
FEELINGS IN THE BIBLE: TOOLS FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

LYNDA Z. TYSON

Abstract

This article proposes a model for teaching leadership in religious contexts through a lens of affective competence. It establishes an understanding of cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning dimensions and their interrelation. Feelings of biblical characters are explored in general and employed to illustrate an affective interpretation of the Hebrew Bible narrative of Ruth. The article concludes with a practical model for teaching leadership in religious venues using theological reflection in the context of affective competence. Several biblical texts are offered as platforms for learning to understand feelings associated with situations that call for specific leadership skills.

Introduction

From congregational Bible study to formal seminary curriculum, Holy Scripture is traditionally interpreted through historical, literary, rhetorical, feminist, and other criticism forms. Recent studies in affective competence, the integration of feelings and behavior, have motivated me to ask the question, What might we be missing by overlooking human emotions in scripture interpretation? Further, How might feelings of biblical characters be employed to teach affective competence in contexts of religious leadership? This article proposes an affective competence model for teaching leadership in religious contexts. It begins with establishing an understanding of cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning dimensions and their interrelation. The next section focuses on defining and illuminating affective competence. Following that is an exploration of feelings as they appear in Scripture, illustrated by an affective interpretation of the Hebrew Bible narrative of Ruth. The article concludes with a practical model for teaching leadership in religious contexts using theological reflection

through an affective competence lens. Several biblical texts are offered as platforms for learning to understand feelings associated with situations that call for specific leadership skills.

Three Ways of Learning

Life lived to the fullest involves transition and transformation, which happen through learning. In his book, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences*, William M. Kondrath describes three dimensions of learning and change: cognitive, behavioral, and affective.¹ While we typically receive and process information in all three dimensions, most of us favor one over the others.

Cognitive learning is a mental exercise centered on thoughts and beliefs. Individuals who favor cognitive learning read directions. They ask *what*, *why* and *how*, and they focus on concepts, linkages, and strategies.

Behavioral learning is less of a mental exercise: it happens by doing. Results-oriented behavioral learners would say, "Forget about working out strategies or reading the directions. Just jump in and figure it out." When he was a youngster, my behavioral-based learning grandson would open a complicated LEGO kit with hundreds of little plastic parts, and he would assemble the toy in record time without ever unfolding the directions. Meanwhile I, his cognitive-based learning grandmother, would still have been reading the directions as he snapped the last LEGO into place.

The affective dimension of learning is emotion-centered: learning through feelings. Affective learners are sensitive to environment and process—their surroundings and how things are done. In my experience, affective learners often consider cognitive and behavioral learners to be insensitive. It's not that they intend injury; rather, less affectively competent individuals are simply not as emotionally aware as their affective-centered counterparts.

¹ William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, Virg.: Alban Institute, 2008), 78–79.

In our North American culture, most of us have been taught to privilege cognitive and behavioral learning dimensions.² We live in our heads and do with our hands, often at the cost of paying little attention to our feelings or at least discounting them as less valuable than data. Reason (cognitive) is associated with intellect, while feelings (affective) are associated with romanticism; in the field of education, they have not been readily understood as equal and complementary learning dimensions.³ Jane Fried takes the more contemporary view that the association between cognitive and behavioral dimensions is essential: "...learning is now understood to be anchored in feeling."⁴ Fried identifies fundamentals of "learning that lasts" including "emotional engagement that allows students to be intrigued, confused, mystified, or upset by the information" as well as "meaning making, the process by which students place [other] dimensions of learning into some broad context or pattern that has personal, social, or spiritual meaning for them."⁵

Beginning at a young age, leadership is more typically associated with intellect (cognitive) and physical presence (behavioral) than with affective competence. For example, students during my high school years who held peer-leadership roles were typically in the highest academic percentiles and received preferential treatment by school faculty and administrators. Students who were not necessarily at the top academically but were athletic (behavioral learners) were forgiven for mediocre grades and celebrated for winning games. School administrators and faculty typically allowed much more freedom to all of those students than to highly sensitive or emotional students who were often labeled as weak or were ignored. Doug Blomberg

² Kondrath, *God's Tapestry*, 79.

