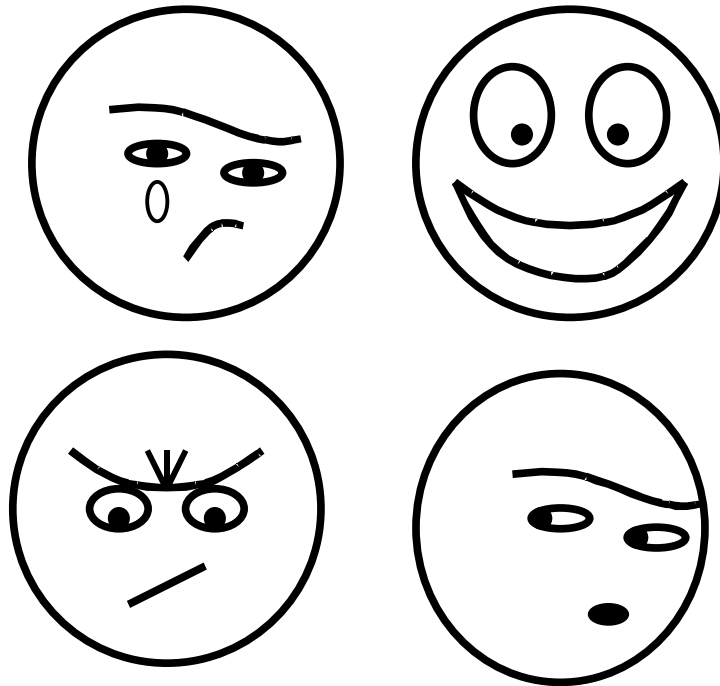


# Inductive Emotions



## “Seeing and Feeling God in the Biblical Text”

### Definition

The “Inductive Emotions” approach to Bible Study has in mind an attempt to enable readers to identify and experience the emotions present in a text. The approach is not totally new. The well known Inductive Bible Study approach has an element to it which seek to identify the writers “mood” as integral to understanding the text. However, Inductive Emotions has the identification of all emotions present in a passage as its main method of discovering the meaning of a text and more importantly the character of God. The approach utilizes four main steps:

1. The careful reading of a given passage with a view of identifying all emotions explicitly seen in the text as well as those implied or deduced.
2. The identifying of the emotions themselves and the reasons why those emotions are displayed.
3. The implications of those emotions as to the character of God.
4. The implications of God’s character to his relationship with his people and their responsibilities to him and others.

## **Origin of the Method**

Assuming that the method is new (one is never certain of these things) the method arose out of a need to make Bible Study meaningful and enjoyable among Jamaican teenaged students. For many years students have rejected the IBS approach to scripture, seeing it as either too intellectual or at least too demanding for the average high schooler to “get right”. The steps of Observation and Interpretation seemed too much in need of “specialist” attention that many felt inadequate to successfully utilize the method whether for personal or group study.

In March 1998 a staff worker from Students’ Christian Fellowship and Scripture Union in Jamaica, David Pearson, while attending a Scripture Union training seminar in Honduras was challenged to view the emotions in a text like a South American (i.e. in a “non-intellectual way”) and not as a typical Westerner. This was in a context when the Swedish Bible Study Method was being employed in the exercise. He found identifying emotions in a “non-intellectual way” difficult, as the Swedish Method itself, like the IBS is also heavily intellectual. However, this challenged him to rethink the approach being used with Jamaican students with a view of coming up with something “fresh” and “exciting” which was faithful to the Biblical text.

The idea of concentrating on emotions in a text came to David one afternoon while preparing for a Bible Study with a group of High School girls. He saw a chart with many line-drawn faces entitled “How do you feel today?”, with each representing a different emotion. Noting that the faces were all easy to draw it became apparent that students could be asked to identify the emotions in the passage he was to use in the evening’s study (the Parable of the Prodigal Son) by drawing the relevant face beside each emotion as they appeared in the passage. This was to be then followed up by a discussion as to the reasons behind each emotion and inevitably what was the main emotion of God in the Parable and his reason for the emotion. The Bible Study was a huge hit with the students. Since then the method has been used with various groups of different gender compositions, with similar results. Because the approach utilizes some of the questions of the IBS, and because there is a focus on emotions coming from the text itself (participants must give reasons from the text for identifying a particular emotion) David decided to call the method “Inductive Emotions”.

## **The assumptions behind the method**

Basic to the success of this method is the idea that a personal God communicates his likes and dislikes (and hence his feelings) through His word. Because God himself is not an irrational being those feelings will reveal important truths about His character, e.g. God can be seen to be ecstatic when the prodigal returns home which means that God is happy when a sinner repents. Every text then, once it teaches something about God, will reveal something about His emotions. Very often it is in seeing the emotion that we garner the truth about God.

Second, the approach draws upon the assumption that when participants get “emotionally involved” in the scriptures, interest will be maintained and active participation will result. Speakers for a long time have practiced carrying their audiences through a series of emotional experiences in order to maintain interest and effectively challenge for results. The results are similar when the IE method is used. As participants identify each emotion, and reflect on times when they have felt similar emotions, they enter the stories being read and as it were experience the events first hand. The scriptures then come alive to them.

