

Module Four

The Truth about Emotions

All God wants of man is a peaceful heart.

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Over the last two sessions, we focused on an intimate relationship with the Lord, resiliency, how our minds work, and our identity in Christ. Now let us look at emotions. Once you understand your emotions you can significantly reduce the number and severity of stress and conflicts in your life.

As we talk about stress, challenges, and conflict, I want to be clear that everyone experiences these. It's part of being human. When you bring your circumstances and feelings to the Lord, they become an amazing catalyst for growth and change. The negative ramifications of stress and conflict occur when we instantly react emotionally and take actions that may hurt others or ourselves.

Emotions

You may not think so, but our feelings are a gift God designed for us. Emotions are complicated and sometimes confusing, yet they are powerful barometers to give us a glimpse into what we are thinking. It's like a built-in warning system. For instance, when you are driving and the car swerves a little out of the lane, you feel (and hear) those little bumps in the road, these are called rumble strips. They let you know you're veering off course. Well, our emotions are like those rumble strips. They show us where our thinking is in the moment. But the most beautiful aspect of our emotions is that they are part of our psychological immune system. Nothing God designed is random.

When you get sick at times you may be really tired and get a fever; that's your physical immune system working to kill the bacteria in your body. Your psychological immune system

functions pretty much the same way. When you begin to overthink, often certain feelings will arise to let you know you've hopped on a particular train of thought. In addition, emotions are a powerful way to release what's inside your body. So, for example, when we go through difficult situations, sometimes we cry and that quiets our thinking.

Once we realize our feelings are related to what we are thinking in the moment, they become like weather that passes. Sometimes it is sunny, sometimes partly cloudy, and sometimes stormy, but the sun never goes away. The same is true for our emotions. Sometimes we feel sad, scared, or angry, but who we are—our peace, wisdom, and resiliency—never changes.

Jesus our Lord—all God but also all human—experienced every emotion we have. Jesus was scared in the Garden of Gethsemane, so frightened that he sweat drops of blood before the crucifixion. He dropped to his knees and said, “Father, if you could take this cup of suffering from me, but if not, your will be done.” (See Luke 22:42–44.) But how amazing that in his fear he knew what to do. He knew to pray and ask God to take it. We can do the same thing when we are scared.

Jesus also got angry. In Matthew 21:12–13 Jesus was at the temple and became angry that people were selling things in God's house. He got so angry that he threw over a table and all the money went flying. We all get angry sometimes, don't we? I remember one time I was so mad that I felt like throwing a table over or even hitting somebody. I know none of you have every felt that. But I knew my anger could hurt someone, so I prayed, “*Lord show me how to experience your peace again.*” Suddenly, an a-ha moment arose, and I picked up a carton of eggs and started throwing them in the sink. It felt so good just to release the anger but not hurt anybody.

Paul talks about this in Ephesians 4:26. He says, “To be angry but not sin.” So, there's nothing wrong with being angry, but when we take it out on other people or act in ways that could hurt somebody or ourselves, anger becomes a problem.

Jesus also felt sadness, grief, and disappointment. John 11:35 says Jesus wept. He lost somebody he loved and grieved. We go through that same thing. Here's an awesome truth: God gives us those tears, that sadness, to release the painful feelings and quiet down our thinking. Nothing is wrong with those emotions.

What I notice in myself is that emotions are like the ocean. Sometimes you go to the beach and you stand in the edge of the water and the waves are gentle. They kind of brush up against your legs and feel really good. Other times the waves are stronger and come up around your chest and hurt a little bit. It's harder to maintain your balance. And then sometimes they are like a tsunami and you're pulled under and knocked off your feet. Every time those waves come; they pull back out again.

Our emotions are the same way. Sometimes the sadness, the fear, the worry, the anger can feel like it comes in waves. Some of those waves can be gentle and some of them can feel like they'll knock you off your feet. Yet like the waves in the ocean, you always get back up again because emotions always quiet down. They always settle down. And sometimes when we just let ourselves experience the feelings; they calm down by themselves. It's so good when we understand that any feeling always comes from what we are thinking and that our psychological immune system knows what to do, because then we don't have to be afraid of emotions.

The one that thing I know for myself is that when I bring my feelings to Jesus, I feel better. I do this in prayer by crying out, "*Lord, I need you*" or writing a Dear God letter, pouring out my heart to the Lord. Psalm 55:22 (MSG) "Pile your troubles on God's shoulders: he will carry your load, he will help you out. He will never let good people topple in ruin." He's got this but you must let go and follow his promptings rather than your emotions. You can write out your frustrations, worries, fears, disappointments, frustrations, and circumstances and place them in your Bible or in a God box.

