

I Second That Emotion

What Role Do Emotions Play in the Christian's Life?

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1. Emotions are part of God's perfect creation

A. Emotions come from being made in God's image

Genesis 1:27 — *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Every way in which humanity truly resembles God comes from being made in His image. This includes volition, intellect, relationship, and emotion.

Emotions come from being made in God's image

- John 17:24 — God loves.
- Psalm 78:40; Ephesians 4:30 — God is grieved.
- Isaiah 42:1 — God delights.
- Exodus 32:10 — God's wrath burns against His enemies.
- Psalm 103:13 — God pities His children.

But remember God rebuke in Psalm 50:21, “You thought that I was just like you.”

“God's emotions are active and deliberate expressions of His holy dispositions.”

— Biblical Doctrine by MacArthur and Mayhue

***God is never controlled by emotion or made vulnerable by forces outside Himself.
His emotions perfectly express His holy character.***

B. The blessings of emotions

1. Emotions fuel our obedience to God
2. Emotions provide meaning to our thankfulness
3. Emotions reveal what we love and desire
4. Emotions enable deep relationships with others
5. Emotions bring color to life

Praise God that He gave us emotions!

2. Emotions are corrupted by sin

A. The fall results in corrupted emotions

Total depravity means that sin is pervasive in every aspect of our personhood, including our emotions.

- **Titus 1:15** — *To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*
- **Jeremiah 17:9–10** — *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick... I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind.*

B. Sin results in untrustworthy emotions

⇒ Just because something feels right does not mean that it is right. Just because something feels uncomfortable does not mean God forbids it.

- **Judges 21:25** — *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*
- **Proverbs 14:12** — *There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

⇒ Feelings alone cannot be trusted as the arbiter of right and wrong.

Carl Trueman describes modern people as “psychological man”: identity and well-being are defined primarily by inward feelings.

“In the world of psychological man... the commitment is first and foremost to the self and is inwardly directed.” — **Carl Trueman**

“That which hinders my outward expression of my inner feelings—that which challenges or attempts to falsify my psychological beliefs about myself and thus to disturb my sense of inner well-being—is by definition harmful and to be rejected.”
— **Carl Trueman**

A moral claim that contradicts my inward sense of self is then experienced as a threat.

“Trust your feelings.”

“You have to live your truth.” “Do whatever brings you peace.”

“You can’t help who you love.” “Be true to yourself.”

“The heart wants what the heart wants.”

“Follow your heart.”

“If it makes you happy, it can’t be wrong.”

“Go with your gut.” “Don’t deny your feelings.”

“Do what feels right.”

“Life is too short to be unhappy.”

Christians must guard against allowing feelings to be the authority

- Marrying an unbeliever because the person is fun and makes me feel special.
- Leaving a spouse because the emotional connection is gone.
- Quitting a job because it is unsatisfying while putting the family at risk.
- Refusing to forgive because I hurt too much.
- Responding in anger because that is how I authentically feel.
- Neglecting Scripture because I do not feel like studying.
- Making decisions merely because I “have a peace about it.”

Because of sin, our emotions may be:

- Based on false beliefs
- Shaped by selfish desires
- Disproportionate to the situation
- Directed toward sinful objects

Our emotions are a wonderful blessing when they align with truth, but a poor guide to what is true and pleasing to God.

3. Emotions must be rightly understood

A. Emotions are not amoral; they are under Christ's lordship

A pendulum swing away from emotionalism can produce a complete disregard for feelings.

- “It doesn’t matter how I feel, as long as I do the right thing.”
- “I cannot help the way I feel.”
- “God demands obedience in behavior, not in my feelings.”

But God demands obedience from every part of us. Our emotions are part of who we are and must be brought into submission to Christ.

Proverbs 3:5 — *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.*

Matthew 22:37 — *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

⇒ **The gospel changes more than outward behavior. Regeneration and sanctification reach our thinking, desires, emotions, will, and actions.**

“True faith... inevitably gives rise to godly desires and emotions... Regeneration always manifests itself in godly desires and emotions.” — **Mark Talbot**

Scripture commands our affections

- **Micah 6:8** — Love kindness.
- **2 Corinthians 9:7** — Give cheerfully.
- **Hebrews 13:5** — Be content.
- **Luke 12:5** — Fear God.
- **Colossians 3:15** — Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.
- **1 Peter 2:2** — Long for pure milk of the Word.
- **Ephesians 4:32** — Be tender-hearted.
- **Philippians 4:4** — Rejoice in the Lord.

God demands obedience in our affections, not just in our actions.

B. Three common objections

1. “How can God command my emotions? I cannot control how I feel.”

This objection puts emotions beyond the reach of sanctification and the biblical commands requiring change.

2 Peter 1:5–6 — In your knowledge, supply self-control; and in your self-control, perseverance.

Galatians 5:22–23 — The fruit of the Spirit is... self-control.

Through the Holy Spirit, believers can grow in God-honoring feelings and desires. Ungodly emotions are not beyond His transforming power.

Second objection

2. “I cannot be blamed for anger—I was hungry, tired, or sick.”

The body can influence emotional experience. Hunger, exhaustion, illness, and pain may increase susceptibility to temptation.

1 Kings 19:4–8 — Elijah’s hunger, thirst, and exhaustion contributed to discouragement and fear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 — No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Mark 7:20–23 — That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts . . .

Physical weakness may intensify temptation, but it does not excuse a sinful response.

