

# A BIBLICAL REFLECTION OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH

---

*BASED ON THE DISNEY PIXAR FILM INSIDE OUT*

## FAMILY GUIDE



# introduction

As Christians, we believe each person is created in the image of God and has the unique ability to feel and express emotions. How you think about, experience and behave in response to an emotion can play a key role in defining who you are.

It's not always easy or comfortable to name and discuss our emotions, but it is an important part of cherishing God's gifts and nurturing our well-being.

Emotions can be short-lived or long-lasting. They can motivate you to take action or make decisions. They can help you survive, thrive and avoid danger. If effort is made to understand them, emotions can allow a better understanding of the people we interact with.

The emotional expressions of those around us provide a lot of social information. When we learn to respond appropriately, we can build deeper, more meaningful relationships with family, friends and loved ones. We can also communicate more effectively in a variety of social situations and better reflect Christ in our world.

---

# how to use this guide

---

The Pixar movie *Inside Out* (2015) follows the emotions and experiences of 11-year-old Riley as her family goes through the transition of moving from Minnesota to San Francisco. The film provides a framework to have important discussions with families or other social connections about faith and emotions. This discussion guide can be used as you see fit in your context. You do not have to follow the questions exactly or engage in every section. Rather, it is a tool available for you to encourage natural conversations about emotional health and faith.

## **Family Guide**

The family section can be used with children of any age. It may be helpful to read through and adjust questions based upon the ages of those involved. Consider the developmental levels of younger and older children as they experience new emotions and are learning how to communicate them. We hope you will find value in creating a safe place for conversation and exploration using this tool. While this guide is titled "Family Guide," it can be used in any household structure.

## **Group Guide**

The group section outlines weekly discussions and includes sections on community building, scripture reference, recommended movie clip(s), reflection, guiding questions, at home spiritual practices, closing remarks and prayer. We recommend watching the movie together as a group prior to starting the discussion. Once you complete this study, you might also take it a step further in your community through a sermon series or larger group gathering. Approaching these topics with grace and understanding, for yourself and others, will foster a safe environment and a more positive experience. Some conversations may be uncomfortable, but it helps in remembering we are all children of God created with a full breadth and depth of emotional capabilities. We can reflect and learn together how to process emotions so we can live a full life in community.

# preparation and supplies

## preparation

---

- Parent(s)/Guardian(s): read through and familiarize yourself with the content. As you move through this guide, there are questions supplied as a starting point. We encourage you to adjust the questions to the level of comprehension that fits your family.
- We recommend watching the whole movie together prior to starting the discussion guide.

## supplies

---

- Optional:
  - Pens or pencils.
  - Sheets of paper or journals for notes.
  - Art supplies for creative processing.

# preface

The following sections of emotions, relationships and memories provide an outline for conversations geared towards children. While the conversations can happen in any order, this guide is designed to be most useful after you have watched the movie together.

You can also reference these conversations outside of the discussion, to remind the child about the tools you've learned together. If a child is struggling with verbalizing their feelings, you can remind them: "Hey, remember that time we watched Inside Out? Riley had a tough time telling her parents when she was sad about moving. Are you feeling like Riley?" This will give the child the opportunity to use the tools from this guide and potentially expand on their feelings.

## The Sections

The Background sections are intended to set the stage for you to establish an understanding of the topic categories of emotions, relationships and memories. The same concepts around emotions are also used in the Group Guide to create smoother and more productive conversations. Question Examples provide you a starting point for organizing thoughts or identifying topics, giving a jumping-off point for the discussions that will be most helpful to your household. Finally, the Biblical Reflections provide scriptural context and support to affirm the connection between emotions, faith and how they are lived out in the Christian walk.

# emotions background

Although we experience a range of emotions, Riley primarily experiences five. These key emotions help us understand our shared experiences as humans. An "emotion" is a physiological experience. "Physiological" means that you will feel a physical result of an emotion. For example, when you're scared and your stomach feels like it's in knots, or your hands get sweaty. Emotions are usually reactionary or subconscious, which is why

it's important to know your emotions and how you can react to them(1).

A “feeling” is your conscious awareness of an emotion. So, when you're nervous and your stomach feels bad, your brain recognizes something is wrong and you feel scared because you can feel physically that something different than normal is happening.

You can have multiple emotions from a situation and multiple feelings about each emotion. We can relate to a change or big life moment that might make us sad, angry, or afraid, just as Riley felt at times in the movie. It's not bad to have these emotions, it's healthy and normal. We can celebrate that God created us to have these emotions and feelings, they are a helpful and important part of our life.

