

Rescuing Your Life From Bondage to Your Emotions

“I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

Brothers and sisters. If you would be spiritually mature and successful in the Christian life, you must rescue your spiritual life from bondage to your emotions.” –J. Sidlow Baxter, speaking to Mississippi Baptists in the mid-1970s.

She said to me, “If I don’t feel like doing something, my heart would not be in it, and the Lord said we are to serve Him with all our heart. I don’t want to be a hypocrite.”

I said, “So, if you don’t feel like reading your Bible or going to church or apologizing to a neighbor, you don’t do it. Right?”

She: “Right. It would be hypocritical.”

Me: “Well. May I ask you, do you ever wake up on Monday morning and not feel like going to work? Or, when you were a teen, were there early mornings when you did not feel like getting up and going to school?”

She: “That’s different.”

Me: “How is it different?”

She: “It just is.”

Her name is legion. A million clones believe as she does. And the most telling thing about her lazy philosophy is how she refuses to examine it to see if it might be flawed.

“Might be flawed.” What a laugh. There are more holes in that way of thinking than in a warehouse of Swiss cheese.

People who run their lives by their feelings end up ruining their lives by their feelings. "How I feel" becomes their guide to everything in life that matters. They flow in and out of relationships as their feelings change, and swap churches and jobs for the same reason.

And they wonder why their lives are so crazy, why nothing lasts and why no friends remain.

Of course, they bring the same attitude to church:

"I don't feel like praying. To pray anyway would be to fake it."

"I don't feel like going to church today. To go anyway would be doing it in the flesh."

"I don't feel like going to that man and asking for his forgiveness. For me to do so would be hypocritical."

"I know I should give to that needy family, but I don't feel led."

Emotions: Great Servant, But Lousy Master

If I require that my feelings must always be present in order for my effort to be legitimate, my emotions become the gold standard of everything.

We think of a long list of Bible questions raised by this philosophy:

- When the three Hebrew lads withstood King Nebuchadnezzar and ended up being thrown in the fiery furnace, did they feel happy about it? Were they afraid? Did their fear negate the positive effect of their faithfulness (Dan. 3)?
- When Daniel stood up against another king and was fed to the lions—or so they thought—how did he feel going in? Did it matter? Did his feelings, positive or negative,

- have anything to do with what God did that day (Dan. 6)?
- Read of our Lord's agony in Gethsemane on the night before He went to the cross, and ask yourself, "How was He feeling?" (Matt. 26:36ff). Two questions: Did His dread of what lay ahead stop Him from going forward? Did that inner pain diminish the value of His sacrificial death on the cross in any way?
 - Take the midnight worship service in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25). Even though Paul and Silas are in great pain from the beating they received earlier—these wounds were left untreated—and they are locked in stocks deep in the interior of the jail, nevertheless, they are "praying and singing hymns to God." Do you suppose Paul had said, "You know, Silas, I just feel like singing"?

Their feelings were irrelevant.

Write that in huge letters on your heart and in your mind, my friend: How they felt had nothing to do with anything.

What counted was what they did. The Hebrew lads stood firm for their faith, Daniel held to his convictions, the Lord Jesus steeled Himself and went to the cross and Paul and Silas praised God in spite of how they were feeling.

Feelings are good. No one is denying that.

We do a thousand things to get good feelings. We take vacations by the seashore or in the mountains. We drive the family to Orlando, buy them snow cones or change shoes. We want to feel good. We throw out old mattresses and install new ones. We wear certain clothes simply because "I feel good when I'm wearing that."

The problem comes when we allow our feelings to call the shots. To say what is true and what is false, what we will do and what we cannot do, how we will live.

She said to me, “I know I should go ask that woman’s forgiveness, but I don’t want to. And to make myself do it anyway would be faking it. I’d be a hypocrite.”

I said, “No. You would be doing it by faith.”

Living by Faith Means My Feelings are Irrelevant

Jesus asked the frightened disciples, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). Their fears were paralyzing them. To do the faith-thing in spite of our fears honors the Lord.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). “And without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). “...hope that is seen is not hope, for why does a man still hope for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24).

Ten lepers approached our Lord, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When He saw them, He told them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” The Bible says, “And while they were going, they were healed” (Luke 17:11-14, HCSB).

Get that? They had turned away from Jesus and were walking toward the synagogue, as He had commanded. And yet nothing had happened at that point. It was only after they obeyed—“as they were going”—that they were healed.

We can imagine the lepers saying, “Just as soon as we are healed, we will obey and find the priests. But not until. Otherwise, it would be silly to seek out the priests while we’re still leprous.”

We walk by faith. We obey the Lord.

We do so regardless of how we feel.

We pray to Him no matter how we are feeling. We enter His house to worship regardless of how we feel. We bring an offering and lift our voices in praise and we open His word

and teach it, and our feelings have nothing to do with anything.

Our Lord asked the question of the ages. “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Will He find His people living by faith or still running their lives by their feelings?

God help us to get this right. {eoa}

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