

“Living Life from the Inside Out”

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First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 42:1-6a

New Testament Lesson: 2 Peter 1:3-8

Yesterday we had our second of three Family Movie Nights this summer. The movie was Inside Out, a Disney film about an 11-year-old girl whose emotions go haywire when her family moves from Minnesota to San Francisco.

Now that might sound like a great change of scenery to you – trading the winters of Minnesota for the clear skies of San Francisco – but for an 11-years-old having to adjust to a new city, and new house and a new school, it's not so great.

The movie starts out by asking, “Do you ever look at someone and wonder, ‘What is going on inside their head?’ And then it shows us. Through the magic of Disney animation we go inside Riley’s head and actually meet her emotions. There’s Fear – a tall skinny character; Disgust – all green with attitude; Anger – red and fiery, as he is; Sadness – who is just as blue as they come; and Joy. Joy runs the show, for the most part.

And one of the first things Joy does is put the character Sadness in a circle, saying, “This is the circle of Sadness. Your job is to make sure that all the Sadness stays inside of it.” Joy did this after Sadness touched one of Riley’s happy memories and it turned blue, became a sad memory.

In the movie, memories are represented by round balls, like from a pinball machine. They get stored inside Riley in an elaborate and complex system, sort of like our own memories.

But unlike for us, in the movie we can see Riley’s emotions working to keep it all together as she struggles with this move to a new city. If only Riley had the assurance of today’s New Testament lesson, where it says, God “has given us everything needed for life and godliness,” living the life God desires for us.

When we realize we’ve been given everything we need for life, things go much better for us. When we forget about God’s blessings, we suffer and struggle, just like Riley in last night’s movie. Balancing our emotions is a lifelong challenge. The Apostle Peter knows this, as he writes to the churches he is nurturing in the faith. The focus of Peter’s letter is for us to grow in the faith, to mature as Christians, so that we experience and enjoy the blessings of God.

Listen to how Peter describes a life of faith. Peter calls us to “make every effort to support (our) faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual [javascript:void\(0\);](#)affection, and mutual [javascript:void\(0\);](#) affection with love.”

Now I'm not going to go through each of these in detail, but I will pull them all together to show how we can use what's in the Bible to live a better life, a more Godly life. Let's start by looking at the first and last in Peter's list. First comes faith, and last comes love, as Peter has listed.

Faith is the foundation of a life of divine blessings, and love is the ultimate expression of faith. In between faith and love comes a series of virtues that form the basis of our self-expression and awareness. These are the things that make us who we are.

There's goodness – just being a good person – and knowledge – knowledge of Christ. There's also self-control, endurance, godliness – aligning ourselves with God's will – and mutual affection – all important in living a good life, a godly life. Here's how these virtues work together in the life of a Christian, a follower of Christ:

Your faith calls you to goodness, a life of kindness. Knowledge of Christ helps us with self-control and endurance. And that supports a life of what Peter calls godliness, a life of mutual, Christian affection and love.

Now, truth be told, it takes a lot to live up to our calling as brothers and sisters in Christ, and all that that means for who we are and how we act. It's something we all struggle with, if we're following the path of a faithful disciple.

We can and should always be growing and maturing as a Christian. And that means accepting our weaknesses while working to overcome them, accepting who we are while working to improve ourselves, with God's help.

In the movie *Inside Out*, Riley's emotions start out working against each other – Anger, Fear and Disgust pop up at all the wrong times. Meanwhile, Joy tries to keep Sadness from touching any part of Riley's life.

But in the end, Joy comes to realize that Sadness is useful, that a healthy expression of Sadness can actually let people know how you're feeling and give them a chance to help.

That's a huge lesson in life. People of all ages – young and old and everyone in between – we all spend way too much time and energy trying to stuff our emotions.

But think about it! Would God give us an emotion that is not useful? Of course not. Stuffing our emotions just leads to greater difficulties. Looking back, it's always better to feel, express and work through our emotions. Take for instance this true story of what happened to one woman trying to suppress her natural emotions.¹

¹ Loyal Jones and Billy Edd Wheeler, eds. *Hometown Humor, USA: Over 300 Jokes and Stories From the Porch Swings, Barber Shops, Corner Cafes and Beauty Parlors of America* (Little Rock, Ark.: August House, 1991), 140-41.

She was spending the summer in the same town where Paul Newman lives. One day she walked into the ice cream shop and there he was – Paul Newman, the legendary actor, having a cup of coffee.

“She thought to herself, this is no big deal, it’s his town, too, and this poor man is entitled to his privacy just like anyone else. So I’ll not make a big deal out of this. I’ll just go up and get my ice cream cone like he is any other person in the world.” And as she did, she nodded to Paul Newman, put her two dollars on the counter and ordered her double-dip of ice cream. And after she completed the transaction, she walked on out, got to the car, and realized that she had a handful of change but no ice cream. ... So she went back inside expecting to see the ice cream cone in a little holder, or in the hand of the clerk, or something. She went over and was about to tell the clerk what happened, but glanced over at Paul Newman, who broke into this wonderfully friendly, warm grin and said, ‘You put it in your purse.’”

See what happens when we try to suppress our true emotions? We can’t think straight. And we certainly don’t grow and mature as healthy adults, able to keep track of our ice cream cones.

It’s better to live life from the inside out, letting our emotions work for us instead of against us.

This goes along with what Peter says about how to live an effective and fruitful life. Peter says, “If (the core virtues of a godly life) are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful ...” keep you from accidentally stuffing your ice cream cone into your purse, or worse yet, stuffing your emotions into pockets of unhealthy living, things like our eating, drug or alcohol misuse, uncontrollable anger, a life of cynicism, disgust or fear.

Now don’t get me wrong, it’s OK to be afraid or sad, angry or disgusted, as long as we don’t let those emotions run the show. We all face situations that get the better of us. But that doesn’t mean we give ourselves over to those situations, to those difficulties in life. No, as faithful followers of Christ, we seek to grow and mature as Christians. We rely on our faith to show us the way toward better living, toward continued growth and maturity.

If you have an area of your life that is getting the better of you, take a look at what you’re bringing to the table. Are you using all your best self to address the situation, or have you let your emotions go haywire?

Our emotions are designed to work together for good, not to tear us apart. Riley in our movie last night found that when she came to terms with her emotions, life got better. People were there to help her.

And the same is true for us, true for the Christian’s Peter was writing to, which in fact, include us. We, too, need to come to terms with our emotions, we, too, need to look for healthy ways to work through whatever we’re facing.

And we can. As God's beloved children, we are called to continue growing and maturing in the faith. And in doing that, we are called to look to God – and to support one another. Rely on God, and help each other, as together we become better followers of Christ. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, we have come together in your name today as your people, your children. It is in your name that we ask you to enter into the life of each person here.

We ask for your comfort and peace, life and breath, hope and joy. We ask that you give us your strength.

Lord, we ask you to touch the lives of not only us gathered here, but of all people throughout our nation and around the world.

Particularly Lord, guide and direct our presidential candidates, that their service would reflect your will and your ways.

Guide and direct the leaders of all countries, O God, and uplift the people of all nations, that everyone would proclaim your greatness, your love, your abundance.

God, pour out your Spirit on your people so that we will know you are always with us. May we experience your presence here, today.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who came to us that we might know you better, and who is with us still in Spirit, that we might come to know ourselves and our neighbors in the prayer that he taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**