

DEALING WITH YOUR FEELINGS

In 1950, in a small town in Oklahoma one high school seemed to lose every football game they played against their arch rival from a neighboring school. The more important the game the worse they lost. Finally, a wealthy oil baron decided to take matters in his own hands. He asked to speak to the team in the locker room after yet another devastating defeat. What followed was one of the most fantastic football speeches of all times. This business man proceeded to offer a brand-new car to every boy on the team and to each coach if they would simply defeat their bitter rivals in the next game.

The team went crazy with delight. They hugged each other and howled and cheered. For seven days, the boys ate, drank and breathed football. At night they dreamed about touchdowns and their new cars. The entire school caught the spirit of anticipation. Finally, the big night arrived and the team assembled in the locker room. Excitement was at an all time high. The coach made a rousing speech and the boys ran out to face the enemy. They assembled on the sidelines, put their hands together and shouted a simultaneous "Rah!" Then they ran onto the field ... and were demolished, 38 to zero.

The team's exuberance did not translate into a single point on the scoreboard. Seven days of emotional celebration and expectation simply could not compensate for the players' lack of discipline and skill. Their lack of conditioning, practice, experience and character. Such is the nature of emotion. It often does not lead us into truth but into deception.

Today we are continuing with our series today called Transformed. It is based on this passage;

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Today we want to talk about our hearts - our feelings. God created us to be emotional beings. He wants us to use our emotions (our feelings) to love Him passionately.

Mark 12:29-30 The most important one, answered Jesus, is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

God wants us to love Him with our whole heart. He doesn't want just head knowledge, an intellectual assent of who He is. He wants us to love Him passionately because He passionately loves us. Our God is an emotional God. There are two extremes to avoid when talking about feelings. One is called emotionalism and the other is called stoicism. Let me explain these to you.

Emotionalism means that all that matters in life is how I feel. It doesn't matter what I think, it doesn't matter what is right or wrong, popular or unpopular, good or bad. What matters is what I feel. If it feels good, do it. That extreme of emotionalism means everything I do in my life is based on my emotions. They control my life. They dominate my life.

Stoicism means that feelings aren't important at all. Stoicism is the exact opposite. The only thing that matters is your intellect and your will – your volition and your intelligence. So, the stoics say emotions are not a big part of life; feelings don't really matter.

It's really funny because stoics often marry emotional people. Typically, in a marriage you have one who is a stuffer and one who is a gusher. Stuffers do not share emotions; they just push it all aside. Gushers show all their emotions. Stuffers get frustrated with gushers because they think they're too emotional. Gushers get mad at stuffers because they think they're too uptight and closed down. Stuffers think you really shouldn't be sharing your emotions. And gushers think if you're not sharing your emotions, you're not being authentic.

Actually, both of these are extreme positions. And the happy medium is where you really want to be. It's not emotionalism or stoicism. It is balance.

It is interesting that there are also Christian denominations built on these two approaches. You probably know some Christians who think that the only thing that matters is the truth of the Word of God. It is all about preaching the truth. They downplay emotions. Feelings are not important.

Let me say to people like that, feelings are important. God gave you emotions for a reason. God wants you to worship him passionately. He wants you to feel it. There are times in the bible when God rebukes people who worship with their lips but not with their hearts.

Other Christians say emotions are all that matters. When they come to church it should all be about the experience. When they worship they want an ocean of emotion. If you haven't been caught up in the moment then you haven't really worshipped.

That is wrong as well. A lot of people are actually seeking an emotion instead of seeking God when they worship. It can become an idol. It is not either or. Both truth and passion are important.

Today I want us to look at four important reasons why you need to learn to deal with what you feel.

1. I do not want to be Mislead

Feelings are often unreliable. They can lead us in the wrong direction. Have you ever done something just because you thought at the time it was the right thing to do? You just felt it was right. But things did not work out the way you thought. Our gut instincts are often wrong. Our intuition is often flawed. Our emotions can mislead us.

Luke 9:51-56 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them, 56 and they went to another village.

