

Day 4

# Emotions: Part 2

## START WITH HEART

*Lord, as You speak please help me listen with my whole heart and Holy Spirit please meet me today and make me more like Jesus.*

### **Romans 8:35, 37**

*“35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”*

*“37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”*

In the previous devotional, I mentioned that it is not our emotions, per se, that are problematic in and of themselves, but rather our response to these emotions that can be helpful or unhelpful.

Now, before we take a look at some Biblical examples of how we can respond to emotions, let's have a look at some specific examples of the type of information or advice that certain emotions give us and how they function in our lives. Emotions are supposed to tell us important things about what is going on in our lives and motivate us to do something helpful or useful.

**Sadness** or depression are usually linked to extreme dejection, melancholy and a sense of hopelessness and inadequacy which is a natural response to the loss of something or someone that is loved or a personal setback for which no solutions are obvious. Sadness or depression are past orientated emotions and signal the need to withdraw and reduce activity so that mourning can take place, resources can be gathered and the event or what is making us feel this way can be properly processed.

**Anxiety**, on the other hand, is a future orientated emotion. It is an emotional response to the perceived unpredictability of or lack of control over upcoming potentially negative or dangerous events. It tells us to be vigilant, reduce activity and refocus our attention on possible sources of future threat or danger. Anxiety tells us to prepare so that we aren't caught off guard if something bad happens.

**Fear** is nature's alarm system. It is usually a response to perceived danger and signals the need for immediate attention and action in order to protect us.

**Anger** is a natural emotional response to perceived intentional injury, mistreatment or victimization. It tells us to increase activity and mobilize our efforts to defend ourselves or something or someone we love. Anger is often directed at the perceived source or cause of the threat.

As you can probably see, our emotions actually give us quite useful information or advice. However, when we allow our emotions to completely overwhelm us and take control, our RESPONSE is more often than not rash and unhelpful and can contribute to escalating the emotional reaction. So in other words, our RESPONSE to our emotions is key in managing them. So how do we learn to respond to our emotions in a healthy and helpful way? Where can we turn to find better ways to cope with difficult emotions? To THE WORD OF GOD.

The Bible deals with different emotions and gives us examples and guidelines on how we are to respond to our emotions. I think one of the core messages of what we see in God's word when it comes to emotions is that our emotions are to be put in their rightful place and that our emotions are not supposed to rule and reign over us. As Christians, God has given us everything that we need to be able to manage or work through our emotions in a victorious manner. This doesn't mean that we won't ever experience difficult emotions. However, we will not be overcome or swallowed by big emotional experiences if we know how to better respond to them.

I won't be able to cover every single verse relating to managing emotions in the Bible but I will give you an overview and want to encourage you to study God's word for yourself and highlight scripture that stands out for you.

So let's start with **anxiety**.

In Matt 6:25 – 34, Jesus speaks directly about anxiety. Usually uncertainty about the future breeds anxiety and Jesus is speaking here about the uncertainty of the provision of basic physical needs. This scripture tells us that instead of responding to anxiety with worry (worry being an unhelpful, doubtful way of thinking) we are to redirect our focus to God and His kingdom. Thus, instead of worrying about what we think we can and can't control, we are to cast our anxiety onto Jesus and focus on Him as our provider.

Philippians 4:6 gives us three ways we can respond to anxiety instead of worrying: Firstly, through prayer, we can turn our worrying thoughts into prayers. Secondly, through supplication, we can make a formal request to God related to our anxiety based on who He is. Thirdly, through thanksgiving, we can acknowledge what we DO have and who God is and thank and praise him for this.

In Isaiah 35:4 we see what we can “tell” our anxiety INSTEAD of worrying. In other words, we can speak the truth to our anxiety based on who God is. When we speak scripture over our lives instead of worrying, we put anxiety in its place. God is in control and He will rescue you.

The Bible has a lot to say about **sadness** and distress so I will only mention a few scriptures here.

