

#66 “How to Handle Our Feelings”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

Feelings are a very confusing thing if one tries to think about what they actually are and what they actually do. One thing is for sure, feelings are powerful, and they can significantly impact our thinking and our choices. Thus, we must understand what they are and how to best live as human beings whom God made with feelings.

In some circles, it is taught to suppress or ignore feelings as if desire or passion of any kind is dangerous and deadly. This kind of thinking stems from poor theology about the nature of the believer’s heart. If we believe the Scripture which says that we are given new hearts (Ezekiel 36:26, Matthew 5:8) and made into new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) who are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6), then we need not categorically fear our emotions as if they are always evil and destined to lead us astray. The Bible doesn’t portray such a negative view of feelings. For example, the bride in Song of Solomon says that her feelings were aroused for her beloved (Song of Song of Solomon 5:4). Jesus felt compassion for the people who followed him for three days and needed food (Mark 8:2). In the early church, everyone kept feeling a sense of awe because of the powerful work of God in their midst (Acts 2:43). Paul felt love and gratefulness when he thought of the believers at Philippi (Philippians 1:7). These are examples of good, normal, and healthy feelings. To suppress such feelings would be to dehumanize ourselves and to ignore part of how God made us. It would be to take love and romance and make it into disinterested boredom. It would be to take care and compassion and make it into impersonal charity. It would be to take an uplifting experience in worship when we are caught up in the wonder of the majesty of our God and supplant it with mechanical ritual and heartless words. To remove feelings from our existence is to kill off a very important part of our being. To be fully human, and thus to live life to the full and to glorify God, we must allow our feelings to operate in a sanctified manner.

Feelings have value and purpose. In fact, feelings are very much interconnected to our thinking. We don’t feel things for no reason at all, but there is a cause. If we feel angry, it is likely because someone has agitated us. If we feel afraid, it is likely because we mentally perceive danger, whether real or not. If we feel disinterested, it is because something is not stimulating our mind to be considered worthy of our thoughts and attention. Feelings also lead to different responses by our body, whether flushed cheeks, a rush of energy, a feeling of fatigue, or a variety of other things. Our body, soul, and mind are very much interconnected, and to suppose that feelings can or should just be turned off is not a healthy or Biblical approach.

The way to handle feelings is the same way we handle thoughts, and this works because of the interconnectedness of thinking and feeling. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is

lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." Sometimes we will feel things that are legitimate feelings but in the wrong context. A temptation of lust, for example, might excite us before we even have a chance to consciously think about who it was that incited the feelings. This is a normal feeling that is part of being a sexual being, but it is in the wrong context and at the wrong time. Once we are cognizant of the mental state which we are in and of the feelings which we have, we must immediately and almost as a reflex reevaluate them in light of our conscience and Biblical morality. In this instance, the feelings must be dropped which means that we will have to not think on what we just saw and rather think on what is good, right, noble, and pure. Once we discard the thought or, as the Bible says, take the thought captive unto obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), the feelings will subside, and the bodily impulses will go away. But we must not let feelings that are in the wrong context lead to a willful decision to sin by thinking wrong thoughts or doing wrong things. We are not slaves to our thoughts, to our choices, or to our feelings because we are no longer slaves to sin. There is always a way of escape from temptation, even if the feelings are strong (1 Corinthians 10:13). We must choose to think rightly, thereby redirecting our feelings. After all, the feelings we will have after doing right are always more fulfilling than the regret of doing wrong. May God enable us to live in a way such that our feelings are increasingly sanctified such that we delight in obedience, good, and truth and get disturbed by disobedience, evil, and deceit. The more we walk in truth and obedience, the more our feelings will cooperate and prod us onward in the right direction.