

How to Deal with How You Feel

We've looked at spiritual health, physical health and at mental health. This week we're looking at emotional health; how to deal with how you feel. Last week we talked about how to manage your mind; your thoughts. This week we'll look at what the Bible says about managing your emotions.

In Mark 12:29-30 Jesus says, *"The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'"* Hear the strength of the emotion in those words? Jesus is saying I don't want you to just kind of love God. I want you to love God passionately, with everything in you; everything you are. God wants an emotional relationship with you, not just knowing about God and studying God. God wants an emotional, passionate relationship - full of feeling.

Let's start with some facts about emotions:

First: **God Has Emotions.** Many people don't realize that God has feelings: joy, grief, love, sadness, even hatred toward things like sin. God has frustration with people. The reason you have emotions is because you're made in God's image. If God wasn't emotional, you wouldn't have emotions.

Second: **My ability to feel is a gift from God.** Emotions are a gift from God. They may not always seem that way. But even seemingly negative ones have a role. Emotions are a great asset; part of what makes you human, not some automaton. It's your emotional ability that allows you to love and create and be faithful and loyal and kind and generous.

Third: **There Are Two Extremes to Avoid.** One is called emotionalism. **Emotionalism** means that what matters most is how I feel. It doesn't matter what I think, it doesn't matter what's really right or wrong or good or bad. If it feels good it's right. Emotions run my life.

The other is Stoicism. **Stoicism** means you act like feelings aren't important at all. The only thing that matters is your intellect, will, volition, reason, and intelligence. For stoics emotions aren't an important part of life; feelings are just a distraction that doesn't really matter.

Stoics get frustrated with emotionalists. They think they're too sensitive or expressive. Emotionalists get mad at stoics. They feel they're uptight and closed down. Stoics want you to keep your emotions to yourself. Emotionalists feel if you're not sharing your emotions you're not being authentic.

These are extreme positions and the middle is where you really want to be. It's interesting: There are Christian traditions built on these two views of emotion. You probably know some Christians who have decided it doesn't really matter how you feel. The only thing that matters is the truth of the Word of God. They downplay emotions as unimportant.

That's not Biblical. God gave you emotions for a reason. God wants you to worship emotionally - to feel it. In fact God complains in the Scriptures when people worship with words but not with their emotions, not with their heart.

Other believers say emotion is what really matters. In worship they want an ocean of emotion. If I'm not completely captivated by the experience, I haven't worshipped.

That's wrong too. A lot of people are actually seeking an emotional experience rather than seeking to know and glorify God when they worship. The experience becomes an idol.

So you can make your doctrine and intellectual theology an idol. Or you can make your emotional experience an idol. Both are wrong. God made both mind and heart important.

Fourth **The Book of Psalms Helps Us Understand Our Emotions.** If you have a hard time with some emotions, spend a lot of time in Psalms. It has every emotion known in it – good ones and bad ones. Positive and negative.

You read some of those psalms and you wonder, Why is this in the Bible? It's there to acknowledge even our negative emotions. Not all psalms are about praise and thanksgiving. There are psalms of anger and there are ones complaining and ones of lament and sorrow. Some argue with God. There some that wish destruction on enemies - even on their children! Every emotion known to humanity is in there and they all need to be dealt with in our lives.

Learning how to manage your emotions is a skill, and you can get good at it. Most people aren't great at managing their emotions. But you can do it, and if you do you'll have an enormous advantage in life. It can be a

key to peace of mind, a key to success, a key to many other things. So first, let's talk about why manage emotions. And then we'll get into how.

I want to share four important reasons why you need to learn to deal with what you feel. The first is, **1. Because My Feelings Are Unreliable.** Feelings can lead you in wrong directions. Sometimes we feel like we know what to do, and do it and it doesn't work out as we'd hoped. Your gut is often wrong because your intuition is flawed. Fictional characters like Leroy Jethro Gibbs on NCIS can have their "gut feeling" always be right, but that's television. In real life emotions often lead you down a blind alley. You can't depend on feelings.

Last week I said you don't have to believe everything you think and that's true. But you also don't have to accept everything you feel. Not everything you feel is right. Some things you feel about yourself are flat out wrong. Some things you feel about other people are dead wrong. Not everything you feel is reality, so you need to manage your emotions.

Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."* Just because you feel it doesn't make it true. Feelings can guide in wrong directions.

