

Find Freedom in The Spirit

It is God's greatest desire that, as believers, you and I progressively learn how to be led by His Spirit. However, there is a powerful enemy that stands in the way: our emotions. Satan is the most powerful enemy we face externally, but internally, it's our emotions that give us some of the biggest problems.

Emotions are strong, complex internal responses that result in bodily changes. They are sometimes helpful and at other times hurtful. They come in positives and negatives. They are not evil, but they also are not holy.

Emotions can make you laugh one hour and cry the next. Not wanting them doesn't stop them from coming, and wanting them doesn't make them come. They are apt to quit on us when we need them most and flare up when we wish they would go away.

The truth is, we are always going to have emotions, and it's not a sin to have them. It's when we follow them that we often get into trouble.

But I believe through the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I can learn how to recognize our feelings and realize where they are trying to take us. Then by His grace, we can learn how to manage our emotions instead of letting them manage us.

UNDERSTANDING OUR EMOTIONS Emotions, or feelings, are part of our soulish realm. We are a spirit, we have a soul, and we live in a body. Our soul is the intangible area between our spirit—the place where God lives—and our physical body. It is made up of our mind, will and emotions—it tells us what we think, what we want and how we feel. Of these three areas of the soul, it's our feelings that get stirred up the fastest and can lead us into temptation the quickest.

Once our emotions get stirred up, they can quickly deceive our

mind. After this happens, the voice of our conscience, which operates out of our spirit, is denied its normal standard of judgment. In other words, our God-given inner voice of insight and understanding becomes drowned out by the cries of our emotions.

In this unstable state, we don't know God's will for our lives. We become confused about what we should and shouldn't do. As a result, we commit to things that God doesn't want us to commit to, we quit doing things that God wants us to remain a part of, and we say things that damage our relationships.

When we follow our feelings instead of following God's Spirit, we are living the life of the flesh, and it keeps us out of God's will. Romans 8:8 says that "those who are living the life of the flesh [catering to the appetites and impulses of their carnal nature] cannot please or satisfy God, or be acceptable to Him" (The Amplified Bible). This doesn't mean that God doesn't love us. What it does mean is that He is not satisfied with nor will He accept fleshly behavior.

It is imperative that we learn how to walk in the Spirit. When we "walk and live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit]; then [we] will certainly not gratify the cravings and desires of the flesh (of human nature without God)" (Gal. 5:16).

How do we learn to walk in the Spirit? I believe one of the best ways is to understand the differences between the natural man, the carnal man and the spiritual man.

THE NATURAL MAN AND THE CARNAL MAN In 1 Corinthians 2 and 3, the apostle Paul talks about two types of people that are led by their fleshly desires—the natural man and the carnal man. The natural man is the person who is not saved—his spirit is dead and totally devoid of God's Spirit. He "does not accept or welcome or admit into his heart the gifts and teachings and revelations of the Spirit of God, for they are folly

(meaningless nonsense) to him; and he is incapable of knowing them (of progressively recognizing, understanding, and becoming better acquainted with them) because they are spiritually discerned and estimated and appreciated" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Since God is a Spirit and the things about Him are spiritually discerned, the natural man cannot understand anything about God. Why? Because his spirit is dead in sin (see Eph. 2:1).

The carnal man, on the other hand, has experienced new birth in Christ. But although his spirit has been made alive through his faith in Jesus, his life is dominated by the desires of the flesh—the combined cravings of his body and soul. He does what he wants and is aimlessly led around by his feelings.

The carnal man is a people-pleaser who cares more about what people think than about obeying God. This was the case with many of the Corinthians. It is also the way many Christians are living today.

Look at what Paul says: "For you are still [unspiritual, having the nature] of the flesh [under the control of ordinary impulses]. For as long as [there are] envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). In other words, Paul is saying that these carnal Christians were immature and operating out of their emotions—whatever they felt like saying and whatever they felt like doing, they did.

Carnal Christians are easy to identify. They are usually in strife, discontent, easily offended and lacking peace.

For many years of my early walk with God I had very little peace with myself or others, even though I was a Spirit-filled Christian. If I didn't get my way, I would argue, pout, throw a fit, have a pity party or not talk to people for weeks at a

time. Basically, I acted like a child.

At the time, I had no idea my behavior was wrong or that I was being led by my fleshly desires. I went to church regularly and heard Bible doctrine, but I wasn't hearing any practical teaching on how to get along with others and exercise self-control over my emotions.

When I finally got fed up with not having peace in my life, I made a decision to do whatever I needed to do to get it. I went to God and asked Him what was wrong, and He responded, "Joyce, you're shallow. You need to begin living on a deeper level."