## question examples

---

- Riley feels joy when she plays hockey, sees her friends and talks with her family. When are times you feel joy?
- At first Joy didn't understand how Sadness could be helpful to Riley. When can sadness be helpful for you?
- What emotion(s) do you experience the most? Why?
- What emotion do you like the least? Why?
- Riley's Control Panel is led by Joy, Riley's Mom's Control Panel is led by Sadness, Riley's Dad's Control Panel is led by Anger. Which emotion do you think helps lead yours?
- All of Riley's emotions were helpful, even though sometimes they were different. When you are having a different emotion, or more than one emotion, how can that be helpful?
- What are ways you express different emotions? How does that make you feel? How do you think that makes other people feel? How do our emotions impact our relationship with God?
- How did Riley's emotions work together?

1. <https://counseling.online.wfu.edu/blog/difference-feelings-emotions/>

# biblical reflections

---

## JOY

Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

This passage comes from near the end of a larger letter the Apostle Paul wrote to his fellow Christians in Galatia. He is trying to let them know there is a chance for them to live differently as disciples of Jesus. Instead of fighting about this or that or trying to prove themselves by doing something, they should welcome the grace and freedom given to them through Jesus and look to serve each other “humbly in love.” As you do so, your faith will be reflected on the outside just as good fruit is produced from a tree with good roots, leaves, and branches. The fruit you will produce is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul argues this is all rooted in God’s extravagant grace (love and mercy) as we seek to serve humbly and walk faithfully.

## ANGER

James 1:19-20: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

James makes it clear that our actions, when taken in anger, do not produce the results that God desires in our lives or lives of others. Instead, James calls us to be slow to speak and quick to listen. It’s easy to become absorbed within our emotion and forget to connect with the other person or to listen. Throughout Scripture there is high value placed on our relationships with other people. In fact, when asked about the most important commandment, Jesus replies a variation of “Love God, love your neighbor, and love yourself.” James offers us that listening should be the primary posture of the Christian life. This doesn’t mean we can’t feel angry at times. What we can do is allow our faith to act in the moment, so we are reflecting God. We are trusting God is in control, loves us and is good.

## *FEAR*

Read Matthew 25: 14-30:

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”



## *FEAR*

This passage compares the kingdom of heaven to three servants of a wealthy master. While the master was going to be away for a while, he trusted the servants with his money and ordered them to do business. The servants knew the master would return, but they did not know exactly when. The first two servants went to work and doubled their money, but the third buried his in the ground out of fear that he would fail and upset the master. He wanted to protect himself. When the master returns, he praises the first two servants for using their abilities and is disappointed in the third servant for not doing anything. Jesus shares this story with his disciples to prepare them for the times when their faith will be tested, to illustrate that you can be bold with your faith in Christ.

One lesson from the story is to teach the disciples to show their faithfulness to the Lord and fight their own fears as they await God's return.

## *DISGUST*

John 2:13-16: "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!'"

Other notable passages- Malachi 3:6-12; Matthew 23:37-39; Revelation 3:15-16.

This passage takes place in Jerusalem where people traveled great distances to participate in sacrifices and religious ceremonies. Merchants, money traders, and lenders would set up shop here and charge unfair prices, thus taking advantage of people.

## *DISGUST*

This passage illustrates Jesus' moral disgust for their actions of seeking profit rather than teaching people about God. Jesus' disgust overlaps with other emotions like anger, disappointment and frustration. As disgust plays out in this example, it shows us how Jesus is frustrated that people aren't getting to see God's pursuant love and faithfulness in the temple.

## *SADNESS*

John 11:35: "Jesus wept."

Jesus has left Jerusalem to avoid unfriendly religious leaders. While gone, he receives word that his friend Lazarus is sick. Before Jesus returns, Lazarus dies. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, are sad about his death and upset that Jesus did not come sooner. But God is ready and wants to overcome death, sin and sickness. Although Jesus is about to perform a miracle and raise Lazarus from the dead, he still weeps. He weeps for seeing the sisters in pain and for the human loss he is seeing. Jesus expresses empathy for the sisters, recognizing their current emotions before going on to heal Lazarus.

# relationships background

---

Each one of us is created uniquely in the image of God. We have different life experiences, personality traits, and different emotions and feelings each day. As we are in relationship with other people, these differences can sometimes create challenges, especially if we are not in tune with our emotions and responses.

We can work to understand our differences and improve the way we communicate so we can have strong relationships. When we allow God to be present and guide our relationships, we can experience things like honesty, loyalty and compassion.

# question examples

---

- Why is it hard for Riley to tell her parents how she is feeling?
- Why did Riley get upset when she was talking to her friend from Minnesota on the video call?
- When you disagree with family or friends, what is a way you can still show God's love?
- Why was Bing Bong sad when the rocket got put into the Memory Dump?
- What are your Islands of Personality? (What makes you you?)
- Where does God live in your islands?
- What personality traits show Christ lives in your heart?
- What is a personality trait you like about a family member or friend?
- What did you learn from Riley's experience with loss (losing her old home and friends)? How was her life transformed when she talked to her parents?

