and brace myself: Here’s the part where he flashes me a stiff grin and then rushes off to find the person he was actually looking for.

“Hi,” he says, flashing me a totally not-stiff grin.

“Hi?” I say, then force my eyeballs not to roll. *Why’d you have to tack a question mark onto that “hi,” Elizabeth? Just say hi! Exclamation point!*

Then: *Did he come in here on purpose? Was he looking for me?*

The eddy of feelings reverses direction, a different kind of stress: a swirl of lovesick longing.

Easy with the hoping. He’s probably looking for someone else. He’s always looking for someone else.

I dig into my bag and shove a piece of gum into my mouth, my only resistance against the flood of inane comments trying to bubble up my throat. *Don’t babble, just chew. Ignore him and go back to your books and your angst.*

But then The Boy plops down beside me, folding his mile-long legs up and hugging them to his chest. Settling in for a chat.

We’re sitting alone in a room.

Just the two of us.

I half-choke on my gum, making a horrifying gargly noise, which I try to cover with a cough.

“So . . . whatcha doin’?” he says, and his Georgia drawl does something squirmy to my stomach.

“Oh, you know, berating myself for procrastinating in between

pondering the influence of Greek culture on biblical writers. The usual.” I give what I know is a borderline flirtatious grin, then barely suppress an I-hate-myself groan. *Could you have possibly given a more dorky response, Elizabeth? Now he thinks you’re a vocabulary show-off and a Bible nerd. On top of being a school nerd. So basically, you’re a triple nerd. Not to mention a very bad flirt—and isn’t flirting a sin?* Guilt-tinged worry prods at my conscience.

I duck my head and start shoving my stuff rather violently into my bag. *Must shut this conversation down before more humiliations pile up.* I wait for The Boy to get bored and leave, but he stretches out his legs and leans back on his elbows, like he plans to stay awhile. Confused, I slow down my packing.

He flicks a finger at my imitation Doc Martens. “New boots?”

My cheeks, foul traitors, blaze with pleasure. *He noticed!* “Yep,” I say, trying to affect a casual shrug. “They’re really comfortable. And they were on sale, so . . . yeah.” *Babbling. UGH.*

My eyes dart up to meet his. Usually this is when we both look away—he because he’s waving hello to another football player or sporty girl, me because I’m trying not to let him see me swoon—but tonight he holds my gaze, and I dare to hold his back. His eyes are brown, coffee brown—no, chocolate brown. No, coffee *with* chocolate brown. No matter, I adore both. It must be a sign.

“I like them,” he says, sliding me one of his side-smiles.

“Thanks.” I drop my eyes back to my boots, hoping he doesn’t realize my heart has sprouted wings.

He stretches, yawns. “Well, I guess it’s time to head back to campus.”

“Yeah,” I say. “About that time. Can I still get a ride?”

He smacks my shoulder. “Always.” He winks.

My heart bursts out of my chest and zings around the room in a hallelujah dance. *He said “always”! Like a little promise. We’re totally getting married.*

I shake my head, trying to calm my chaotic thoughts, crush my idiotic hopes. *Don't be a fool, Elizabeth.* I stumble to my feet, fumble my backpack onto my shoulder, and traipse behind him, new boots squeaking, already planning how I'm going to call my best friend, Sara, and spend four hours breaking down every nuance of this four-minute conversation. After that I can get back to my regularly scheduled guilt trip.

Welcome to life with all the feels, all the time.

It took me many years in Christ to get comfortable with the emotional sides of my character—wait, who am I kidding? I don't have a side that *isn't* emotional. It took me ages to realize that as Christians, we can lead our feelings instead of having our feelings always lead us. It took me forever to understand that emotions can be a defining part of who we are, but that each day's emotions don't have to define that day. And what a revelation it was when I realized that my emotional nature—and yours, too, whether you have all the feels, some of the feels, or reluctant feels—is from God.

