

Remember, as an illustration, when a man loves a woman, he does not work up his emotions, but rather he enjoys the other person by discovering as much as he can about her.

James: Is Mr. Phipp a believer?

Brockton: I doubt that it is so, for he appears to have no pleasing thoughts of God. God, of course, will only take worshippers to heaven. A man with no pleasing thoughts of God is only consumed with himself. For one thing, Mr. Phipp would have an awful time in the worship experiences of heaven. There, owning a pew is no merit and pleasant emotions are unrestrained because they flow from an unfiltered apprehension of God. He is totally unsuited for that.

Yet Miss Corrilton even now "rejoices with joy inexpressible and full of glory." A more intense gaze at God is exactly what would please her the most. Heaven is just right for her. She will never be more spiritually-minded than when she is in heaven, and never more emotional. The Lord will even increase her capacity to enjoy Him, but her emotion will never usurp her accurate comprehension of God.

James: I see, then. Affection toward God is inseparable from authentic worship.

Brockton: I couldn't have said it better myself.

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A Brockton Dialogue

The Elderly Mr. Phipp

Jim Elliff

James, the youth: Is affection necessary for true spirituality? I mean, can't a man be Christian, yet cold as a stone emotionally?

Mr. Brockton: Affection cannot be separated from true religion.

James: But are we to strain to be affectionate toward God when it is not natural?



Brockton: We are to strain to *know* God, and that is enough. Mr. Phipp will make my point for me. Hear his story:

When the elderly Mr. Phipp lost his wife, he cried for the first time in seventy-plus years. Emotions were not Phipp's strong suit. He despised them. Even when Jasmine died, his oriental war bride, the emotions that surfaced were fugitive and hung in his ocular cavities only temporarily, much like condensation on a cold glass. He was not going to give in. He thought that a man, if he were truly manly, conquered emotions in childhood and never permitted them again. His stubbled face, sun-creased features, Korean War haircut, and thick unadorned black glasses gave him a no-nonsense look. He liked that—believed in that. He was Harlan Phipp and as much like Harlan Phipp as he could possibly be.

Without any question, deacon Phipp's role in the church was one of supreme importance. He occupied one end of a pew on which he and Jasmine had rested their "blessed assurance" since their very first visit to the church. By "occupied" I mean that term in the military sense of the word. Loyalty was a big deal to him and holding one's place in the sanctuary symbolized this elevated virtue before the watching, yet more unstable types in the church. He was here to stay. If some day you did not find him in his pew, he would be stretched out in the front

of the auditorium in a pine box—those were the only two options. His crusty hands brought his imitation leather King James Bible to that pew each Sunday. He did not open it, but he was demonstrably faithful in bringing it.

When the tender-hearted Miss Buelah Corrilton began to occupy the seat somewhat near but not immediately adjacent to Mr. Phipp, he bristled. She meant nothing by it. She was not trying to take Jasmine's place. In fact, she was blissfully unobservant about what such a move might mean to Harlan Phipp. Stiffness, however, took on an even more austere appearance in Mr. Phipp after this time. His Bible was the barrier between he and Miss Corrilton, and it was inched into enemy territory little by little, Sunday by Sunday, so that Harlan could bunker down in ecclesiastical safety. The particular irritation to Phipp, that is, the worrisome and ever dilating strain on his sanctity, was Miss Corrilton's incessant tears. This is what brought about the confrontation.

Leaders like Phipp must not cause waves, misleading the masses that obviously look up to him as the paragon of stability in the church. But he had his fill, and under mortar attack something must be done to protect the homeland. Things were getting out of hand—Miss Corrilton was weeping right in the middle of the pastor's message! He was pressed to believe that it was "now or never." He must hit the beach decisively and not turn his back from the objective. The encounter should take place, he determined, just following the service.

"Miss Corrilton," he croaked, "why do you persist in blubbering in the church of the Living God?" He stared with mouth open and eyebrows raised just sufficiently to display a consternation of pharisaical proportions.

We will not expect Miss Corrilton to answer as a trained word-smith at such a severe moment. All she could eek out as she looked down, and that nearly inaudibly, were the elementary one-syllable sounds, "I can't help it."

If this was Harlan's midnight of infamy, it was Buelah's sunlit midday of unpretentious purity. Perhaps, in that whimper of a phrase, Miss

Corrilton was never more profound. And in that phrase, Mr. Phipp was never more condemned.

James: But what could make such a phrase so profound when on the surface it sounds untutored and simplistic? "I can't help it" is hardly a phrase to be remembered.

Brockton: This phrase reveals what matters about emotions.

James: Do you mean that emotions are what you cannot help?

Brockton: That is almost the answer. Emotions are the *result* of true spirituality and not the *cause* of it. To worship God is to fix your gaze on Him. Our emotions rise from that fixed gaze and may justifiably be as lofty as the truth we comprehend. Unthinking emotions and self-induced emotionalism are not legitimate as worship. In this gaze, believers are seeing the greatest good and the most perfect Being. This moves them, for there is nothing higher to comprehend. Indeed, to see something of Him and not to experience a rise in affection may be a sign that we are not seeing Him as we imagine.

James: But, though I wish to worship God, I have often been unmoved.

Brockton: This may be because you are conscious of your emotions and are laboring at them. When we perceive something of the Lord's beauty, majesty, knowledge, or some other noble characteristic through what is said or sung or brought to the mind, our emotions are not to be either worked up by conscious effort or checked by deliberate willfulness. To do so would mean that we must take our gaze away from Him to ourselves. We are just to look and enjoy and let the emoting follow as it may—sometimes greater, sometimes lesser—the degree is not important. The regulator of emotion is solely our mental and true (or Biblical) apprehension of God; and the fullest apprehension of God is our single objective in worship. This Miss Corrilton knew by experience, and this Mr. Phipp did not know.