

# Emotions are the window to the heart

Proverbs 4:23

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Is it good to be emotional? Some would probably say “yes”, others maybe “no”. Some of it might depend on the family you come from, the cultural background that you have, or your temperament. For some, emotions are a blessing, and for others they seem to be a curse.

Some of you are very emotional because that’s the way that you have chosen to live life. Others of you hold your emotions in check because that is the way to stay in control of the situation or avoid conflict. Or maybe you are emotional when it serves your purposes. Perhaps you allow yourself to feel anger because it makes you feel strong and in control, and you avoid sadness because you don’t know how to handle it.

Today we will be talking about emotions. Where do they come from? What is their purpose? How do we know which emotions are good or bad? And how do we change them if they need to be changed?

Let’s pray and then we will turn to the scriptures to see God’s perspective on emotions.

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Who was the most emotional character in the Bible? God. We see anger, joy, patience, long-suffering and sorrow. In Christ we see weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, we see anger as he drives the “thieves” out of the temple. We see patience with His disciples, compassion with the children, mercy with the woman caught in adultery, and His enduring the cross for the joy set before Him. Christ is our example of how to live with God-honoring emotions.

Christ was emotional, but His emotions were so different. They were never self-serving. They were never manipulating. They were an extension of His love for us. Our emotions are to be an expression of the same. Our emotions are to flow from our love for God and our love for each other.

Our emotions reveal what is precious to us and what we hold dearly. They are a God-given part of life that were created “to follow”, even though we often allow them to lead.

In one moment, we rejoice in the praises of God, but later our same heart will rage with anger against our mate or children. At times they are a mystery. They control us and at times even ruin us. Since God gave them to us, there must be a way for us to honor God with our emotions. But how?

Every emotion is an indicator of something that is happening inside of us at a deeper level. Our emotions are the windows to our hearts. If we will pay attention to them, we will begin to have a greater understanding of what is happening inside of us.

Our emotions are our warning lights or spiritual nerve endings. It is similar to what happens in our bodies on the physical level. Nerve endings were created to communicate to our minds what our body is experiencing. When there is a problem, we often feel pain. At other times, we eat something good and experience pleasure. The nerves are not good or bad in themselves, they just serve an important role in our lives. The nerves do not create, they merely communicate what is happening. You could say the nerves do not lead, they follow and respond what is happening in our bodies.

Our emotions are similar. They report to us the perceived reality of our lives in that moment.

God created us as emotional people. Emotions are meant to be a blessing to our lives. They make life more memorable and joyful. At other times, they serve as warnings to protect us or show us that something is not right. At times, painful emotions are meant to motivate us towards needed change or repentance. Emotions were meant to bless our lives in various ways.

The problem is that in our world today feelings are being used wrongly. We trust feeling more than fact. We let feelings lead us, when they were created to follow. We call love an emotion, when it is really a commitment. We call worship an emotional experience, when it is really a life that is lived committed to Christ. Emotions are created by God, but they will only be a blessing when we understand their rightful place in our lives.

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I was encouraged recently when speaking with a friend who continues to experience the miracle of the gospel in his life. He remembers his life in the past, when he was ruled by his desires of money, anger, pride and pleasure. God has now set him free. His desires are more and more in line with God's desires. The fruit of the Spirit are taking root in his life. How blessed it is to live a life that is described by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As he surrenders daily to Christ He is being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The interesting thing is that as his desires are transformed so are his emotions.

Like my friend, we all have the things that we desire. When we get what we want we are happy, and when we don't get what we want we are . . . not happy.

James 4:1-3 says this, ***"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."***

The root problem James is referring to in these verses was not their emotion, even though their emotions were wrong. The problem was with their desires.

We all have desires in our hearts. The things that we long for the most. The things that affect our behavior, fill our dreams, and capture our thoughts. But are our desires trustworthy? It depends. In Psalm 37:4 it says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."*

That is what this friend was doing. As he delighted more and more in Christ his desires began to change to match the desires of Christ. His desires were being made new.

The same is available to each of us. As we draw near to God we will begin to celebrate the things that God celebrates. We will begin to mourn the things that God mourns. We will begin to long for the things God longs for. So, back to the earlier question. Are our desires and emotions trustworthy? It all depends on our delighting in God. If I am walking surrendered to God, then my desires will become more and more similar to His and my emotions will honor God.

When considering our emotions and desires we must also consider our hearts. That is where our desires reside. Scripture talks multiple time of our "heart's desire":

Proverbs 37:4, *"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."*

Psalm 20:4, *"May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans!"*

Psalm 21:2, *"You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips."*

That is why, if we want to understand or even change our emotions and desires, we have to first understand Proverbs 4:23:

*"Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life."*

It is from the desires of our hearts that come our words, our thoughts and actions, and even our emotions. Because of this we must understand that whatever rules our hearts drives our behavior.