Our emotions can affect our body as well!

- **Psalm 32** — Unconfessed sin left David groaning and physically weakened.
- **Daniel 8:27** — A disturbing vision left Daniel exhausted and sick for days.
- **Proverbs 17:22** — *A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.*

Wisdom prepares for predictable physical weakness: rest, eat, and seek appropriate care. When the weakness cannot be remedied, be especially vigilant to rely on God's strength.

Third objection

3. “If I do not feel like reading, praying, or attending church, obeying would make me a hypocrite.”

Wrong #1: Not desiring to seek and obey God.

Wrong #2: Refusing to obey because the desire is absent.

⇒ **A failure to desire obedience should not be compounded by a failure to obey.**

“In the truest sense, you haven’t obeyed until you’ve ‘felt like it,’ because God commands us not only to behave righteously, but also to be holy.” — Mike Riccardi

Confess the sinful lack of desire, ask God to change the heart, and move forward in obedience.

C. Emotions arise from our interpretation of circumstances

It is natural to think that our emotions arise from our circumstances.

- If someone criticizes you, you cannot help but get angry.
- If your child does something disrespectful, you cannot help but feel shame.
- If you are passed over for a promotion and it is given to someone else, you will necessarily feel envy.

⇒ But the reality is that it is not circumstances that cause emotions. It is your *interpretation* of circumstances that cause emotions.

⇒ It is not what you are going through, it is how you are thinking about what you are going through.

Biblical examples of interpretation shaping emotion

⇒ Responding to Goliath (1 Samuel 17):

- Israel saw Goliath and responded with dismay and fear (v. 17).
- David saw the same Goliath defying “the armies of the living God” and responded with righteous anger and confidence (v. 26).

⇒ **Psalm 46:1–2** — *God is our refuge and strength... Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change.*

⇒ **James 1:2–4** — Trials can be evaluated as joy when we understand God’s sanctifying purpose.

D. Emotions are righteous when they align with truth

- 1) Obey the commands given to us in Scripture regarding our emotions**
- 2) Emotions are proper and appropriate when they align with the truth.**
 - Romantic love belongs within marriage; directing it toward another person is sinful.
 - Anger at seeing God dishonored is righteous; feeling angry because I did not get my own way is sinful.
 - Godly sorrow over sin leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10); envious sorrow over another's possessions is sinful.

Evaluating if your emotion is godly or ungodly must consider your desires and thinking behind that emotion. Are you desires and thinking sinful or in harmony with God's revealed truth and principles from His Word?

Evaluate your feelings by biblical truth

1. What am I feeling?
2. What am I believing about this situation?
3. What desire or thinking is driving this feeling? What do I think I need right now?
4. What is the biblical interpretation of this circumstance?
How should God's character, my own sin, salvation, and God's grace toward others inform my feelings?
5. What emotional response would God want from me?
6. How can I obey God in words and actions while praying for Him to change my heart?

If our feelings disagree with God's revealed will, we must repent and ask Him to change us.

4. Emotions must be properly trained

A. Examine whether you have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit

- **Romans 8:8** — *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*
- **Romans 6:20** — Before salvation, we were “slaves of sin.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** — In Christ, we become “new creatures.”
- **Titus 3:5** — The Holy Spirit regenerates and renews believers.

Aligning emotions with God’s will is impossible without the Spirit’s work. Faith and repentance are the necessary first step.

B. Pray

Pray that God would sanctify your heart and cause you to respond in emotionally God-honoring ways.

- **Ephesians 1:18** — *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.*

*“My feelings are not God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God’s word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes—many times—my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens—and it happens every day in some measure—I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but rather, **I plead with God**: Purify my perceptions of your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.”*

— John Piper, Finally Alive

C. Speak to yourself more than you listen to yourself

Feelings arise quickly. Do not merely listen to them or wallow in them—evaluate them, and then speak biblical truth to yourself.

Psalm 42:5 — *Why are you in despair, O my soul? ... Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.*

Say to yourself, “Listen up, self. My perfectly loving and wise God put this situation in my life for a purpose. Stop complaining and stop moping around and start rejoicing that He is using this to build my faith.”

Speaking truth to yourself is often necessary to overcome sinful emotions and trust in God’s character and promises.

D. Fill your mind with truth

1) The character of God

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” — A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy

- God’s sovereignty steadies us against sinful worry about the future.
- God’s justice restrains anger when we are treated unjustly.

⇒ **The study of God results in worship and reshapes our emotional responses.**

2) Salvation

- You will be quick to respond in gratitude about any situation when you know that you should really be in hell.
- You will be quick to forgive when you remember how much you have been forgiven.
- You will be more patient with others when you recall God's patience in drawing you to Himself.
- When you think upon your riches in Christ, you will be able to come out of times of sadness knowing that you are not only redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, but you are being held fast by the Father.

⇒ **The glory of salvation reinterprets every trial through undeserved grace.**

3) Future glory

- **Romans 8:18** — *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*
- **2 Corinthians 4:17** — *Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.*
- **2 Timothy 1:12** — *I know whom I have believed... He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

⇒ **Thinking on eternal things brings present suffering into proper perspective and trains the heart to endure with hope.**

Conclusion

Christian godliness is not the absence of emotion. It is the sanctification of our emotions so that we love what God loves, grieve over what grieves Him, and rejoice in what brings Him glory.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

Matthew 22:37