Thirdly, and very importantly, the IE method believes strongly that the “emotional” can be used as a bridge to the “intellectual”. It is a popular idea among many Christians that God requires of us an intellectual commitment, most of all. As such they avoid anything that will deter from such a commitment and avoid the emotional which is viewed as being in opposition to the intellectual. The result for many, especially the young, is that Christianity becomes lifeless and boring. It is something you intellectualize but not feel. The very enjoyment of the Christian life is snuffed out. However, when the IE method is used, the emotional is used to ask a series of intellectual questions as we reflect on God and what He desires of His people. Importantly, however, is that participants subconsciously make the link between God’s intellect and his emotions, and so better understand His will.

Fourth, and closely connected to the third point above, is that commitments made through such an approach as the IE method involves the whole man and so are more desirable. Having felt and reflected on the implications of a text, a commitment is better understood than when reflection takes place in isolation from the emotional. Thus, IE involves the total person: Intellect, Emotions and Will, increasing the chances of producing a “total commitment”.

The success of the IE method however rests upon the flexibility and creativity of the leader to have the participants “enter” the emotional phase of the study. Like any other method IE can become sterile and lifeless if a variety of approaches is not utilized to engage participants. Participants may be asked to draw faces or act out emotions. They could also be asked to relate stories or create stories that best illustrate emotions viewed in a passage. It is as participants get involved, and as reflection is done on various emotions, that more and more they will be comfortable to open up and themselves participate. It is not unusual that during these times participants share very personal emotions, of joy or heartache or whatever. With some sensitivity the Bible Study can be used as a time to pray with/for individuals or to laugh and cry with them. Of course, the group then can become a powerful tool for bonding participants together, but it can also become a tool of division if not controlled properly. The leader then must be very sensitive to group dynamics and have a keen awareness of what is happening with individuals in the group

One of the draw backs with the method is that some Biblical passages do not lend themselves easily to the identification of various emotions. As such the method is best used with narrative passages which illustrate stories that involve various people.

Emotions inevitably abound in such stories and surely they will provide a gateway to reflect upon God, who Himself is inextricably bound to all Biblical narratives.

Perhaps a final word of caution. In preparing to lead an Inductive Emotions study the leader must be certain to do all the necessary background preparation to ensure that, as participants observe emotions and reasons behind each, they remain faithful to the author's intent in recording the event/narrative. Inductive Emotions does not rule out the essentiality of good Inductive Bible Study preparation but rather depends on such to be truly successful.

## **The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-2, 11-32): A Sample Study**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In order to prepare participants for seeing emotions it would be beneficial for the Bible Study Leader (BSL) to lead the group in some emotional exercise. Younger participants will not be inhibited to mimic various emotions, and this can be done on a competitive basis using the group itself as the judge as to whom displayed the best emotions. This will definitely get the group "loose" and will assist in greater participation as the study continues. The same can be achieved with older participants by asking them to reflect on a scene/scenes from a soap opera, or even from passages from a book. An additional benefit of doing this is that participants will realize that identifying emotions is something that they already do. This will minimize apprehension in attempting this "new" skill of looking for emotions in the Bible.

### **B. STUDY**

On pre-distributed sheets with the Bible passage, have participants draw faces, displaying relevant emotions beside verses where those emotions appear. This can be done individually or in smaller groups of two or three. Participants must be prepared to give reasons from the passage for identifying each emotion. Groups are brought back together where findings are discussed. To add to the interest of the study the BSL may ask a few group members at various points to talk about their own experiences with various emotions. It would be best if this is done with varying emotions.

In the discussion of the emotions seen in the text be sure to answer the following questions:

- Who displays what emotions?
- What circumstances lie behind each emotion in the passage? (Background help may be required here for understanding the nature of the younger son's request, its implications for the family and how the Jews would have viewed the request).
- What do they reveal about the characters who display them?
- Who does each character in the parable represent (Verse 1 is key in answering this question)?
- What are the emotions then saying about the people represented by the parable?

- Is God represented in the parable? What do we learn about Him?
- What are the implications for:
  - Jesus' opponents?
  - Repentant sinners?
  - Those wishing to live a life pleasing to God?

### **C. CONCLUSION/APPLICATION**

Have participants move from the realm of the “general” relating to “others” (which would likely be the outcome of reflecting on the last question above) to the “specific” relating to the “me” or “us”, by asking:

- “In light of the Parable’s teaching, what specific steps can we take, individually and as a group, to be more like God?”
- How does each implication/responsibility make you feel? Why?

(BSL should always be looking out for opportunities during the application time to encourage participants especially as individuals may believe that implications demand too much of a radical change in their lives. In the case of this parable the implications would likely include our acceptance of those who have disappointed us (and God) badly. The father’s demonstration of love to the returning son may not be easily shown among Christians/churches who more display the attitude of the older brother. Thus, some participants may believe that what is required of them is so radical that it may bring them at odds with their peers.)

Be sure to end the study with a time of prayer and an opportunity for commitment to group accountability.

Dwight Fletcher: 92-97848

Del Palmer

Charlie Royes

David Pearson

Sharon Nash

David Henry

Kathy Lamb

Charles Grizzle

Napoleon Black - JTS Student

Stephen Jennings - Pastor, Mona Baptist

Donald Stewart - Pastor, Covenant Portmore

Faith Linton - Discovery Bay Tabernacle

Donahue Colash - Director of Back to the Bible, Jamaica

Philbert Johnson - Pastor, Temple Hall New Testament Church of God

Wayne Vernon - National Youth Director, New Testament Church of God

Dave Hazel - Pastor, Lincoln Kirk United Church