Last week I said you don't have to believe everything you think. Today let me tell you, you don't have to accept everything you feel. Not everything you feel is right or good. Some of the things you feel are flat out dead wrong. That is why we need to manage our emotions. Emotions can mislead us. Just because you feel something does not make it true.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea. Hundreds of passengers died. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction or even thick fog.

The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late. I do not want to be misled.

2. I do not want to be Manipulated

If you do not control your emotions, they will control you. You will be manipulated by your moods. If you let your feeling guide you, eventually other people are going to take advantage of you. Salesmen and advertisers are trained in how to stir up your emotions because they know if they can get you hooked emotionally, you're going to buy the product. The color of the packaging and the music in the commercial and the things that they say are all designed to elicit an emotional response.

If you make decisions on what you buy based on emotion it's called impulse buying. It means that you are going to buy a lot of stuff that you don't really need or want. Has that ever happened to you? You bought something and afterwards said to yourself "Why in the world did I buy that?"

Proverbs 25:28 Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

That means you have no check on your feelings, you have no governor, no control, no manager on your feelings. He says you're like a city with no defenses. 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 how to push the right buttons.

Worst of all, Satan's favorite tool in your life is negative emotions. He will use fear to paralyze you. He will use resentment, jealousy and envy to hurt you. He will use bitterness and worry and anxiety. He'll use shame to beat you up. If you don't know how to manage your emotions you are helpless against Satan.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

One of the emotions that causes the most damage is depression. It shocks us when we realize that great men and women go through periods of deep, dark depression. For instance, Winston Churchill said, "Depression followed me around like a black dog all of my life." Back in the 1800's there was a young lawyer that suffered such a deep depression that his friends did everything they could to keep all razors and knives away from him. He wrote these words, "I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall be better, I cannot tell. I awfully fear I shall not." This lawyer later became the 16th president of the United States. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

Even a man by the name of Charles Spurgeon was given to periods of depression. History tells us that there were times when Spurgeon would be so depressed that he would refuse to leave his home to go to church. On more than one occasion, his deacons had to come and physically carry their pastor to the pulpit. I do not want to be misled or manipulated.

3. I want my Life to have Meaning

If you are going to succeed in life you have to be a person that know how to deal with your emotions. You have to know how to manage your moods. Do you know how to deal with how you feel?

Many studies have been done that show that your EQ is more important than your IQ. For success especially in business it is often your Emotional Quotient that is far more important than your Intelligence Quotient. Many businessmen who don't have a high IQ are very successful because they have good smarts in dealing with their emotions. They are people persons.

There are so many people in life who allow their emotions to destroy them. They waste their life because they do not deal with what they feel. They ruin their reputation because of their lack of self control. They ruined a job opportunity because of a bad decision at a party? They get a record of drunk driving, or some other thing and they spend the rest of their life paying for that mistake. They suffer because of their foolishness and lack of self control.

Proverbs 5:22-23 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. 23 He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

When you give your heart to Jesus that includes your emotions. When you say to Jesus, "I give you my heart," that means you are giving Him your emotions and allowing Him to managed them. The heart is the seat of your emotions. Jesus wants to be Lord of how you feel not just what you think and what you do. He wants to be Lord of your emotions.

1 Peter 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

What are human desires? They are your emotions. If you are believer then your life is to be controlled by God's will not by how you feel.

If you want your life to have meaning you have to manage your emotions. Bobby Jones was a legendary golfer who won a major tournament at twenty-one. By age twenty-eight, he had already won the grand slam and retired. Jones had an uncle who said that by the time he was fourteen, Bobby was probably already the best golfer in the world. He certainly was popular. However, Jones was also known for his temper because he would throw his clubs when he got irritated. Jones's uncle sat down with him and said, "Bobby, your problem is you've mastered the game of golf, but you haven't mastered your emotions; and until you master your emotions, you'll never be a champion in golf." That is true. We have choices when it comes to our emotions: we can master them, or they can master us. I do not want to be mislead, manipulated and have no meaning.

4. I want my Life to be Managed

So how do I do that? How do I manage an unmanageable or unwieldy or an unwanted feeling? You do three things.