³ Doug Blomberg, "The Heart Has Reasons That Reason Cannot Know": Thinking, Feeling, and Willing in Learning," *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 17(1) (2013): 62.

⁴ Jane Fried, "Engaged Learning: Why Feelings Matter," *About Campus* 18(1) (March/April 2013): 4.

⁵ Fried, 4.

argues against segregation of thinking and feeling in the learning process: "...the aspects of cognition that we recruit most heavily in schools, namely learning, attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning, are both profoundly affected by and subsumed within the process of emotion...a person is always feeling *and* thinking; these dimensions may be *distinguished* but are never *separable* in human action."⁶

There is also a gender bias in the devaluation of affective over cognitive and behavioral learning. In her book *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice*, Joyce Fletcher recounts the study of women software design engineers "being invisible and getting disappeared" by male colleagues who devalued the women's collaborative and sensitive (affective) working styles.⁷ The women in the firm were expected by their male colleagues to behave relationally (consistent with men's expectation and experience of women in their personal lives), yet the women in the workplace were devalued for doing so.⁸ While it is generally more acceptable and/or expected for women to express their emotions more readily than men, women may pay a price for doing so when they hold leadership positions. Relational theory pioneer Jean Baker Miller has written extensively on this male-versus-female power differential, starting with her iconic book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.⁹

Ideally, we are able to access all three dimensions of learning and change, situationally if not simultaneously. Finding a balance among them will facilitate our transformational learning. Understanding and appreciating all three dimensions will also enhance our relationships, particularly across differences in gender, race, language, age, and other human characteristics associated with identity. The resulting sense of connectedness helps us to deal with

⁶ Blomberg, 64.

⁷ Joyce K. Fletcher, *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 1.

⁸ Fletcher, 108.

⁹ Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

our own feelings and those of others, with empathy as a byproduct.¹⁰ Empathy is an essential quality for relationships that inspire both individual and mutual growth and development. Capacity for empathy is also central to the Christian tenets of love and reconciliation. It is a quality that distinguishes an understanding of humanity's interdependence from the individualism celebrated in secular culture. Thus, empathy is an essential quality for religious leadership that inspires both individual and mutual growth and development.

Affective Competence Learning

Affective competence is an essential component for our self-understanding regarding effective and healthy leadership.¹¹ When we pay attention to our feelings, we can learn about ourselves: What is the source of our feelings? Where or when in our lives might we have learned particular emotional responses? Are we substituting one feeling for another—exhibiting anger when, the truth is, we may be afraid but in our particular environment the display of fear isn't acceptable?¹² We can take cues from feelings about what we need by understanding the messages our feelings are sending. Conversely, being unaware of or inattentive to our feelings inhibits developmental transformation and hinders our ability to relate to others. Kondrath writes that feeling messages “assist us in regulating life and relationships.”¹³ Regulating conjures up the image of a thermometer—measuring relationships as warm or cool and taking the temperature of feelings, as in the heat of anger or the frigidity of fear.

Kondrath writes of six primary families of feelings: fear, anger, sadness, peace, power (understood as agency rather

¹⁰ Stephen J. Bergman, “Men’s Psychological Development: A Relational Perspective,” *Work in Progress* 48 (1991): 2.

¹¹ Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry*, 77.

¹² Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry*, 79–82.

¹³ William M. Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities* (Herndon, Virg.: The Alban Institute, 2013), 13.

than power over), and joy.¹⁴ These six primary feeling families will be used throughout this article. Other behaviorists use synonymous terms and may add a category or two. Psychologist Paul Ekman adds surprise, disgust, and contempt to his list of feeling families, and he substitutes happiness for peace.¹⁵ Within each of those primary feeling families are multiple additional nuanced feelings and moods. In her “Feeling Wheel,” spiritual healer Gloria Wilcox adds seventy-two qualifiers to the same six primary feelings families Kondrath uses.¹⁶ Each of the six primary feelings is a pie-wedge at the center of the Feeling Wheel. Two increasingly larger concentric circles hold related and more specific feeling labels that are grouped with their corresponding primary feeling. For example, apathy and boredom are manifestations of the primary feeling of sadness. Similarly, someone in a bewildered mood may be experiencing confusion caused by fear.¹⁷