If Christ is ruling our hearts, if Christ is our greatest desire, then even when life is difficult I still have Christ, because nothing can take us away from Him. My day may be bad, but my life has not been shaken. My emotions may be strained, but I still have access to contentment, peace, gratitude and love. Because of this my emotions may struggle, but my foundational emotions that depend on Christ are still in place, untouched.

Let me explain it this way. Each of us have many deep desires, such as a desire for love, value, innocence, peace, joy, freedom, order, etc. It is in Christ that these are met at their deepest levels. If I desire Christ above all else, then these desires will be met in Him. I am then free to relate to others with a heart of service because my deepest needs have already been met. If my needs are met in Christ, then my emotions will be more stable because Christ is consistent in my life. My joy, peace, and hope will come internally from my relationship with Christ. Because of this they will be present even when my external life is chaotic or difficult.

If Christ is not my greatest desire, if I turn to the world to meet my needs, then I will relate to others as a means to an end. The purpose of others will then be to serve my purposes so I can get what I

desire. Because of that, people and circumstances will in many ways control my emotions, because I am depending on them to meet my deep desires. When they don't I will be angry, sad, humiliated, and powerless. Life is filled with "ups and downs" and our emotions will follow these unpredictable patterns if we are looking to the external world to meet our deepest desires.

Here's an example. If we get our value from Christ, then when we make a mistake at work we can still be gracious, accept responsibility, and improve. If we get our value from the world, then when we make a mistake we will try to make ourselves look good by passing the blame, lying, or hiding the mistake so no one will know. When our value is found in Christ, the emotions will be calm, humble, and content. If our value is found in people's opinions, then we will feel humiliated, angry, and resentful.

Christ alone is our stability and the One who fulfills all of our deepest desires. If anything else has become my chief desire, then it can be taken away or lost. I become fragile. I have no foundational emotions and I become frail and easily upset, angered or dejected. My emotions are now out of control because I cannot control the outcome of if my desires will be fulfilled or not.

But this is where our emotions become helpful. If something is not important, we do not get angry about it. If something does not matter to us, it does not drive us to anxiety. It is only the things that we really want that drive us to these emotions. As we begin to observe our anger, sadness, worry, or anxiety, they begin to point us towards what we cherish most. What we are worshipping. You could call them idols of our hearts. Because of this, our emotions are windows to our hearts and help us know if Christ is our greatest desire or not.

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Let's consider another spiritual factor that affects our emotions. It is the matter of faith.

Are we willing to believe the truth? It comes down to do we really believe that a sovereign, all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful, ever-present God truly exists? Do we believe what He has told us in His Word? Do we believe His promises and His provisions?

As we believe, it will affect our actions and even our emotions. For example, look at Psalm 46:1-3, *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear."* Once they believed that they were safe in the reality of God they no longer had any reason to fear. But they had to believe before their emotions conformed.

Isaiah 26:3 declares, *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."*

Standing on the truths of God affects one's emotions. As they believe in, trust in, call on, rely on, act upon, the truths of God become their truest reality, and their emotions no longer see from a worldly perspective, but have confidence in the truth of God.

We see it in real lives throughout scripture, where people of faith believed with such a true faith that it affected even their emotions. May we be counted among those who believe and whose emotions give testimony to the truth of God.

In closing, I would like to introduce you to Robertson McQuilkin. He was the respected president of a Columbia University. The university was doing well and he was entering the prime of his career when his wife was stricken with Alzheimer's. They sought doctors' opinions and finally accepted the fact that the diagnosis was true. He wrestled with the decision and finally decided to resign from his position as president of the university so that he could become the full-time caregiver for his wife. They then prayed for a miracle. In his own words, *"We would trust the Lord to work a miracle in Muriel if he so desired, or work a miracle in me if he did not."* It was this point that God began to work a miracle in his life and change his heart's desires so that he would be able to honor God by serving his wife.

Mr. McQuilkin describes it in these words:

*"This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. (Changing diapers, bathing, cleaning, cooking, protecting, going for walks, just sitting with her in the silence.) It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion; now it was my turn. And such a partner she was! If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt.*

*It is all more than keeping promises and being fair, however. As I watch her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. Daily I discern new manifestations of the kind of person she is, the wife I always loved. I also see fresh manifestations of God's love –the God I long to love more fully."*

God worked a miracle in Mr. McQuilkin's heart so that he would be able to be faithful to the purpose for which God had created him.

The desires for the things of the world were removed to make room for the desires of God's heart. And the emotions followed as he rejoiced in serving his wife.

Today, in your life, what desires need to be removed and what desires need to be added? What "miracle" are you needing with the desires of your heart? As you delight more fully in God may your desires be God-honoring, His will more clear, and your emotions a testimony to the faithfulness of God.