Over time, God made it clear to me that the deeper level I needed to live on was the level of the Spirit. In order for us to truly enjoy the abundant life Jesus died to give us, we need to stop living by what we want, think, and feel and start following the promptings of His Spirit. This is the level that the spiritual man lives on.

THE SPIRITUAL MAN The spiritual man is the mature Christian who follows diligently after the desires of the Spirit. He is not someone who just prays the sinner's prayer and then never feeds his spirit with the Word. Nor is he someone who keeps God in a "box" and lets Him out only on Sunday mornings.

The spiritual man has a full-time commitment to follow Christ, and he lets the Lord into every area of his life. He walks in integrity, humility and peace. He knows how to get along with others. His life displays the fruit of the Spirit, and he enjoys the favor of God.

First Corinthians 2:15 says, "But the spiritual man tries all things [he examines, investigates, inquires into, questions, and discerns all things], yet is himself to be put on trial and judged by no one [he can read the meaning of everything, but no one can properly discern or appraise or get an insight into him]." What Paul is saying here is that the spiritual man

doesn't live his life on a whim—impulsively following his fleshly desires for what he wants, thinks and feels. Instead he lives by discernment.

What is the difference between feelings and discernment? Feelings are of the flesh—they are shallow and constantly subject to change. Discernment, on the other hand, is a knowing in the spirit—something that comes from deep inside and is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived His life by discernment. Isaiah 11:2-3 says, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon shall make Him of quick understanding, and His delight shall be in the reverential and obedient fear of the Lord. And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, neither decide by the hearing of His ears." So Jesus' discernment was not based on the superficial senses of His flesh—it was the result of a knowing deep within His spirit. And this same gift of discernment is available to you and me.

How does it work? Before the spiritual man does anything, he quickly checks with his spirit to see if the thing he is about to do is OK. If he has peace, he proceeds. But if he is uncomfortable, confused or frustrated, he remains still. For instance, there have been times when I had a strong desire to give a word of correction to one of our employees. But before I opened my mouth, I checked with my spirit to confirm that it was what God wanted. If I felt a peace and a release to do it, I did it.

There have also been situations when I've been at the mall getting ready to purchase something, but before I could get to the checkout counter, I sensed an irritation, frustration and pressure in my spirit. In this case, my spirit was not bearing witness with the Holy Spirit that what I wanted to do was of God. So I didn't buy anything.

You see, every time you and I choose to listen to and follow

the Holy Spirit's promptings, our spirits grow stronger, and a little bit more of our flesh dies. As a result, more and more of God's power is released in our lives to operate in the fruit of the Spirit. By yielding to the Holy Spirit rather than being controlled by our emotions, we honor God and put ourselves in a position to be radically blessed.

Developing discernment and being led by the Spirit is not something that happens overnight—it is a learning process that takes time. Little by little, one experience after another, God tries, or tests, our hearts, emotions and thinking (see Ps. 7:9, The Amplified Bible).

How does He do it? He allows us to go through difficult situations that stir up our emotions. In this way, you and I are able to see for ourselves how emotionally unstable we can become and how desperately we need His help.

Psalm 94:12-13 says, "Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man whom You discipline and instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him power to keep himself calm in the days of adversity." This Scripture lets us know that God allows things in our lives to affect us emotionally so that we can learn how not to be led by our feelings. His ultimate goal is to get us to the point that, no matter what is going on, we remain calm.

Who's going to keep us calm? We are going to keep ourselves calm. How? By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

All God wants us to do is to get in the habit of running to Him for grace (supernatural inner strength) to exercise self-control over our emotions. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then fearlessly and confidently and boldly draw near to the throne of grace (the throne of God's unmerited favor to us sinners), that we may receive mercy [for our failures] and find grace to help in good time for every need [appropriate help and well-timed help, coming just when we need it]."

I encourage you to stop bowing down to your feelings—stop depending on and placing more value on how you feel than on the Word of God. Exalt the Word over your feelings—believe what the Bible says.

Instead of saying, “I don’t feel as if God loves me,” “I don’t feel as if I’m forgiven,” or “I don’t feel as if I have a future,” say, “God does love me, and nothing can separate me from His love. He has heard my confession of sin, and He has forgiven me and cleansed me. And God has a positive plan for my future because His Word says so” (see Jer. 29:11; Rom. 8:38-39; 1 John 1:9).

Every time feelings come up to try and steal your righteousness, peace, and joy, find out what the Word of God says, and then open your mouth and speak the Word. Eventually the truth will override and change your feelings.

Read a companion devotional.

Joyce Meyer *has been teaching the Word of God since 1976.*