Our feelings communicate vital information. For example, feeling messages from anger, sadness, and fear signal the likely need for an appropriate remedy. If I am angry, I understand myself to have been violated in some way and I need to reestablish boundaries and/or expectations. If I am sad, I am experiencing loss and I might need comfort, space to grieve, or time to let go. If I am afraid, I understand myself to be in danger and I need to get to safety. A deep sense of connectedness will probably evoke a feeling of peace; accomplishment creates a sense of power; and joy can leave me in a state of awe, wonder, or gratitude—each of which tell me I should continue doing what I am doing. Feelings that result from perceived rather

¹⁴ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 3.

¹⁵ Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 190.

¹⁶ Gloria Wilcox, *Feelings: Converting Negatives to Positives* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Fwin-Win Team Publishing, 2001).

¹⁷ “The Feeling Wheel,”

<http://med.emory.edu/excel/documents/Feeling%20Wheel.pdf>, accessed July 28, 2014.

than real situations are the same, such as a reaction to a *potential* threat versus actual danger.¹⁸

Learning to recognize feelings and the messages they are giving us about ourselves and others is integral to our own growth and transformation. Feelings also have a role in our relationship with God, the ultimate source of the gift of our emotions. Biblical characters frequently display feelings toward and about God. Jonah's fear of God in the beginning of the Jonah story becomes anger at the end. In the Exodus story, Miriam sings and dances for joy, praising God for destroying the enemy. Naomi is angry over her perceived and unwarranted abandonment by God, which we will explore further below.

Feelings have gained credibility as a learning dimension in the scientific realm only recently. Antonio Damasio, a leading neuroscientist and professor, writes that reason in the twentieth century was privileged over emotion in the scientific community and was "presumed to be entirely independent from emotion."¹⁹ He says twentieth-century scientists labeled emotion as "not rational" and "too subjective," "elusive," and "vague" to be taken seriously.²⁰ In contrast, Damasio finds a correlation between our feelings, rationality, and biology. He says his own laboratory work "has shown that emotion is integral to the process of reason and decision making"²¹ Damasio distinguishes between feeling ("the private, mental experience of an emotion") and emotion ("the collection of responses, many of which are publicly observable").²² He says we cannot observe a feeling in someone else, as feelings are internal. So, in Damasio's way of thinking, we might be able to read others' emotions, but only they know their feelings. In our common vernacular, the terms *feelings* and *emotions* are used interchangeably, which I will do in this article for simplicity.

¹⁸ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities*, 157.

¹⁹ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1999), 39.

²⁰ Damasio, 39.

²¹ Damasio, 41.

²² Damasio, 42.

Affective competence depends upon our emotional literacy—the ability to read and understand emotions and what they are telling us about ourselves and our relationships with others.²³ Many of us were conditioned from an early age to substitute one feeling for another in the expression of emotions. For example, children who are taught or who intuit that it is inappropriate or frowned-upon to display anger or fear may present as sad instead.²⁴ Building emotional literacy helps us break habitual feeling substitution and build authenticity internally and in relationships. Our human development, including growth in leadership acumen, happens in the process of increasing our affective competence.

Feelings in the Bible

Bible commentator Ellen van Wolde tells us, “Emotions, musings or unconscious levels are seldom described in biblical narratives.”²⁵ She holds up the Ruth narrative as an exception. As we will see, feelings do motivate pivotal decisions and actions in the Ruth story. However, I respectfully disagree with van Wolde’s suggestion that feelings and thoughts at unconscious levels are *rare* in Scripture. I would argue instead that Bible characters’ feelings are often evident and even spelled out in the text. Consider the following examples from Genesis.

Adam tells God he “was afraid” because he was naked so he hid from God (Gen. 3:10 NRSV). Cain “was very angry” and two verses later kills his brother Abel in a jealous rage (Gen. 4:5–6). The Lord has grief in his heart for having made wicked humanity (Gen. 6:6). Hagar has contempt for Sarai and runs away in fear (Gen. 16:4–5). Sarah laughs when she hears she will conceive and bear a child in her old age and then denies she laughed because she is afraid (Gen. 18:11). Abraham is distressed that Sarah wants Hagar and Ishmael cast out of the household (Gen 18:11–12). Hagar

²³ Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry*, 77.

