



Check the Gauges

Part 2 – The Emotional Gauge

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If you're new jumping in on this series with us, we are in a series called Check the Gauges. We're looking at five gauges for our wellness and how it ties to ministry effectiveness. We believe at this church that every member is a minister, and we believe to be healthy means you are going to effectively minister.

Last week, we looked at the first gauge, the physical gauge. Today we are talking about the emotional gauge. We're going to talk about emotional exhaustion, we're going to talk about emotional flooding, emotional safety. My prayer is that you and I would learn a new spiritual discipline today that we take into our lives because we have become very good, as a culture, at venting, whining, and complaining. We do it online, we do it in relationships, and it actually has a lot of negative affect, and can cause damage to a relationship. We're not looking at a discipline called venting. Today we're looking at the biblical practice of lamenting. And in our worship... I'm encouraged lately to see more worship songs coming out where yes, we pour out our heart to the Lord, we pour out pain that we are experiencing in life, but we always end it with a confession of trust of who God is and what he has done.

We've been looking at these gauges. Last week we looked at the physical gauge. I know there are some of you in here right now that this emotional gauge (battery) right here and where we have the red line represents where your heart and soul is at this very moment. You're depleted, you're exhausted, and you know you're not getting your best sleep because of it. And the physical and emotional gauges work and are linked together. Some of you are depleted emotionally and tonight, because of that, you'll get online and start online shopping and creating a financial crisis. So, come back next week. We're going to talk about why we need some reserve in the tank and to be healthy financially, so we can be better stewards and we can give more to what God is doing in our community and in our families and around the world. And you know that emotional exhaustion/depletion has led to relationship strife. And then we are going to end the last week with our spiritual gauge.

Mental health experts say, especially in the last three years, there is a lot of exhaustion among all the trades, among all the professions, among all the jobs and careers. But they've listed the five professions at greatest risk for emotional exhaustion.

Teachers – At the top of the list is educators, our teachers. We know what you've been going through the last few years and the exhaustion and how your soul may feel depleted today.

Social workers – The work they do for families in communities, trying to meet physical needs, emotional needs, financial needs.

First Responders – if you think about all that it already takes to work as a first responder in a community, now add to that the disrespect of the last few years.

Physicians – They've been overloaded. Every doctor I talk to, every nurse I talk to, EMTs that I talk to in our church, they're just overloaded and you know that when you call and try to get an appointment. The other day, I had a friend say he tried to get an MRI. It was scheduled four months out, so you know the hospitals are overloaded, so there's that exhaustion.

Financial Managers

I was a little frustrated that pastor didn't make the list.

But whatever your job, whatever your career, whatever your family status is right now... I'm thinking about a lot of students that have returned to the Ozarks in programs and college. Many of you are dealing with homesickness right now. I'm with you. Three weeks ago, I dropped my son off at Liberty university, and I'm feeling it too. I have to remind you part of the Christian life is that joy and sorrow are travel companions. I think we understand what it means to travel with both of those. So, you've got the joy of a new season starting and it's exciting, but then you have the sadness of missing friends and family. You have the sadness of another chapter closing.

I called my son the other day and this is how he answered the phone. When I said "Hey, Carson, He goes, "Whatup pimp." What are you learning at Liberty? He goes, "Dad, it's a term of affection." So now, I guess, I end my calls with, "See ya, Carson," and then I text him, "Love Pimp Daddy. I don't know how to have the conversation. I don't know if he's trying to make me miss him less. I have no idea what's going on.

But what are some of the causes of emotional exhaustion? **Trauma** – something from your past that you have carried with you. You are 0% percent to blame for what happened to you, but you are 100% responsible for your healing and treatment of other people. That emotional exhaustion has led to sleeplessness. You don't get a good night's sleep and the tank is still depleted when you wake up.