FEELING IN HIS IMAGE

Feelings and all, God the great Artist made us exactly as he wants us to be. His loving hands knit us together in our mother's womb (see Psalm 139:13)—and our emotional capacity is a precious gift. Made in the image of God, we reflect his nature not just physically, but emotionally. And what a passionate God he is! We feel because *he* feels. We love wildly and give lavishly because *he* shows us how.

In this passage we find a small sample of the multihued emotional palette from which our God paints:

I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD . . .
 yes, the many good things he has done
 for the house of Israel,

according to his compassion and many kindnesses.
He said, “Surely they are my people,
sons who will not be false to me”;
and so he became their Savior.
In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.
Yet they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit.

ISAIAH 63:7-10

In these few lines we glimpse God’s compassion, kindness, devotion, affection, protectiveness, empathy, generosity, distress, mercy, hurt, and grief. If we are sometimes sensitive, our God is infinitely more so. He delights, he dotes, he protects. He mourns, he grieves, he shouts with joy. The universe with all its beauty and danger—sunsets and tsunamis, wildfires and fireflies—reflects the many facets and feelings of our mighty, passionate God. The very skies proclaim his artistry, his lyricism, his love of the poetic and ineffable. Every morning his sunrise sings hallelujah; each night his sunset cries, “Glory.”

We should not be surprised, then, when we are like him, having powerful feelings—some of us some of the time, some of us all of the time. One of my favorite Bible scenes unfolds in Ezra 3. Whenever I read it, I stand riveted—and affirmed. I think, *Here are my people: deep-feeling, wild-dreaming. And here is our God: all-loving, heart-healing.* Years earlier, faithful Israel had been banished into the humiliation of exile. Long years they had languished, homeless and heartsick, their pain compounded by regret and shame, knowing their suffering was a consequence of their

own disobedience. Home was now little more than a memory: Jerusalem, with its festivals, its lavish Temple, its rich history, was gone—all gone. Destroyed. Out of reach.

But finally—finally!—God opened a way for their return, and with slow hands and cautious hearts, they began to rebuild their lives, their nation, their faith. For months the entire community labored together to rebuild the Temple, a home for the God they had once abandoned but were now determined to serve anew. When the foundation of the Temple was complete—the work far from over, but still beautifully begun—they paused the work to celebrate, commemorate:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD:

“He is good;
his love toward Israel endures forever.”

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

EZRA 3:10-13

Can't you see it, hear it, feel it? The sea of people with streaming eyes and shouting mouths, raised arms and bent knees? The cry so loud the distant people could hear? Laughter and wails, cries of sorrow and shouts of triumph all amingle in one cacophonous roar, a howl so earth shaking and heart wrenching it rumbled down into the earth and surged back up through the soles of their feet—up, up—till it set their souls to trembling?

The children of God: home at last, forgiven at last. The lost Temple: rising from ruin, resurrecting hope. The old ones, the ones who remembered the glory of Solomon's Temple—now they looked on with throats clogged and eyes clouded with memories: far-off, sacred, untouchable. And the young ones, the ones who had lived an estranged half-life in a foreign land, knowing their true home only in stories and borrowed memories—now they cast eyes upon and took first steps into a new life, a free future . . . all they had hardly dared to hope and never hoped to touch. Regret and renewal, longing and loss—where does one feeling end and another begin?

Oh, God's people are emotional people, because they love—and are loved by—an emotional God.

If you have always kept your faith in one compartment of your heart and your emotional life in another, get ready for something new. Get ready to bring God to your emotions and your emotions to God—the God who invented feelings and who now welcomes yours.

BEHIND THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART

In the pages ahead, I invite you to throw open the doors of your heart as we explore what God has to say about feelings. And you might be surprised to discover how much God has to say about feelings!