²⁴ Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry*, 86.

²⁵ Ellen van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1997), 85.

weeps, certain that Ishmael will die, and God tells her not to be afraid (Gen. 21:16–17). Abraham mourns and weeps at Sarah's death (Gen. 23:2). Esau weeps when he learns that his father Isaac has given his blessing to his younger brother Jacob (Gen. 27:38). In a prime example of a feeling changing destiny, Jacob's fear of Esau's hatred motivates Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban's home. There, Jacob finds his future wives Leah and Rachel who, along with their maids, will bear the sons who will procreate Israel's twelve tribes (Gen. 27:41). If not for fear of Esau's retaliation, would Jacob have fathered these twelve sons?

Feelings of characters in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are frequently named directly or intimated. The Psalms, while poetry rather than narrative genre, are replete with feelings. When the text does not literally spell out a Bible character's emotion, his or her feelings can often be discerned through the character's behavior and action. If it is true that feelings motivate certain responses, it is also true that biblical characters' decisions, behaviors, and actions can reveal the feelings that stimulated their responses. Here is a case in point using three translations of Genesis 37:29: "When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes" (NRSV). While the text does not tell us literally what Reuben is feeling in that moment, his distress is exposed in his action of tearing his clothes. In the next verse, Reuben says to his brothers, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" (NIV). The Tanakh translation is somewhat more emotive: "The boy is gone! Now what am I to do?" We might interpret his reaction as helpless, bewildered, anxious, or even confused, all of which Wilcox categorizes as "scared" on her Feeling Wheel.²⁶ Similarly, we can deduce that the Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus at the well is so moved with joy when she dashes off that she leaves her water jar behind (John 4:28–29, NRSV). Though the text does not mention her feelings, The Feeling Wheel breaks the primary feeling of joy into more specific emotions, such as excited, cheerful, hopeful,

²⁶ The Feeling Wheel.

and optimistic, all of which we might apply to the woman at the well.²⁷

Feelings give us a fuller understanding of biblical characters' relationships to one another and to God. They further contextualize Scripture, as do historical, cultural, and literary knowledge of the text. Integral to the human condition, fear, anger, sadness, peace, power, and joy expressed in the Bible affirm that our emotions are a valid and significant part of who we are as created beings. By understanding feelings as God's gift inherent in the creation of humanity, we can accept feelings as a means of God acting in the course of human events, choices, and decisions. As we will see below in the Ruth narrative, characters' emotions add color, frequently illuminate motivation, and make Bible characters and sacred story more meaningful and relevant. Characters' feelings help us identify more closely with them and their stories.

Ruth Narrative Overview

Ruth, more than any other single Hebrew Bible narrative, makes use of the full range of human emotions. Feelings in Ruth are inseparable from theology and human identity, serving as catalysts for characters' decisions, actions, and interactions. The author's consistent incorporation of human feelings contributes to the enduring power of the narrative across cultures and through centuries of political, socioeconomic and evolutionary change. One example of feelings making this a poignant narrative relative to politics and culture is found in Ruth's religious conversion and eventual intermarriage with Boaz vis-à-vis the history of bitter political, military, and religious conflict between Israel and Moab. Both ancient and modern audiences would know this history, which is mentioned throughout Hebrew Scripture. The Ruth characters' feelings override the historical conflict.

Transformation is the overarching motif in the Ruth narrative. The story moves from famine to bountiful

²⁷ The Feeling Wheel.

harvest, from lost personal and family identity to identity restored, and from death to redemption and new life. Feelings are a legitimate source of human development and transformation along with more commonly acknowledged cognitive and behavioral human development modes.²⁸ The Ruth storyteller artfully uses feelings to enhance the impact of the three primary characters' transformative thoughts and behaviors. The result is enriched narrative that communicates characters' theology and identity on an emotional level that transcends the strategic elements of the story and touches the audience's emotions, as well. The following refresher of the Ruth storyline will prepare us to then consider how the author uses characters' feelings to shape the narrative.