I also need to manage emotions, **2. Because I Don't Want to Be Manipulated.** If you don't control your emotions people will use your feelings and moods against you to control and manipulate you. Too many people are directed by their feelings rather than their commitments and what's right.

Salespeople and advertisers are actually trained in how to stir up your emotions because if they can get you hooked emotionally you're much more likely to buy the product. So the color of the packaging, the music in the commercial and what they say are all designed to elicit emotional responses. Watch car commercials. They say very little about the actual car. Most of the ad is about an emotional reaction.

Emotional decisions on purchases are called impulse buying and that's when you buy stuff you don't really need or want. Anybody here ever done any impulse buying? You get home and wonder, Why in the world did I buy that?

Proverbs 25:28 says, *"A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls."* The New American Bible says it this way: *"Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings."* Not only are you defenseless against the manipulation of other people but you are defenseless to the manipulation by your old nature. We talked about that last week. Your old nature knows your moods and uses them to manipulate you.

But beyond that, negative emotions leave you vulnerable to the evil one. He will use fear, resentment, jealousy, envy, bitterness, worry, and anxiety to get you moving in the wrong direction; to distract you from what God wants you to be doing. He'll use shame to beat you up. These emotions are some of Satan's favorite tools and if you don't know how to manage your emotions you are vulnerable to manipulation.

1 Peter 5:8 says this *"Be on your guard and stay awake. Your enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack."* If you're not on guard and have some self control, he will eat you for lunch.

I also need to manage my emotions, **3. Because I Want to Please God.** I want to know just that my feelings are unreliable and I don't want to be manipulated by other people or by my old nature or by the devil but I also want to please God. And God cannot be God in my life if emotions are god in my life. God can't rule my life if emotions rule my life. Jesus can't be Lord of my life if my emotions are Lord of my life. If I make all my decisions simply based on how I feel then I've made my feelings god. And then God can't be God.

Romans 8:6-8 says, *"...letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God."* The words "sinful nature" translate a term meaning your flesh, human nature, emotional passions, and material circumstances. You can't please God if emotions dominate your life and determine your decisions.

The fourth reason I must manage my emotions is... **4. Because I Want to Succeed in Life.** This is one of the top predictors of success or failure in life. Do you know how to manage your moods, and deal with how you feel? If you don't learn how to do this you'll never be as successful as both God and you want you to be.

Study after study after study have shown that your EQ is more important than your IQ. Emotional Quotient is far more important. A lot of people who are very successful in life are so because they've got smarts in dealing with their emotions and how to get along with others. As a result they're people-people - not because they're naturally outgoing, but because they are aware of and smart about their own feelings and the feelings of those around them.

How many times have we seen people ruin their reputation because of their lack of self control? How many have ruined a job opportunity because of something that happened at a stupid party? People get lost. People die because of emotional foolishness and lack of self control.

When you give yourself to Jesus it includes emotions. If you say, "I'm a Christian," you're affirming you gave your emotions to be managed by him. Jesus needs to be Lord of how you feel not just what you think and do. 1 Peter 4:2 says, "*From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires.*" What are human desires? It's your emotions, passions, affections - what you want and the way you feel. As a believer, your life is meant to be controlled by God's will, not by how you feel.

So how do I manage unwanted feelings? This is what I'm going to spend most of the time on today. How do I manage an unmanageable or unwanted feeling? You do three things.

1. I Name My Emotions. The first thing you have to do in dealing with an emotion is to identify it. You must pinpoint it; be specific. You can't manage vague feelings. You can only manage something that you have identified. If you don't know what the situation is, you certainly can't work on it.

We tend to think we're very much in touch with our emotions, but we're not really. You can be very emotional and still not really be in touch with your true emotions or be able to state WHY you feel the way you feel.

If you ask people how they've felt this past week, some will say "I was tired." That's not an emotion, it's a report on your mental, physical and emotional condition in general, but it's not an emotion itself. So ask yourself a couple questions:

First, what am I really feeling? Go beneath the surface. What you think you're feeling is often not the main or the most important thing. You're feeling a bit down, discouraged and you think the problem is depression. But you need to ask, What's making me depressed? What's the cause? Maybe it was something that happened at work or something didn't happen the way you expected it to happen. Look and find the disappointment, worry, fear, or repressed anger. A lot of times what you think you're feeling, is just the product of other emotions. You feel irritated with someone? Maybe it really has nothing to do with that person. It can be transference. So ask yourself, what am I really feeling? What's behind this?