There's been a **financial crisis**. For some of you the interest rates going back up to 7% or 8% and you've tried to sell a house. You're wanting to buy a new house. I talked to people all the time that move to the Ozarks. They can't find a place here. Some of you are going through a separation or divorce, and you wake up every day completely and totally depleted.

The pandemic... We don't talk about this enough and I know some of you want it to be over, never to be discussed again, but it did take a toll on us, individually, as a church, and as a nation. We are still feeling the effects of it in the workplace. Some of you **received diagnosis**. You were fine, so now you're trying to figure out what you are going to do next? "How is my family going to be prepared for the future if something happens to me?"

Some of you have a **new baby**. You get new baby exhaustion. I encourage you to lean into grandparents and friends for this level of exhaustion. **School** – Some of you are now taking on school and deadlines and you're starting to feel that.

What are the symptoms of these? The symptoms are anxiety and depression. That's why I love the anthem we sang today – *I speak Jesus over my family. I speak Jesus over all anxiety, fear, depression.* We looked at this last week from Paul to Timothy, that the physical effects of all of this exhaustion on you. Stomach aches is what young Timothy had dealing with the pressures of ministry. Headaches – some of you, when you're feeling all of that and all those causes, lack of motivation, commitment, or just moodiness.

I want to start today with a primer. If you've been at our church for a number of years, you know we are not afraid to talk about the heart. I didn't grow up in a church that talked about the heart. My church never talked about it. We were all Bible, we were all truth, and with anything we were feeling, you were just supposed to stuff that, not discuss it. Definitely don't be led by it, don't allow it to make decisions for your life, and all that.

So, we're not afraid of it. But here's what we know about the heart.

1. Jesus is my source of life, and I am called in Matthew 22: 37 – Love the Lord your God with all of your heart. When we come to worship, worship should stir your affections. Worship music makes us emotional. That's okay. As we are going to see today in the Lament Psalm, Psalm 13, as it was read already by Mandy. We should have our emotions heard, but emotions should be stirred for Christ and toward Christ. So, we're not afraid to speak about the heart with all of your soul and with all of your mind.

And we know He's our true and only source of life. We say it around here all the time. Jesus is your source, Satan is your enemy. Do you want to experience high levels of relationship satisfaction and marriage satisfaction? Never treat the other person like the source or the enemy. 1John 4: 16 says, **¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.** We want to be as full of God's love. I want your emotional tank to be all the way to full. We said it last week and we are going to say it all five weeks. Even if you are not feeling that right now, you're not toward that right now, that you will leave out of here today or at the end of this series and at least have a plan for it. What does it mean for you to know and rely on the love God has for you? We are going to see that clearly today in the Lament Psalm.

2. My words and actions reveal what is in my heart. Proverbs 4: 23 says, ***Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*** It is the wellspring of life.

We went through a pandemic, and it's true of any crisis – financial crisis, a divorce, anything that hits your life – whatever is coming out of you reveals what's in there. So, we know that is my words and actions. It's the source of all that.

3. My heart is where my time and money are. You've heard it said, if you want to know what someone is passionate about, look at their bank account. See where their money goes.

Johnny said, "Mine doesn't go towards clothes. Matthew 6:21 – **21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** Here's the bottom line. We're not afraid of our emotions, but I don't want to be controlled by my emotions. That's the difference. A word picture that we use at our church is what we call the US Bus – the sources, the influences of decision making in our life. We say at Woodland Hills Family Church that we always have scripture driving the bus... period. There are a lot of other passengers, and they make good passengers, but they make terrible drivers. Tradition is good. We can honor tradition, we just don't allow tradition to drive the bus. We don't put tradition and scripture in the driver's seat together as some churches do. Some churches get very passionate about their application of scripture, turn it into tradition, and then they preach it as though it's the scripture.