Chapter I: As the story begins, the narrator tells us Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons had emigrated to Moab from Bethlehem more than a decade earlier when there had been a famine in Judah. Elimelech died, and the sons took Moabite wives. Both of Naomi's sons have also died. Naomi hears news that there is now food in Judah, so she decides to return home. She begins the journey with daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth but then decides the younger women should return to their mothers' homes. Orpah does so, but Ruth clings to Naomi and insists on going with her. Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the onset of the barley and wheat harvests.

Chapter II: Ruth volunteers to go to the fields to glean food for herself and Naomi. There, she meets Boaz, owner of the fields and Naomi's late husband's kinsman. Boaz has heard Ruth's story around the village, and he admires her loyalty to Naomi. Boaz is kind to Ruth, giving her protection and preferential treatment in the fields. Ruth returns home with barley and shares her story about Boaz with Naomi—they have security in the short-term. But soon the harvests end; consequently, so does Ruth's access to Boaz.

Chapter III: Naomi, hoping for longer-term security for herself and Ruth, plots a late-night Ruth-Boaz liaison. Ruth

²⁸ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities*, 15.

goes beyond Naomi's instructions and asks Boaz to act as next-of-kin (marry her and secure Naomi's land inheritance). Boaz agrees to try to work out the arrangement. He sends Ruth home with a large measure of barley as a show of good faith.

Chapter IV: Boaz meets with a male relative who, as a closer kinsman to Naomi, has the right of first refusal to inherit Elimelech's land by marrying Ruth. Boaz engineers a deal resulting in his own marriage to Ruth, who conceives and bears a son—a male heir for Naomi. The village celebrates. Naomi is restored to wholeness. The closing genealogy establishes Ruth as the future (king) David's great grandmother.

Feelings in the Ruth Narrative

At the beginning of the story, Naomi's feelings are a mixed bundle of sadness, anger, and powerlessness. Beyond being grief-stricken and depressed over the loss of her husband and sons, she is also bitterly angry with God. Anger is often the feeling triggered by the perception of injustice and our inability to reestablish equity; it is also marked by disconnection.²⁹ In Naomi's case, she seeks distance from her daughters-in-law and the Bethlehem women who come out to welcome her back. Naomi also distances herself from God by blaming God for dealing harshly with her. Distancing is a behavior that is often associated with intolerable sadness. It is clear that Naomi does not believe she deserves the misfortune she is experiencing, and she feels powerless.

The storyteller moves the audience, particularly those who have known painful loss, to feel sympathy toward Naomi. Although Naomi does not say she is afraid, fear is implied and instilled in audience members who grasp the full impact of her predicament. Fear is a response to real or perceived danger.³⁰ With no male presence in her life, Naomi's future is grim. How will she support herself, and

²⁹ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 45.

³⁰ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 29.

who will advocate for her in a social system where she has no voice? What will become of her late husband's property in Bethlehem and the family name with no male heirs? Naomi has every reason to be afraid, and the audience can feel afraid for her.

The feeling of anger is often considered a negative feeling—something to get over or to be controlled.³¹ Conversely, anger can be a powerful motivator. It may well be Naomi's anger at God that motivates her to take action—to do the one thing she *can* do to change her situation, and to seek God by returning home to what she perceives as God's land. Anger is also an indicator of a certain degree of caring as opposed to feeling apathy. If we don't care about someone, we are not apt to feel anger toward that person.³² Naomi's anger is further indication that she cares about her relationship with God.

Naomi's widowed daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, are weeping aloud in sadness when the audience first meets them on the Bethlehem road as Naomi attempts to send them away. With the loss of husbands after childless, decade-long marriages, the two daughters-in-law have an option that is unavailable to Naomi: returning to their mother's homes. Naomi urges them to do just that. The audience is left to imagine the feelings associated with the idea of returning to their mother's houses: sadness over losing a relationship with Naomi, humiliation over their possibly shameful situation, powerlessness, even fear. In any case, there is no real positive feeling in this exchange, not until Ruth decides to exercise her sense of power to take charge of her own possibilities. In contrast, Orpah demonstrates no feeling of power, only sadness as she retreats to her mother's household. A certain amount of self-worth and confidence are needed to claim one's power and to stand up against an opposing force, and particularly a mother-in-law who would have been in the more

³¹ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 43.

³² Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 47.

authoritative role.³³ Verse 1:18 is very telling: “When Naomi saw that [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.” Naomi does not get her way with Ruth. The narrator masterfully uses Naomi’s silence to leave the audience wondering what Naomi is feeling now.

Arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi is too steeped in sadness and anger to see the first signs of hope that the author shows the audience: Ruth’s devotion to her, the welcoming Bethlehem community, and the metaphorical and literal promise of the fertile barley and wheat harvests.

Ruth’s feeling of power continues to grow as she takes the initiative to go into the barley fields to find food for herself and Naomi. She is poised and self-confident, yet humble in her introductory conversation with Boaz, immediately earning his favor. The narrator has given the audience a lift of joy and anticipation in revealing Boaz as a wealthy kinsman of Elimelech’s before Boaz is actually introduced to other characters. Boaz enters the story with an air of peacefulness and well-being that lives up to the audience’s expectation of him as established by the narrator. Boaz exercises his own power of protection over Ruth, beginning with their first meeting. He generously invites her to share in the midday meal and instructs his field men to leave her alone and to be overly liberal in the amount of barley left behind for her to glean.

Naomi’s joy in learning that Ruth has been working in Boaz’s field and that he has been kind to her is an emotional turning point for the audience, as well. This is the beginning of the transformation in the narrative that, up to this point, has only been anticipated. Just a few verses later, however, the clever storyteller finds a way of revisiting concern for Naomi’s and Ruth’s security. The audience is told that the tandem barley and wheat harvests have ended, and Ruth continues to live with Naomi. A bit of fear is injected here for the audience members who think this through—is Boaz now out of the picture for Ruth, without further encounters

³³ Kondrath, *Facing Feelings*, 105.

in the field? And what are Naomi's prospects for self-preservation and recovery of her late husband's land?

Naomi's transformation takes another turn toward restoration as she claims her feeling of power in the plot she hatches for Ruth to seduce Boaz. Naomi's new determination to find more than a temporary solution to secure Ruth's and her own future surprises the audience. Ruth, interestingly, does not seem afraid or surprised at Naomi's threshing floor instructions, despite the obvious risks. Her feeling of power climbs another level as she confidently accepts the assignment. Ruth's request that Boaz act as next-of-kin is her own doing. It goes considerably farther than Naomi's instruction that Boaz would tell Ruth what to do when he discovered her lying next to him on the threshing floor.

The surprise is all Boaz's! Ekman identifies surprise as the most fleeting of all emotions, lasting only a moment until one understands the situation and then some other feeling takes over.³⁴ For Boaz, surprise becomes joy. He is pleased at the notion of marrying Ruth and is deeply moved by her worthiness and loyalty. While no direct evidence shows that Ruth is feeling fear, the audience may be meant to assume she is at least somewhat afraid since Boaz tells her not to fear. This is the emotional climax of the Ruth narrative as the tension is resolved. The feeling of peace settles in over Boaz and Ruth as night turns into dawn, when Boaz's strategy goes into action.

For the first time, Naomi exhibits a feeling of peacefulness in hearing Ruth's report of the previous night's events. All of Naomi's earlier angst has been replaced with power—a matter-of-factness and confidence that there will be quick results, whatever they will be. The audience's earlier empathetic sadness, anger, and fear are calmed by Naomi's resolve. Along with the narrative's characters, the audience is moved to joy and then to the feeling of peace that comes with crisis resolution.

³⁴ Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 148.

Boaz fully uses his feeling of power to work the system at the city gate. The closer next-of-kin exhibits no particular feelings in the redeeming transaction other than exercising his power to decline to marry Ruth and walk away. The townspeople, already predisposed to joy after a bountiful harvest, exert happy and festive energy that ends the narrative on a high note for everyone involved, including the audience. The storyteller's creative use of feelings makes the audience want to hear and tell the story again.