Then the second question is, What are my triggers? What things trigger these emotions in me? What emotion gives you the most trouble in your life? You need to know because certain emotions set off reactions and responses.

Sometimes emotions can be triggered by something you see. You may be somewhere that looks like someplace where you experienced something or see an object that reminds you of something - it brings up something of the past.

Sometimes smell can trigger an emotion. A scent makes you feel warm and comfortable - for me it's anything cooking with cinnamon. Scent can also trigger bad memories. My grandmother had a muskrat die under the house where you couldn't get at it and the smell was terrible. She tried to cover it up with a particular pine scented air freshener. It didn't work, and the smell of that air freshener nauseates me to this day!

A trigger might be something you hear. The sound of someone's voice. A certain musical pattern. A particular noise.

A touch can trigger an emotional response.

Taste. You can taste certain things and it will send you back to childhood.

So you ask, what am I really feeling and what triggered it? I can't solve a problem that I can't identify. So you start by naming the negative emotion you're feeling.

The second thing to do is, **2. I Challenge My Emotions.** Challenge what you're feeling. Don't just automatically accept it. Don't automatically assume that it's accurate. Don't immediately assume that what you feel is the truth is correct or real. You challenge it.

Are things really as bad as I'm feeling like they are? Probably not. Or are things really as good as I feel they are? Probably not. So you need to ask yourself some questions.

David in the psalms often asked God to challenge his emotions. That's smart since God understands is better than we do. God knows what you're feeling even when you don't. And God knows what triggered an emotion even when you don't. God can help you out. In Psalm 26:2 David says, "*Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart.*" Test my motivation and my feelings. So you ask God to help you evaluate them.

To help you help yourself, let me give you three questions to ask about emotions. When you're angry, upset, irritated, frustrated, depressed, or whatever, ask these three questions:

First: **What's the real reason I'm feeling this?** That goes back to what we were talking earlier. Maybe it's fear. Maybe it's worry. Maybe it's hooked into something said to you years ago.

Then ask yourself, Second: **Is it true?** Is what I'm feeling right now true? There's a point in the Bible where Elijah gets discouraged. He complains and says, "God, I'm the only one in the entire nation left serving you." And God challenges him, Are you kidding? You act like you're the only real believer in the whole world! That's not true. All these people are serving me! So what's the real reason you feel this way?

Third: **Is what I'm feeling helping me or hurting me?** Will this benefit me and other? Will I get what I need or want by feeling this way? A lot of feelings we have are actually self defeating. They don't help the situation and they may encourage a reaction in us that makes things worse.

They teach police officers that, when they're dealing with someone in a crisis situation, to lower their voice, not raise it. Naturally in a crisis you want to raise your voice. But that can just escalate the problem. Ask yourself is this emotion actually getting me where I want to go?

If someone's frustrating you, ask yourself, I know I'm, frustrated right now with this person in my life but is expressing my frustration at them going to change them and get me what I want out of this? It's probably not.

Then the next thing you've got to do is... **3. I Change or Channel My Emotions.** When you have a mood or emotion that isn't getting you where you want to go, you've got three options: You give in to it, change it or channel it. I recommend you change or channel it. Let's look at both of these.

Sometimes you need to work to change what you're feeling. Some emotions are so destructive, ineffective, or hurtful, that the only thing to do is to make the effort to change them. Philippians 2:5 says, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*" So your attitude – that includes your emotions - should become more and more like that of Jesus. Ask yourself, would Jesus get irritated and impatient with a waitress? No. Would Jesus be fearful? No. Jesus would not be prideful. Jesus would not be envious. Jesus would not be bitter. So I work to change those attitudes.

Sometimes you need to channel what you're feeling instead. Sometimes you can even take a negative emotion and channel it to use it for good. For instance: Let's say you have been the victim of injustice - experienced unfairness in the classroom or workplace. And naturally the emotion that will come up in you is anger. That's a legitimate response.

Will that anger get me what I want? Probably not. But can my anger be used to help other people? Yes. You can become a champion for justice because you know what it means to experience injustice. Does that make sense? When you use anger for your benefit that's selfish. When you use anger for the benefit of other people that's righteous.

Anger is not a sin in itself. It's the reason you're angry and what you do with that anger that makes it a sin or not. If somebody hurt my wife or kids I'd get angry. If you never get angry about anything it means you're apathetic.

God gets angry. The only reason you have the ability to get angry is because God gets angry. God gets angry at sin. God gets angry at evil. God gets angry when children are abused or molested. God gets angry when people are misused and suffer injustice. So you can take a negative emotion and you can use it in a positive way.