We can have it in the front seat, we just don't allow it to drive because ultimately, the driver determines where we end up. Your experience – I can learn from your story, but your story never becomes my authority. I can learn a lot of great lessons that are not going to drive my bus. Reason – my mind's ability to work through things. Here's emotion... Kari Brawner said this morning, "Yeah, my emotion is in the back seat, lying down, taking a nap." Emotion is on the bus. We are not afraid of it. But here's the bottom line with our emotions. We listen to, express, and care for them, but we never allow them to drive the bus. We never allow them to make major decisions for us.

You've been in that moment where you've been overwhelmed because of your emotional exhaustion. The Gottman institute has studied over 40,000 couples over the last several decades in what they call the Love Lab. They bring these couples in, and they don't counsel them, they just watch them fight. Could you imagine that job every day. "What are you doing today, honey?" "Got six couples to watch fight." You come back full at the end of the day.

Here is what they describe as emotional flooding. *"Emotional flooding is when your body has a physical and psychological reaction."* You are overwhelmed when you are emotionally flooded in a conflict. You don't know what to do, you don't know what to say. We even call this a trigger. Your body senses danger during a conflict and this is when your fight or flight kicks in. You're just overwhelmed. I'm telling you, emotional flooding is easier, it happens quicker, when you are emotionally exhausted or depleted.

They go on to say, *"Your heart races, you feel out of breath, your jaw or muscles clench, so your body tightens up. You have a hard time hearing your spouse or friend or family member. You struggle to focus on anything outside of your own racing thoughts. You want to scream and say negative things, run away or ignore your spouse. You might say things you don't mean."* This is when we are emotionally exhausted and emotionally flooded. You've experienced this. And really, a loving and caring person observing that in you will shut down the conversation. The Gottmans say, *"We have a number one rule in our marriage and it's simply we never fight when emotionally flooded."* All it's going to do is cause damage to the relationship.

Can I just add this in. We are emotionally flooding ourselves with social media. We're not meant to take it in. Amy and I were talking about it yesterday. She said something that I wrote down. I've been carrying this notebook, taking notes. I was on the phone with her. I was in Florida, and she was here in Branson. There was a moment I paused and guess it was a long pause because she asked, "Are you listening?" I said, "Not only am I listening, I am taking notes." Checkmate. I got this one.

This is what she said. “You and I are not wired emotionally to know what’s going on in every country, city, church, and family in the world at all times.” I just need you to know that. You do not have the capacity for that. It is emotionally flooding us. We get online and we see the people that are venting, whining, and complaining. Every time I see it, I’m like, “ouch, that person has a spouse.” Ouch that person has co-workers and bosses and family members. Are they hearing that all day?” Listen, you think venting is helping. But what we are going to see today is lamenting. Lamenting is where you and I want to go. The Gottmans say, “Everyone has their own built-in meter that measures how much negativity and fear they can take in at a single moment.” And I guarantee you, in your closest relationships, yours is different than the person you are in the relationship with. And if you want to be a loving, caring person, notice that in the other person. When they just don’t know what to say, they don’t know how to respond, they clam up. It says, When it becomes too much, the nervous system goes into overdrive, and we essentially enter fight or flight mode.

So, what can you and I, as believers, do when we are overwhelmed, flooded, exhausted, depleted? We don’t know where to go, we don’t know what to say. We are going to turn to our heavenly father in lament. I love studying the lament Psalms. They have this basic outline. So, this is just a basic structure of a Lament Psalm. **1) The Lord seems distant** – “When I pray, I don’t feel like anything is happening and my prayers aren’t being heard.” We are going to look at that. **2) My heart aches** – “I’m in pain. I have deep sorrow. This is not a comfortable time for me. The trial, the affliction, the turmoil that I’m in, I’m just hurting.” **3) The enemy is winning** – “And the bottom line is people coming against me seem to me winning.” And it goes back to, “I’ll just say it. “God, you don’t care.” Some of you are like, “Can we have this tone with God?” We are going to see how in psalm 13 today. **4) I will trust God’s loyal love.** The key with the Lament Psalm is to end it with a confession of trust. Pour out your soul in the confession of trust.