The Ruth narrative is a timeless and compelling story of transformation—human redemption and restoration on many levels brought about through faithful people's compassionate behavior and courageous witness to God's providence in their lives. Although it is historically situated, the story operates as narrative fiction with multiple themes and messages. A theological thread is clearly at work in the Ruth narrative, but the story is even more about individual and corporate identity: relationships between women, women and men, family members, community members, and cultural and societal roles. The Ruth storyteller demonstrates that human feelings are integral to matters of theology and identity. This narrative employs feelings as tools that facilitate humanity's relationships with one another and with God.

At various pivotal points in the narrative, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz each assume leadership roles in their relationships with the other two primary characters. Their respective leadership moments are an outgrowth of their feeling of power and transform the story's outcome. Naomi makes the decision to leave Moab, seizing upon her power motivated by the promise of food in Judah and her anger over believing she has been abandoned by God. We don't see Naomi exhibit that feeling of her own power again until she realizes the threat to Ruth's and her own short-term security at the end of Chapter Two. Her feelings of power and fear motivate Naomi's scheme to bring Ruth and Boaz together.

Ruth, on the other hand, starts out with strong self-confidence and exercises her power in refusing to be left behind by Naomi. Ruth's sense of power grows continually

throughout the story. She takes the lead in finding food for herself and Naomi the only way she knows how—gleaning harvest leftovers in the fields. Likewise, Ruth takes an assertive role upon first meeting Boaz, in what would have been an unusual stance for a young foreign woman. The apex of Ruth’s demonstration of leadership takes place on the threshing floor “...spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin” (Ruth 3:9), an appeal for Boaz’s protection in marriage.

Similar to Ruth, Boaz exercises his power throughout his leadership actions in the story. He also similarly integrates feelings and behavior, a sign of his affective competence. Boaz’s power is tied to his secure position as a man of wealth and status in the community. He is depicted as an honorable character, another source of a sense of power (affect)—motivation to do the right thing (behavior). At every turn, he goes above and beyond in his concern for less-advantaged characters from his field workers to Ruth and Naomi.

The Ruth narrative would have been a very different story had these three characters not been compelled by feelings to make the decisions and take the leadership actions they do. As will be seen below with other suggested pericopes in the closing section of this article, the Ruth narrative can be used effectively in religious leadership education to draw out students’ feelings through theological reflection.

Teaching Leadership through Theological Reflection upon Feelings in the Bible

What relevance do feelings in the Bible have for teachers of religious leadership? Twenty-first century Christians can identify with and relate to biblical characters’ feelings with empathy. Biblical characters’ relationships, situations, predicaments, and their emotional reactions to them provide rich parallel and metaphor for teaching leadership skills in the religious context. One way to make use of the Ruth narrative and the following selected biblical texts in leadership education is to engage in theological reflection

that explores the various biblical characters' feelings, followed by mining the feelings of the participating faith community members who are faced with contemporary parallel situations or events.

Four biblical passages follow as possible theological reflection texts to use in leadership education on "Moving Through Loss to Healing," "Leadership in the Face of Resistance," "Compromise," and "Perceived or Alleged Sexual Misconduct." The theological reflection begins with reading the text aloud several times, employing different voices in the group, followed by group members reflecting upon what the biblical characters are feeling at critical turning points in the story. Use of the six core feeling families mentioned above is recommended, and in the following examples, more specific identifying emotions are offered in parentheses to help participants find their way to the core feelings.

In some of the following examples, the text names outright or hints at characters' emotions in the moment. If not, the characters' thoughts, decisions, behaviors, or actions may be used to reveal their feelings: What feelings would likely have motivated their behaviors? Were they perhaps feeling joy or peacefulness that motivated them to avoid taking action? Maybe they were feeling an increased sense of power that gave them the self-confidence to take on a challenge. Was sadness motivating them to withdraw and distance themselves, or was anger stimulating a confrontation? How do the characters respond to or resolve their feelings, if they do? Members of the present audience then gather to discuss how *they* would feel in the characters' situations, and how they might resolve their feelings if they were to find themselves in those characters' circumstances.