First, you NAME IT. You have to name the emotion that you are feeling. You have to identify it and be specific. You cannot manage a vague feeling. You can only change and control and manage something that you have identified. That means you need to be in touch with your emotions. You have to understand why you feel the way you feel. I know that this is hard for some people, especially if you are a stoic. For people who show little feeling, sometimes identifying their emotions can be difficult.

I am not a very emotional person, so I understand this. For me, the best thing that helped with this was journaling. When I was in Seminary, one of the things they asked us to do was to keep a daily personal journal. Not of the things we did, but about what was going on in our hearts. I really did not like doing this at first, but over time it was extremely helpful. It was good for me because it helped me to identify what I was feeling. It helped me to understand my own ups and downs, the valleys and the mountaintops. Over time it helped make me aware of why I was feeling the way I was. If you can't name it, you can't change it. You've got to name it first.

Second, you REIN IT. Like the reins on a wild horse, you pull it in. You challenge what you're feeling. You do not just automatically accept it or assume that it is accurate. You challenge it. Are things really as bad as I feel they are? Probably not. Are things really as good as I feel they are? Probably not. Ask yourself some questions and challenge it.

Third, you TAME IT. That means that you need to **change** and **channel** that emotion. What is the difference? Sometimes you just need to CHANGE what you're feeling. Some emotions are so destructive, damaging and hurtful that the only thing you can do is to change or remove them.

Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Your attitude includes your emotions. So, you ask yourself, what would Jesus feel in this situation? Would Jesus get irritated with this waitress? No. Would Jesus be yelling at the person? No. Would Jesus be sitting up worrying about this situation? No. Would Jesus be fearful? No. I seek to quickly dismiss any feeling that doesn't make me more like Jesus. If I have identified an emotion and I know it is something that Jesus would not be feeling, I dismiss it and deal with it.

Sometimes you need to CHANNEL what you're feeling. Sometimes you can even take a negative emotion that you're feeling and rather than change it, you channel, it. That means you use it for good.

How do you tame a wild emotion? Not by will power. You do it through the help of the Holy Spirit. We need God's help. In Galatians 5 it says that when you give the Holy Spirit free reign in your heart, He produces all kinds of different fruit;

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Self control comes from God control. The more I let God control my mind and emotions the more self control I have. When the Holy Spirit controls your life, He fills you with all these good things that take the place of unwanted negative feelings. If I take a bottle of shampoo and I squeeze that bottle what comes out? Shampoo. If I take a tube of toothpaste and I squeeze it what comes out? Toothpaste. Not peanut butter but toothpaste. Why? Because whatever is in it comes out when it's under pressure. That's true of your life. Whatever is in you comes out under pressure.

A little league baseball coach was talking with one of his players. The coach asked the boy, "Do you know what cooperation is? What it means to be a team?" The little boy nodded. "Good," the coach said. "Do you understand that what really matters is that when we win, we win as a team and if we lose, we lose as a team." The little boy nodded again. The coach continued. "So, when you are at bat and a pitch is called a strike, or if you are called out at first, then you don't argue or cuss out the umpire. Do you understand all that?" The little boy nodded yes a third time. "Good," said the coach. "Now, go explain all that to your mother."

One of the ways that you know you have learned to deal with your feelings is whether or not you have learned to control your mouth. Self control means controlling your mouth.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

Ask the Holy Spirit for help, and read the bible every day.

Psalms 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Maybe you are here today and you are missing God's call on your life because you have not learned to deal with your feelings. Stop being misled and manipulated. If you want your life to have meaning, you need to learn to manage your heart. Give it to Jesus. Give Him control of your life.

There was a pastor that was asked to speak at another church. That morning everything went wrong. The alarm did not go off. Various domestic crises occurred. The traffic was unusually heavy. Finally, when he arrived at the church, he was late and could not find a parking space. With his frustration level at an all-time high, he walked into the church. Someone was there to greet him and show him to his seat. The zealous young Christian asked him as they were walking in, "Are you full of the Spirit today pastor?" He gave the most honest answer he could give at the time. He replied, "I ought to be."