If you feel bored with faith, stiff or distant when you pray; if you secretly feel that your faith doesn't apply to your "real life," perhaps you have never learned how to bring your true feelings to God. Perhaps you never knew you could: *God's got the universe to run. Why would he care that I'm having a bad day? That I'm lonely or anxious? That I'm so happy I'm about to dance with a lamppost and sing in the rain?*

Maybe on Sunday mornings you put your feelings in airplane mode (*I'll deal with you after church*), walk into church all shiny and presentable, and wonder why you don't *feel* anything in worship. Why God feels distant and intimidating, or perhaps vaguely disapproving, like a relative you admire from afar. But then you hear other Christians talk about being "close to God," and you're stumped. "*Close to God?*" *What does that even mean?* It sounds weird . . . but wonderful. When service ends, you walk back out to your car, hoist your emotional burdens back onto your weary shoulders, and wonder what you're missing.

Deep down, we all long for more with God, more from faith. And we all need help with our feelings. In the pages to come, you'll find that God cares deeply about your feelings. If it matters to you, it matters to him. He longs to share your joys, guide your heart, and—most wondrous of gifts—carry your sorrows.

Whether you consider yourself a big feeler, a steady feeler, or a reluctant feeler, in the pages to come you'll find God-centered guidance for your specific emotional needs. First we'll do a drone-style flyover, mapping out the big-picture view. How does God want us to feel about our feelings? What foundational, biblical truths do we need to embrace in order to construct an emotional life that is healthy, happy, and holy? What biblical principles need to undergird our emotional life, giving it stability? And then there are more practical matters: How do we distinguish fact from feeling, and should we trust our feelings? Do we get any choice in which emotions we

experience and how intensely we feel them? Which emotional gifts does God want us to expand, explore, and offer to his service?

From there we'll take a closer look at specific feelings and emotional tendencies that can give us trouble: anxiety, sadness, cynicism, idealism, burden-borrowing, guilt, and more. What does the Bible have to say about these feelings, and what practical tools can we add to our emotional toolbox?

In the final section, we'll consider how our emotions affect our spiritual life, and we'll draw out the spiritual skills every Christian must develop in order to cultivate a healthy emotional-spiritual life. How do our feelings flare up when we read difficult passages in Scripture, and what do we do about that? What emotional pitfalls can we avoid in our relationships, and what strengths can we nurture? What effect does social media have on our emotional-spiritual life? We'll come full circle by envisioning how we can use our emotional makeup and gifts to draw closer to God than we've ever been, and how we might devote our particular temperament to his glory.

* * *

In the pages to come, I pray you will find more happy and learn how to stay holy. I pray you will be inspired by the wondrous possibilities your emotional nature allows. Emboldened to embrace the beautiful soul God dreamed you would be. Equipped with more of the biblical perspectives, practical tools, and scriptural arsenal you need to encourage your faith, protect your joy, and amplify your strengths.

Like me, perhaps you feel excited about the journey to come. Intimidated by the need to grow. Giddy about spiritual discovery. Nervous about diving deeper. Humbled, eager, overwhelmed, inadequate, understood, comforted, valued . . . well, you know. All the feels.

FEELING YOUR WAY FORWARD

At the end of every chapter, you'll find material to help you apply what you've read to your walk with God. The prayer prompts are emotionally rich prayers drawn from Scripture, particularly the Psalms. You can borrow the psalmists' exact words and speak them to God, or you can use them as springboards for prayers of your own. The journal prompts are questions for self-reflection that will help you think about how the principles and practices in this book might apply to your daily life. Even if you don't usually journal, I recommend writing down your answers. The act of moving pen across paper cements truth more deeply into our hearts and memories, and it gives us a record of our thoughts and growth over time.

Prayer Prompt

You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord,
 for I call to you all day long.
 Bring joy to your servant, Lord,
 for I put my trust in you.

You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
 abounding in love to all who call to you.
 Hear my prayer, LORD;
 listen to my cry for mercy.
 When I am in distress, I call to you,
 because you answer me.

PSALM 86:2-7

Journal Prompts

1. What do you most love about your emotional side?
What do you think God most loves about you?
2. What strengths does your emotional disposition give you?
How might you use those gifts to honor God and love people?
3. If you could change one trait about your emotional makeup, what would it be? Why?