The same questions that are asked about characters in the biblical text are then asked of the present audience using the Scripture passage as a metaphorical parallel to the present leadership challenge in the faith community. "How were we feeling at various junctures in *our* situation? What do you believe would bring us to a response to our feelings that would restore community wholeness?" The following

Bible pericopes are offered as prospective texts for reflection to introduce the designated leadership teaching opportunity.

Moving Through Loss to Healing: John 11:1–50, The Raising of Lazarus. In John, different characters at various points clearly feel sad (grief), fearful (anxious), angry (frustrated), powerful, and joyful. Miraculous divine action restores wholeness, but verses 46–50 make it clear there are detractors—not everyone is pleased with the situation’s outcome. What happens in a leadership situation when everyone is not onboard?

Leadership in the Face of Resistance: Exodus 31:18–32:1–6, 19–34, The Golden Calf. Israel grows impatient and reverts to idol worship while Moses is atop Mount Sinai with God. Characters alternately exhibit sadness, fear, anger (frustration), power (satisfaction, confidence in themselves rather than in God or Moses), and short-lived joy. The text reminds us that ultimate power is the property of God—an important consideration for leaders in a religious context.

Compromise: Jonah 2:10–3:10, God Spares Nineveh. Jonah has been running in fear from God. Now he is avoiding God’s will for his prophesy because he fears God will spare the people of Nineveh (which God does), and he will be a failed prophet. In addition to fear, feelings of anger (frustration), sadness, and power are present in this passage. In the following chapter, the study of Jonah’s anger and ingratitude toward God is rife with possibility for discussion. It begs the leadership question, How can compromise result in conflict resolution without eventual disgruntled feelings of anger or sadness on the part of one or more parties who experience a sense of loss?

Perceived or Alleged Sexual Misconduct: Genesis 39:5–21, Joseph Is Accused. Joseph, Potiphar’s wife, and God reveal their feelings through their actions: power (confidence), fear, sadness, and anger. God’s protection of Joseph in the last verse is an expression of joy (love). Leadership lesson opportunities in this passage include exploration of the situations that enable the crisis and reflection upon the feelings that precipitate characters’ behavior and actions.

These are some of the many examples of biblical texts that may be drawn upon for theological reflection using affective competence to explore and teach leadership skills in a religious context.

Conclusion

Affective competence, the integration of feelings and behavior, is one of the three primary modes of human development, along with cognitive and behavioral learning. A balance of all three dimensions of learning is the ideal, building intellectual, interactive, and emotional intelligence. Feelings reveal our responses to stimuli of real or perceived events and situations. The reverse is also true: our decisions, behaviors and actions can put us in touch with feelings we might not be acknowledging or might be unconsciously substituting with more acceptable feelings.³⁵ Paying attention to messages our feelings send us can tell us what, if any, action we need to take to resolve the feeling—for example, continue on, seek support or protection, reestablish personal boundaries, or make space to grieve. Developing our affective competence is key in discovering personal identity and building authentic relationships, including leadership relationships.

Feelings in the Bible are a valid tool for making Scripture twenty-first century relevant and for teaching leadership in a religious context. Attentive reading of Scripture reveals both explicit naming of characters' feelings and the ability to decipher feelings that are not specifically described through characters' actions. The presence of emotion in Scripture points to feelings as central to humanity's created nature. They teach us about relationships to one another and to God. The Ruth narrative makes use of all of the six feeling families and illustrates how feelings play a role in human decisions, actions, and motivations. Each of the three primary characters in Ruth take leadership initiative at different pivotal junctures in the story, driven by their emotions—actions that determine the characters' respective

³⁵ Kondrath, *God's Tapestry*, 86.

futures. Religious educators can employ feelings in biblical texts as a starting point for teaching leadership through theological reflection. The texts offer a platform for learning to understand feelings associated with situations that call for specific leadership skills.

The Rev. Lynda Z. Tyson is a priest in The Episcopal Church, interim director of formation/associate dean at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and is completing Doctor of Ministry studies at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.