So, for the people you read in blogs or online talking about worship music becoming too touchy/feely, there is nothing wrong with expressing deep pain or emotion in worship, so long as it leads to a confession of trust of who God is and the promises he has made to us.

So, let’s jump into Psalm 13. The question – **1 How long, Lord?** Some of you are asking that right now. This relationship crisis, this marriage crisis has been going on for years. How much longer?” We’ve looked at this a lot. This we know, this is a promise of God if you're writing promises down. It’s only going to be for a little while. And do you know what we mean by a little while? It’s only ever going to be in this lifetime. It’ll never follow you into eternity. You're like, “That could be years.” It could be, but that’s a little while. The answer you’ve been crying out for. We want immediate. We know that when we pray, “This is pain. I want it gone right now, immediately. How long, Lord, are you going to make me put up with this? How long do I have to deal with this pain How long do I have to go through these treatments.”

I have a friend that went through cancer treatments for over 22 years. And I watched God work in this man’s life. And he was probably one of the most gentle, kind, loving, followers of Jesus I’ve ever met. It’s a hard truth to remember that God cares far more about my character than he does my comfort. We want comfort and we say, “God doesn’t want you to go through this.” You hear people say that all the time. But in the Lament Psalms it says, **...Will you forget me forever?** Is this just going to go on forever? **How long will you hide your face from me?** ... Distant, angry, we believe God is. **2 How long**

must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? You know I'm standing for you and I'm standing on your truth, and you know what's coming against me. You don't want this for me. I just hope you see these are all questions. ***3 Look on me and answer, Lord my God.*** That's strong. I don't know what your prayer life looks like, but I can know from many of you in here, this is your prayer life. "Dear Jesus, thank you for this food. In Jesus name, amen." And that's it. I want to encourage you. I want to implore you to go deep in your prayer life this week and start with lament. I've been carrying this journal. I do everything in this journal. I write notes, people say things to me, people catch me after service, and I write it down. And when I'm going through difficult situations... Something hit me a few weeks ago. I felt something I had never felt before so I'm trying to journal, trying to figure out okay what am I feeling? Then all of that can be prayers to my Father in Heaven. And I can get passionate about it. And I can repeat myself. When it's just me and the Lord, I can pour myself out.

Some of you are like, "I usually just ask for some things, say thank you for what I have, and say amen. I'm going to encourage you to go deeper. I want you to pour out your heart on paper this week, and then pray it. If you're dealing with homesickness, write it down. I can write down next to homesickness numb, sad, helpless, I fear missing out – that's an emotion. I can write all that down and then I can express that. And as I'm praying, if more comes to mind, just get that out there.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. And here's the confession of trust. We've just seen the enemy is winning, I am hurting, God why aren't you doing anything about this. ***5 But I trust in your unfailing love...*** Here's his loyal love. ***...my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.***

And we just sang it. "All my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good." Even when it has been difficult and painful. Write down next to those feelings, when else have I felt this and go back 10 years, go back 5 years, go back 3 years and see how God has been good to you at other times when you felt the exact same thing. And here's the key. Will you trust, rejoice, and sing in the middle of it or are you going to wait until the end of it? because the confession of trust in a lament prayer is I'm going to trust, rejoice, and sing now, in the middle of it. The pain I'm in right now, I'm turning up the car radio, I'm turning up whatever worship song I have playing, I'm turning it up, I'm singing it now, before the victory ever comes. I'm singing it now while my enemy is winning. I am singing it now while I'm in deep sorrow and pain. Why? Because I can go through times of deep sorrow and have joy in the Lord at the exact same time. Follower of Jesus, get this. Joy and sorrow go together. They are travel companions. And when you lament, you're pouring out before your Father in Heaven.