Psalms 6 is a psalm written by David when he was feeling greatly distressed and possibly even depressed. One of the things we see in this psalm is that feeling depressed can be for physical reasons (v2) and this means that sometimes just practically looking after ourselves physically is a healthy response to sadness and depression. In other words, putting up healthy boundaries, resting, getting a good night's sleep, eating well and taking time to pray are all important. In 1 Kings 19, we read about when Elijah was depressed, before anything else, an angel was sent to give him food and sleep. Thus, looking after ourselves physically is a useful response.

We also see in this psalm that feeling depressed can come from reasons of guilt. So how can we respond to this?

By **praying** and appealing to God's character, his steadfast love and graciousness. David's prayer in this psalm is not one of self-pity but is absolutely focused on God.

We also see in verses 6 -7 that David is "real" with God about his emotions. God is affected by our distress and we can freely share it with him

David's depression is lifted by **faith**. He becomes confident that he will be triumphant (vs 8 – 10). David reaches this point by thinking about and knowing God's character:

- He knows God answers prayer
- He knows that, if he has sinned, he may be forgiven and no longer feel guilty
- He knows that God's promises can be trusted
- By FAITH in God's promises, David recovers.

When it comes to responding to **fear**, Deuteronomy 3:22 tells us that the Lord God fights for us and thus we do not have to fear. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 31:6 – 8 says that God will never leave or forsake us. Thus, our response to fear is to believe who God says he is and to cast our fear onto Him rather than worry about it on our own.

When we believe and understand our value in God's eyes, we can also put fear in its rightful place. In Matthew 10:26 – 33, Jesus addresses fear directly and tells us that we are of great value to God and that our focus should be on Him and His kingdom. We are not to fear physical things of this world but rather be concerned with God's kingdom.

The Bible also tells us that instead of having a timid spirit, we are to respond to fear with a spirit of power, love and self-control (2 Tim 1:7). This spirit of power, love and self-control is given to us through the Holy Spirit. Instead of focusing on our own thoughts or cleverness in response to fear, we are to admit our weakness and trust

the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of cowardice and thus fear will not have a grip on our hearts.

When looking at **anger**, the Bible tells us that when we are feeling angry, we are allowed to experience the emotion but that our response to anger should not lead to sin (Psalm 4:4 and Eph 4:26). This can be quite difficult as anger is one of those emotions that really drives a response! So, what are we to do?

Ephesians 4:26 tells us that when we are angry we should “not let the sun go down on our anger”. So, one of the responses to anger is to forgive. Now, that can be tough!

Further in Ephesians, we are told to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32). Thus, we are to live our lives in such a way that opportunities for anger to flare up are few. We are to live differently to the world around us.

As you can probably see, the Bible teaches us to respond to emotional experiences differently to how the world teaches us to respond. Ultimately, our feelings are not God, nor do they define the truth. God is God and His word is the ultimate truth. Along with the empowering of the Holy Spirit to respond according to His ways, responding to emotions in a biblical manner will also take a lot of practice. It may seem impossible but I want to encourage you to read God’s word to gain wisdom and knowledge, pray pray pray and practice!

### **JOURNALING QUESTIONS:**

1. How do I usually respond to/how am I responding to certain emotions that may be unhelpful or even destructive (be as specific as possible when listing these behavioural responses)?
2. What do I believe God’s word and the Holy Spirit are telling me in terms of changing these responses?
3. Make a list of the promises and truth that you can find in God’s word that you can stand upon when dealing with difficult emotions (Hint: start with the book of Psalms and as you read a promise, write it down).

*Lord, thank you for your word that can guide me and give me the wisdom that I need to better understand how to respond to my emotions. Please fill me with your Spirit and help me to see the fruits of your Spirit in my life, especially in responding to my emotions. Help me to hear and obey your voice even when what you require of me is so different to how I naturally want to react.*

**WORSHIP SONG:**

*Praising You in this Storm - Casting Crowns:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYUGwUgBvTU>

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*by Odette Roberts*