First Peter 5:7 instructs us to cast our anxiety on him because he cares. *Trust* him that everything you are facing will work out—often better than you expected—when you let him lead and obediently follow his promptings.

I have experienced moments when the only way I could unhook my mind from my thinking was to write it down. When I let go, God's power comes in and through me. If my hands, mind, and soul are filled with worry, anger, and unforgiveness, I block the flow of God's goodness and his perfect solution, the perfect action to take.

Here is an example of the prayers I write. You will know if it is right for you.

Dear God, I surrender _____ to you and trust you are bringing good to and through it. Jesus, I trust in you. Show me you are here in a way I understand. Show me what my next right step is to move forward, to be blessed, and be a blessing. In Jesus's name.

Writing and praying are ways for me to feel connected and safe while I'm experiencing those feelings. But it also is a way for me to get wisdom when I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me to my next right step. Sometimes that next right step is letting myself cry, throwing the eggs in the sink, letting myself settle down, getting a hug, sitting in nature, having a conversation with somebody, or getting some help.

When I first came to the Lord, I would feel guilty if I felt angry, sad, or frustrated. I thought it was not Christian of me to have these emotions. But the more I learned about myself, the more I realized that my emotions are part of who I am, and that every emotion comes from the thoughts I'm thinking. Noticing these emotions and then surrendering them to the Lord helped me become more honest and peaceful, but there was a greater gift. Just like the psalmists who poured their emotions out to the Lord, I developed a deeper relationship with God when I cast all my cares upon him.

Remember, every feeling comes from what we're thinking in the moment about our circumstances and interactions, not from our circumstances or other people. We

cannot control the thoughts that come into our minds, yet when we realize they are thoughts, we don't have to act on them. Knowing this quickly takes you out of victim mentality and allows you to be victorious over your circumstances, because we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus (see Romans 8:37).

I don't know what's right for you, but I know that the Holy Spirit does. And underneath all your feelings and all your thinking is a place of perfect peace, wisdom, common sense, and wholeness that comes through God's power inside of you.

Wisdom

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God . . . and it will be given to you.

James 1:5

Underneath you feelings is wisdom. Besides thinking, your human mind also has the capacity to receive clarity and wisdom from the Holy Spirit, who sees all, knows all, and lives inside of you. How cool is that? A piece of God lives inside of you.

So, since the human mind constantly has a flurry of thoughts, how do you know what's a thought and what's wisdom? Wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit. The more time you spend in God's Word, the more you can distinguish his voice from other thoughts. Wisdom is always a small peaceful voice—calm, gentle, and loving. It is that a-ha moment of knowing what to do in the current situation. Wisdom will always guide you to love, to strength, to peace, and to your next right step toward God's will in any situation. Wisdom will never, ever guide you to hurt yourself or another. It will always protect you and guide your choices to what's best for you.

All the insights I shared in this program will help you get quiet enough to hear the Holy Spirit's wisdom so you can experience healthier relationships, move through challenges with grace, and receive all the good God has for you.

Asking for wisdom is so important in every area of your life. One of the things I pray every morning and before difficult conversations is, *“Lord, take over my mind, words, thoughts, deeds, and actions. Put the words through me that you would have me speak.”* James 1:5 promises, “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you” (NLT).

I am often amazed at the wisdom that comes through when I surrender to an all-knowing and all-powerful God.

Your ladder to stress less is building. You now know who you are in Christ, ways to seek God first to create a peaceful foundation, how to understand your emotions, and how to let go.

Let's Review

With each step on this ladder of wisdom and understanding, you have gained more insight into God's Word and into what makes you who you are. Learning about yourself is not always easy, but it is an extraordinary process, because you are extraordinary.

Let's review what steps you can take today to fully experience and release your emotions:

- Remember it is perfectly normal to have emotions; every human does.
- Realize that each emotion is a gift that comes from your thinking not your circumstances or other people.
- Turn to the Lord in prayer and pour your heart out.
- Emotions always pass. Give yourself some time to let them settle down.
- Spend time alone to calm down before addressing the conflict.
- Remember that underneath your thinking and feelings is wisdom, common sense, and peace.
- Remember to not act on your feelings, especially if you feel you want to hurt yourself or someone else.

In the next lesson, you will learn specific ways to resolve conflict effectively. Until then, may you and your family be showered with peace, harmony, and joy.