So, the bottom line is this. We need less venting and more lamenting. Get off all the crazy websites that you're on where people are just complaining about our town and get on Crisco the Table Rock goat. I'm not kidding. Some of you are like what's the goat? Greatest of all time? No, it's a literal goat. It's a white goat that lives on a bluff. I go out just to see the goat. And nobody's mad on the Crisco Goat sight. If they are, we're kicking them off. You think venting is helping. No, follower of Jesus, we need more lamenting.

When my daughter was 12 or 13 and having struggles at school... I think parents will relate to this. She would come home and share something she said to so and so or something that happened, and she was expressing to me. And there was so much passion, so much energy in it that Amy and I would sit there and listen and be like, "Did you say this to that person?" "Did you actually talk to your teacher that way?" And Corynn would say, "No, dad. I'm saying this to you. Why? Because she felt safe with me. She had emotional safety with me. You have that with your Father in Heaven.

Focus on the Family did a study on a thousand couples, asking them about emotional safety, and here were some of the answers that they shared. "I want to be accepted." "I want to feel relaxed, comfortable." "I want to be able to open up fully to give and receive" "I want to feel valued, understood." "I want to live in an atmosphere of open communication. "I want to know my spouse is trustworthy." "Have my flaws accepted as part of the whole package – the imperfections."

Let me tell you, I want safety in our home that my daughter could share with me knowing this is where she's sharing it. We're processing it together because she feels safe. I want that for each one of you this week to begin to lament whatever the pain is, pour it out. Here's the key. Your willingness, desire, level to which you can pour out your sorrow and pain to the Lord is tied directly to what you think about him. It's tied directly to who you think he is. It's tied directly to the promises he's made.

In the book, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, here's a lament definition. *It's a prayer of pain that leads to trust.* And that's the purpose. It's not just venting. It's not just pouring out our sadness and sorrow and taking it to the Lord.

Pastor Rob Brockman puts it this way. *"Lament is the wailing of the heart before a God who hears, who listens, and who responds to our cries."* – Rob Brockman

This is not "Dear Jesus, thank you for this food in your name, amen." This is "I am in pain. Hear me. How long am I going to have to deal with this." You don't need to worry about your Father in Heaven hearing that cry and be like, "I can't believe you're talking to me that way." It's like, "Son, I hear you. Daughter, I hear you. I love you. I know this is difficult and here's a promise. I will be with you through it all. I'm not going anywhere. I know it's not easy."

Sue Head says it all the time at CofO, and you've heard me quote it time and time again. Talking to parents of incoming freshman. Your children will struggle. Let them. I always add to it that it will be hard to watch. It's hard. It's not easy. And I know the struggle. I know my son is going through the homesickness being 14 hours away. I just know it's a part of life, right? Part of God growing his character. And I can have great joy thinking about that and at the same time I can be sad. And that's alright. I'm just done with the "How's it going?" "Awesome!" Nah, I encourage you this week that when someone asks you how it's going, don't get into your life's story because they'll stop asking you. When they say how's it going? Go, "It's pretty rough but we'll get through it. We have to stop with the fakey, fakey Christianity. Your cliché Christianity ain't helping anybody. God hears your cries.

What you think about God determines your approach to him. This is so key. Pastor Brockman goes on to say this: *"Lament is a form of praise and prayer with the intent of growing close to God in times of great suffering and pain. It ultimately is a wonderful gift to the children of God because it presupposes a*

relationship with God and depends on it. Only those who can approach God in a covenantal relationship are able to lament because lament is pleading with God to act in accordance with his character and promises to us. The mere fact that we are able to approach God in lament is a sign of intimacy and hope.” And that’s why our worship must move from what we feel about ourselves. That’s great; we can have that in our worship music, but it has to end with what we know to be true about God. Our confession of trust.

AW Tozer put it this way. “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. – AW Tozer

Louie Giglio talks about this. He talks about all the different pictures people have of God. Some people think God is like grandpa – just this cuddly guy you jump up in his lap. He says a few nice things and then your off back to your parents’ house.