# biblical reflections

---

Ephesians 4: 2-3, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

In the early part of Ephesians 4, Paul is describing Christian unity. God's grace (love and mercy) is offered to all. We are called to be humble, just as Jesus was. We are called to be gentle, one of the fruit of the Spirit. In doing so, we can avoid unnecessary arguments. We should exhibit patience and show love to one another. In this case, love means doing something that can benefit someone else.

# memories background

---

The glowing balls in the movie were Riley's core memories. The color they glowed represented the emotion related to that experience. Many of Riley's memories were yellow because they were rooted in joy, like playing hockey with her mom and dad. But her memory of trying broccoli was green because her body responded with disgust. Riley did not remember all her memories though, some of them were sent to the Memory Dump. It would be really overwhelming if we tried to remember all our memories. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Medical Institute (2017) found that when our memories relate to a heightened emotion like joy, anger, or fear, it is more likely that we will keep that memory.

# question examples

---

- How are the glowing balls, the "core memories" made?
- What are some memories you treasure? Why do you think those memories stand out? What emotion do you feel when you think about that memory?
- What are some of the core memories that shaped your family members' or friends' personalities?

# biblical reflections

---

Luke 2:19: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Although Mary had faced challenges being pregnant and unwed, she did not waver in her faith in God. She remembered what the angel had told her and what God had promised in her son. The idea of treasuring is preserving something from being lost. God gives us memories so we can treasure each day.

# conclusion

---

When we reflect on the power of emotions, even as adults, it's important to have safe places to name and process our body's response. Likewise, it's important children have safe and trusted places to do the same.

In a safe environment they can learn emotions aren't bad and that it's their responsibility to learn how to identify and react to their emotions and feelings.

Remember, adults, you are not alone in providing the safe place. There are many organizations and websites that provide resources to help you have these conversations on your own or with a professional.

Here are examples of reminders you could share with children to create a safe place:

- You can tell me (us) anything you are feeling at any time.
- Emotions alone are not bad, but how we handle them is important. We should want our behaviors to reflect the person we want to be in Christ.
- If any of us is not handling our emotions in a way that honors God, we will respectfully help each other find a healthier way.
- Although we can feel a variety of emotions, we want joy in God's love to be what we feel most often.

# resources

## [www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/parents-caregivers](http://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/parents-caregivers)

Provides access to U.S. government mental health and mental health topics information.

## [www.apa.org/topics/emotions](http://www.apa.org/topics/emotions)

This site has articles about emotional health, other mental health topics, and information about referrals for therapy or counseling in your area. The American Psychological Association is a professional organization of psychologists.

## [www.mhanational.org/what-every-child-needs-good-mental-health](http://www.mhanational.org/what-every-child-needs-good-mental-health)

Mental Health America is a community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and to promoting the overall mental health of everyone.

## [www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/games-skillbuilders/social-emotional-activities-for-children](http://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/games-skillbuilders/social-emotional-activities-for-children)

5 social-emotional activities for children to learn to manage their emotions and work on social skills

### **Books to check out:**

- How Full is Your Bucket for Kids: By Tom Rath (available at Wal-Mart, Target, Amazon, Christianbook.com)
- Big Feelings, Bigger God: By Michele Howe (available at Wal-Mart, Christianbook.com)

### **Activities for children to practice mindfulness:**

- Square Breath: A square breath is a breath that is even on all sides, and it can be useful as a mindfulness exercise for both you and your child. Here is what to do:
  - Breathe in, to the count of four.
  - Hold the breath for four seconds.
  - Breathe out to the count of four.
  - Wait for four seconds before taking in your next breath.
  - To help your child keep track, show them how to draw a square in the air with their finger, taking four seconds on each side.

# resources

- Balancing on One Foot: This exercise is for children three and up, and all you need for it is your body! Here is what to do:
  - Tell your child to focus their gaze slightly below eye level.
  - Tell them to stand on one leg and keep gaze fixed on that focal point.
  - Challenge them to see how long they can stand on one leg like this.
  - Tell them to try the other leg.
  - Challenge them to stay focused while you engage them in conversation, ask them to sing a song, or to close their eyes.
  - This is a simple game that can help your child develop focus and improve r body awareness as well as give a chance to practice mindfulness.
- Mindful Word: This exercise instructs you to choose a word that connects back to mindfulness and use it as an anchor to keep you present, calm, and collected. Teenagers should find it easy to follow and helpful in supporting their mindfulness. Here are the steps:
  - Think of a word that seems calm or soothing to you, like “peace,” “love,” “sunlight,” or “calm.”
  - Think the word to yourself, saying it silently in your own mind. Say it again as you breathe, once when you breathe in and once when you breathe out. Stay focused on the word.
  - If/when your mind begins to wander, gently bring it back to your word.
  - Challenge yourself to do this for one minute. If that seems too easy, try five minutes!

More resources at <https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-kids/>.