

Handling your emotions

Emotions are God-given. God has emotions. God has designed our emotions to respond to what we think. Emotions are not designed to control us; rather we are designed to control our emotions. Emotions are transformed by the renewing of our thought process.

Pete: Those who know me well would not necessarily describe me as an emotional person. This doesn't mean I am without emotions but rather that I don't express them as others might. However, the truth is that many years ago I was so lacking in emotion that some said hugging me was like hugging a fence post! Yet the story does not end there. Not long after I became a Christian, I drove my mother to a small Christian conference centre for an event they were holding. I was not part of the gathering but I stayed in the conference centre ready to take my mother home at the end. The presence of God was so strong in the property and it began to work something in me. I really did not know what was happening but I received a picture that seemed to describe something of what was happening within. The picture was of a treasure chest that had tight chains around it to prevent what was inside from coming out. I was troubled by this picture and I didn't know what to do. My mother asked one of the leaders to pray for me which he did. It was amazing, I can't remember what he prayed but he was gentle with me and firm in his prayers, the peace of God descended and I slept very deeply afterwards. What I understand now is that the picture of the treasure chest represented my life. The chains over the chest had come through my emotional responses to events in my childhood. I had become afraid to express my emotions since I knew if I did it would tear me apart. God in his wisdom did not suddenly allow that chest to open up completely because he knew I would not know how to handle what was inside. Yet over time he began to heal me and open me up and also to teach me some things about the emotions and how to handle them. I hope the following may be of helpful to you.

We were not originally designed to handle negative emotions.

Before the fall God declared over his creation: *'it is good'*. Before the fall, significance and security were the two basic attributes that Adam and Eve possessed as they related to God in a world unmarred by sin. When sin entered the world these two attributes became needs. Immediately Adam hid from God fearing rejection; then Adam and Eve blamed each other and were afraid of how God might react to their sin. The earth was cursed and only by the *'sweat of the brow'* could mankind's physical needs be met. The struggle between nature and man began and the struggle for superiority in relationships began. Negative emotions of fear, rejection and anxiety entered the scene. Trust in God was now the only way that those deep emotional needs could be met.

The Source of Emotions.

Emotions find their origin in our beliefs. Beliefs create thoughts and thoughts trigger emotions.

Proverbs 23:7

'For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he'

Isaiah 26:3

'You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you'

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John 8:32

'And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'

The Bible equates liberated emotions with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17

'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'

From the above we can see that emotions find their origin in our beliefs. We will find freedom from our negative emotions as we learn to yield ourselves to the Lord so that his Spirit can reign in our thought life. Self control is one fruit of the Holy Spirit that a believer possesses. In other words, yielding to the Holy Spirit gives us greater control over our lives and therefore over our emotions.

Galatians 5:22

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, SELF CONTROL'

How we can change those negative emotions through self-control?

1. Repentance.

Since it is the truth that sets us free, where we have believed in and therefore lived a lie, we need to repent. Repentance is the first decision toward emotional change.

Acts 3:19

'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord'

2. Yielding your heart to God.

Having repented or changed your mind, you can now receive rest, relief and healing from negative emotions from God.

Matthew 11:28-30

'Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light'

3. Re-orientate your thinking.

Now that freedom has come, strengthen yourself in what is true. This will guard your emotions from further disruption.

Philippians 4:8

'Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things'

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For example: Anger

1. Anger is not always sin.

2. God gets angry

Psalm 7:11

'God is a just judge and God is angry with the wicked every day.'

Mark 3:5.

'And when Jesus had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out and his hand was restored as whole as the other.'

3. Believers are commanded to be angry.

Ephesians 4:26-27

"Be angry and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your anger, nor give a place to the devil.'

However, righteous anger can turn to sin when it is not focused rightly or when it is allowed to boil over without restraint .

Proverbs 29:11

'A fool vents all his feelings but a wise man holds them back.'

4. Righteous anger is a God-given emotion.

Anger is a God-given emotion to highlight problems. For example, Jesus gets angry when he cleansed the Temple.

John 2:13-17

'The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

5. Discern your anger.

If it is from an unrighteous base then repent of it and refocus. If it is righteous anger then seek God's help in how it may be used for the sake of righteousness.

6. Acting in the opposite way from the anger we feel is difficult but it does help us in the healing process when our relationships with others may have become soured.

Matthew 5:44

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'But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you'

7. If there is a deep historic anger in your heart then ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts to understand its source and how you can come free so that his peace can come into that area of your life.