

# Putting a Stop to Life-Destroying Emotional Bondage

Many Christians wake up to their day facing significant trials and overwhelming responsibilities. In all honesty, there are moments when they do not feel like handling these challenges. The difference between spiritual excellence and mediocrity is what they do with these very real and natural emotions.

Years ago, I read a story in the book *The Disciplined Life* by Richard Shelly Taylor. It told the account of a student who came to class without completing the assignment for the day. When asked why he did not finish his work, the student replied, "I just didn't feel like it."

In response, the teacher stood up behind his desk, pointed his finger at the student and angrily scolded him, "Did it occur to you, young man, that the world is run by people who 'don't feel like it'?"

I've heard it said that we should "act our way into feeling rather than feel our way into acting." That's good wisdom. Yet, many believers falter under the press of negative and difficult feelings. This reality robs them of resolve and stymies their personal productivity.

## God-Given Feelings

Of course, emotions are part of God's design for us. After His image, the triune God made us to be both rational and emotional. Our all-wise God also exhibits the emotions of joy, sorrow, grief, anger and compassion, just to name a few. Emotions can enhance our relationships, our enjoyment of special events and our savoring of the daily journey. They can also have the opposite effect. In fact, emotions make better servants than masters. They are designed to decorate our lives with color and celebration, but not to drive us into

complacency and consternation.

## **The Spirit and Emotions**

Given the emotional battles we all face from time to time, we need a fresh surrender to the consistency and ascendancy of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit's regulation and rule, any believer can potentially be overcome by negative and counterproductive feelings.

### **Spiritual Discipline to Steer Our Emotional Compulsions**

Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. When young Timothy's fears were hindering his spiritual fruitfulness, his seasoned spiritual father, Paul, challenged him with these words: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7). This "sound mind" is also translated to mean "self-discipline." Discipline results in regulating one's conduct by principle rather than impulse, emotion or convenience. When emotion yells that we "don't feel like it," the Spirit can intervene with a fresh dedication to the principles of maturity, responsibility, servanthood and supernatural power.

### **Spiritual Desire to Spark Our Emotional Choices**

It is not uncommon to feel stuck in the emotional mud of apathy or despondency. It is in those moments that we need the supernatural desire and energy available to us by the Holy Spirit. Philippians 2:13 tells us, "For God is the One working in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure." Rather than pleasing ourselves in compliance to convenient feelings, we can surrender to the good and Christ-honoring power of the indwelling motivation and power readily available through the Spirit.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul prayed, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ.” The faithful presence of God in us, by the Holy Spirit, moves us beyond self-absorbed feelings to produce comprehensive consecration that makes us more like Jesus. The Savior who battled with deep emotion in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the brutality of the cross works in us to produce sacrificial and sanctifying choices that serve others and advance His purposes.

### **Spiritual Determination to Sustain Our Emotional Commitment**

Still, the road is long, the days difficult and the choices continual in our journey of discipleship. Our need for the Spirit’s help in our emotional self-management is constant—from salvation until the day we step into eternity. That’s why we need the truth of Hebrews 12:2 for every decision, day and decade of life. The Scriptures say that emotional perseverance is found when we “look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we “don’t feel like it” we have the assurance that “The Finisher” lives in us to empower us with an unleashing of divine joy that can counteract our lethargy.

### **Faith That Strengthens Feelings**

The issue is not whether the Holy Spirit can give us emotional discipline, desire and determination. Rather, it is a question of whether we will have the faith in the Spirit’s sufficiency to surrender and trust His empowerment. The hymn writer reminds us, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in—to trust and obey.” This commitment is vital, especially when we “don’t feel like it.”

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