What pain are you using for good? Maybe you have pain you don't even want to talk about. But you need to manage these emotions. You need to name it, challenge it, and then if you're not going to change it, channel it and use it for good. Your greatest ministry could come out of your deepest pain.

But what about those ones that need changing. How do you tame a wild emotion? Some of you say, I'm a worrier and I can't stop worrying. I'm a perfectionist and I can't stop it. I just criticize and judge and nag. I'm a naturally angry person. I lose my temper and I either blow up or I clam up. All these are emotionally based.

How do you tame a wild emotion? Not by will power. In Zechariah 4:6 says, "*It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*" You don't change an emotion by willpower. You can't force an emotion to change. It doesn't work that way. It's by God's Spirit.

How does that happen? How do you let the Holy Spirit change an emotion that's hurting you and other people? Let me give you two final suggestions:

First: Every day I ask to be filled with God's Spirit. Every single day. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "*...the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, [Wow! just with those three life would be so much better!*

But wait! There's more!] *"patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and [notice the last one] self-control..."* Self control comes from God. The more I let God's Spirit into my life, my mind, my heart the more self control I have. A lot of people think, "If I let the Holy Spirit fill my life it will turn me into some nut." No. If you let the Holy Spirit fill your life you get more self control than you're ever had in your life.

That's a good thing.

When the Holy Spirit guides your life God fills you with this. When you're filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control it's a whole lot better than being filled with anger, jealousy, fear, guilt, shame, bitterness, resentment and self-indulgence.

If I take a tube of toothpaste and I squeeze it what comes out? Toothpaste. When you're put under pressure what comes out is whatever's inside you. And if you're filled with anger, jealousy, fear, guilt, shame, bitterness, resentment and self-indulgence, when the world puts the pressure on you, that's what's going to come out.

But when you're filled with the Spirit and the world pressures you, what will come out? love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When I'm full of myself almost anything can tick me off. When I'm full of God, nothing much can. I can handle it. So the first key to managing emotions is to be filled with the Spirit. And that's what's going to come out in your emotions.

The other thing to do is, Second: Every day I ask God to help me manage my mouth. I say, Lord, put a guard on my mouth. Proverbs 13:3 GNT says, "*Be careful what you say and protect your life. A careless talker destroys himself.*" Self control includes controlling the tongue."

There's a chapter in James that says that your tongue is like the rudder on a big ship. A little rudder can direct a big ship in any direction. The tongue is the rudder of your life. What you say determines where you're going to go. You're not going to experience what God wants you to experience until you say what God wants you to say. So let the Lord manage your mouth. Make God's Word your word. Get it into your mind. Read the Bible every day. Listen to the Bible. Get the Word of God in you.

Psalm 119:11 says, "*I keep your law in my heart, [Your heart is where your emotions are.] so that I will not sin against you.*" Psalm 19:14 says, "*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*"

Notice the connection between your heart and your mouth. What's inside your heart is going to come out of your mouth. My heart is revealed in my words. Go to God and say, fill me with your Spirit, and God will make your heart new. Let's pray 🙏

How To Deal With How You Feel

"The most important commandment is this: You must love the Lord your God with ALL YOUR HEART, and all your SOUL, and all your MIND, and all your STRENGTH." Mark 12:29-30 (NLT)

Understand My Emotions

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'" Genesis 1:26 (NIV)

Two extremes to avoid:

Emotionalism: _____

Stoicism: _____

God gave us _____ to understand our emotions.

Why I Must Learn to Manage My Emotions

1. Because _____
"There is a way that SEEMS right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death." Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)

2. Because _____
"Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings." Proverbs 25:28 (NAB)
"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

3. Because _____
"To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace... Those who obey their human nature cannot please God." Romans 8:6-8 (TEV)

4. Because _____
"[People] get lost and die because of their foolishness and lack of self-control." Proverbs 5:23 (CEV)

"From now on you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires." 1 Peter 4:2 (TEV)

How to Manage an Unwanted Feeling

1. _____
Ask:

2. _____
Ask:

Eliphaz asked ob: "Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash?" Job 15:12 (NIV)

3. _____

Everyday:

"When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

Everyday:

"Self-control means controlling the tongue!" Proverbs 13:3 (LB)

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord!" Psalm 19:14 (NIV)

Your Small Group This Week: "How to Heal Your Damaged Emotions"