

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 5 MAY 2019



## Pray for Holy Tears

*John Piper*

The aim of this article is to encourage Christians to pray for holy tears. This is on my mind right now mainly because recently I have seen it so clearly in Scripture.

The plea for holy tears also seems urgent because the acrimonious spirit of our times threatens to dry them up, or turn them into a performance. “The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20) – including righteous tears.

Paul told the Philippians that tears were welling up in his eyes as he wrote chapter 3.

Many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even *with tears*, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18–19)

Paul combines what we seldom see joined – sorrowful tears and scathing indictment.

- They are enemies of the cross of Christ.
- Their end is destruction.
- Their god is their belly.
- They glory in their shame.
- Their minds are set on earthly things.

And all that as the tears welled up in his eyes. Can you do that? *Both – and*. Not *either – or*.

The tenderness of tears did not keep him from hard words. And being critical did not keep him from crying. He did not separate what Jesus had joined together: *tenderness* through

tears and *toughness* with the truth.

Jesus heard the heartless silence of the Pharisees when He put a crippled man before them and asked, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?”

How did He respond to their silence? *Both – and*. Not *either – or*: “He looked around at them with *anger, grieved* at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:4–5). *Grieved and angry*. *Angry and grieved*.

*Some of us are easily grieved.  
Some of us are easily angered.*

He was emotionally whole. We are broken into fragments. Some of us are easily grieved. Some of us are easily angered.

In this wholeness, Jesus was, of course, the image of God the Father. Paul said in Romans 11:22, "Behold the *kindness* and the *severity* of God." Kindness *and* severity. Severity *and* kindness. *Both – and*. Not *either – or*.

Test your anger. Can holy tears over the hardness of the human heart survive in the heat of your anger, or are they consumed? Beware of one-sided emotional responses to evil. Seek to be as complex emotionally as Jesus and Paul. Embrace a *both – and* emotional life. Seriously, ask God for tears. Don't say fatalistically, "That's not my personality." Ask for the miracle.

Thousands of Christians grew up in homes with little experience of healthy emotions. There was no holy weeping or rejoicing. The homes were dominated by anger. They do not feel compassion easily, and tears seldom come. This emotional brokenness is true of all of us, more or less. None of us feels what we ought to feel all the time.

What should we do? Many say, "This is just the way I am," and do not believe God can, or will, do anything to give them the gift of holy tears. I think

that attitude is a dishonour to God, and harmful to the soul.

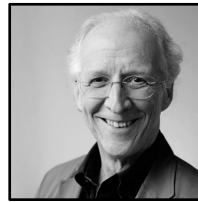
***Beware of one-sided emotional responses to evil.***

I spoke to a woman just a few days ago who told me that she could shed no tears in college. Then God stepped into her life, and today she is easily brought to tears by people's suffering. We do not know what

measure of emotional transformation God may be willing to give. But we should pray earnestly for holy tears.

Oh that my head were waters,  
and my eyes a fountain of tears,  
that I might weep day and night for the slain  
of the daughter of my people! (Jeremiah 9:1)

The Hebrew says literally, "Who will give my head waters and my eyes a spring of tears?" In other words, Jeremiah knew that holy tears must be given. They are a work of grace, not nature. We should plead for them.



*John Piper is founder and teacher of [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org) and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

Excerpts from: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/pray-for-holy-tears>

© *Desiring God Foundation*

For the complete library of St David's Articles, please go to [rest.org.au](http://rest.org.au)

**Kindly pass on this article.**