Some of us have the ATM God attitude – I go to God when I need something.

Some people see God as the “No” God – he’s a cosmic killjoy, just out to take all my fun.

Some see God as the “Good buddy” – he just wants me to have fun. He just wants me to sail through life. And he’s just there to walk with me in the sand.

Score keeper God. – “He’s going to get me.” And it’s good and bad. “Hopefully when I get to the other side...” “I hope when I get there in the end, my good outweighs my bad.”

That’s not how it works at all. For it is by grace you are saved through faith; it’s not of your works so that you can’t boast about it. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Some of you still have the Stained-glass God – he is just somewhere in a building, so you have to go to a place, and this is where we worship. Worship is more than a day of the week. What we did today – worshiping together corporately, it’s more than just a gathering once a week in a building. You take this with you throughout the week. And I hope you add lament to your worship.

My emotional health requires a regular checkup on what I believe about God and the voices surrounding me. Some of you know the quality of this emotional gauge. Some of you are depleted because you hang around the wrong people, the people that join in on your venting and the venting isn’t getting something off your chest, it’s just making it worse because those people jump in and add to it, and you leave depleted. You know this. You go to bed at night after scrolling social media for an hour or two and you’re depleted. You’re not filled, you’re not recharged. What I believe about God and the people reminding me of it.

I asked you to read through first and second Timothy as homework. Some of you thought we were going to cover all 10 chapters today. But I wanted you to see in there the struggles, the leadership struggles, the challenged that come in the church, then in Ephesus and today in Branson and around the country and around the world. That’s why Paul was saying, “I want you to be healthy.

You need to be well do you can minister well. The resource challenges, the people challenges, all that is going to drain you.

In 2 Timothy 1: 5-6 we read **5 I am reminded** (This is Paul to Timothy) **of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice...** Meaning you have a legacy that's been passed onto you. They taught you the scriptures. For them, Scripture was in the driver's seat. You keep scripture in the driver's seat. You continue to preach the word. You don't back away from it. **...and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.**

Remember your calling. Some of you are really going through it right now. As you lament, let me picture a special future for you. Be reminded of your calling. Students who are just getting started right now in Branson, you're on the front end. And there are going to be times when you question everything. Remember the God who called you here. Remember the God who called you to what you are doing now. Don't quit. Be resilient to it. Bounce back from the professor who says something you don't like or the rule that you don't care for. Bounce back from it. I love when Paul says this and I will end with this. **You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** -2 Timothy 2:1

I have a lot of favorite hymns. I sing hymns very loudly as I drive down the road. And one of my favorite Baptist hymns... Do we have any recovering Baptists in the room? Make some noise recovering Baptists. You'll know this one.

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace... This is what Amy and I pray every single night before our head hits the pillow – Peace of heart and mind. Because we know what's coming the next day. I know what's coming for you the next day. Father, "Peace of Heart and mind." *...we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

Good lament. Good reminder of lament. It's not what a friend we have in Facebook. It's what a friend you have in Jesus, who walks alongside you and carries you through it all. I hope you pour out your heart to him this week. I hope you write it down first. Write down everything you're feeling – the pain, the sorrow, the difficulties – and cry out.

Maybe if you are in a place where nobody can hear you, cry out loud. Let the volume be raised in your voice.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I thank you for this discipline. I pray we practice it as a church. I pray as part of our worship. I pray we come to you boldly in your character, in your promises, we gather corporately to remind one another of those truths, for you are the perfect Father and we are so grateful. And we can come to you and share with you things we would never share with other people. We can pour out our hearts to you. And we can sing, we can rejoice, and we can trust through it all, and for that, we are grateful.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day they confess with their mouth, believe in their heart that Jesus was raised from the dead that they would be saved. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved and for that we are grateful.

We love you and it's in the name of Jesus that we pray it... Amen.