

The Incredible Way Holy Spirit Can Help You Defeat Soulless Emotions

Feelings are fickle. They're real, but they're unreliable. Emotions can be affected by everything happening both inside you and around you. You may see your emotions as overwhelming, and think you are at their mercy. I'd like to help you befriend your feelings instead of living as their victim.

Without emotions, life would be colorless and purely clinical. God built us with the capacity to experience sadness, anger, pain, grief, fatigue, peace, joy, hope and love. Many of those encompass more than just feelings, but you can't experience any of them without feelings. Jesus expressed and experienced them all.

This past year, I've experienced plenty of times when emotions felt overwhelming while I've walked my journey of grief. I'm also grateful that I had learned previously, and am learning again, what to do with feelings when they come.

You know that letting your emotions control you is neither healthy nor godly, but neither is stuffing and denying them. So here are some key steps to help you befriend your feelings and make your emotions work for you rather than against you.

Befriend Your Feelings

1. Both "positive" and "negative" emotions are legitimate and can be healthy.

Shutting down negative feelings means cutting yourself off from the positive feelings also; you can't be open to experiencing one without the other. The pleasure center and the pain center in your brain are not completely separate. The

opposite of love is not anger, but apathy. Deep pain can be very close to deep love and profound meaning.

God's goal for you is not creature comfort or superficial happiness. It's not until eternity that pain will be eliminated. In our journey now, we must find the godly healthy place emotions have in our lives. Choosing to embrace pain or grief, for example, is the only way to find healing and the hope, true comfort, and lasting joy that will result.

2. Feelings provide a window into the state of your heart.

It's the old "thermometer or thermostat" analogy. Feelings are a very helpful thermometer, but they make a very poor thermostat. "Negative" feelings may provide the only alert your brain will notice telling you that something needs to change. Fear, anxiety, sadness, pain—they're screaming "pay attention!"

Learning to see your emotions as a window into your heart can let you know when you need to rest, when you need to get wise outside input, when you need to seek God's wisdom, when you need to forgive and much more. See your feelings as providing valuable information you can then make thoughtful decisions about.

3. Emotions are true, but they are not the whole truth.

You really are afraid. You really do hurt. You really are excited. You really are sexually charged up. You really are happy. Denying that reality won't help. You feel the way you feel regardless of whether anyone else acknowledges it, or whether you acknowledge it to yourself or not. God sees you, and He knows how you feel also.

But He knows "the rest of the story," and you would do well to remember that there's more to the story also. Just as picking up your child can make boo-boos all better and monsters disappear, stepping back (or even better, running into God's

arms) can help you see more truth.

- Yes, you feel sick and are in pain. But it's also true that Jesus is the Healer, improving your lifestyle may help you improve and in eternity, there will be no more sickness or pain.
- Yes, you are lonely and sad. But it's also true that reaching out to others will lift your spirits, and when you know Jesus, you are never truly alone.
- Yes, you are overwhelmed and terrified. But it's also true that there are some things you may be able to do that will help, and God is big enough to handle what you cannot change.

4. Feelings can change when you change your habits, thoughts, and lifestyle.

Yes, feelings are fickle. They can be affected by how much you slept last night, what you had for breakfast, habitual thinking patterns, the people around you and so much more. A problem may seem much smaller after a good run or a talk with a friend.

If your feelings are not what you would like them to be, pay attention to the input your mind is receiving. Does your physical or mental diet need to change? Do you need to spend time with different people? Do you need to pay more attention to what God says about fear, about grief, about purpose and so on? Consistently making relatively small changes in the raw materials your brain receives and the messages it takes in will almost always, over time, change your emotions.

5. Embrace emotions, but don't make decisions based on them.

Seeking primarily pleasure or seeking relief from pain at any cost, may be natural human motivations, but that type of motivation will result in addiction, lack of fulfillment and eventually destruction. Solomon echoed that: "And I said in my heart, 'Come, and I will test you with selfish pleasures to

experience desires.' And notice that this too is vanity. And I said of frivolous fun, 'They are only senseless ideas'; and regarding selfish pleasure, 'What purpose is this?'" (Eccl. 2:1-2).

The alternative is to embrace emotions, but not to seek them. Let your feelings inform you, but don't let them control you. As Jesus did, go ahead and weep, feel angry, agonize, sleep, grieve, rejoice, relax, give and love. Pause and feel your feelings. But make the direction of your life, the thing you seek after, to be about your Father's business.

If you need to grow here, make the decision to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in maturing you. Submit all your feelings to His control. He made you the way you are, and He's well able to finish His work of making you like Jesus—emotions included.

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board certified OB-Gyn physician and an ordained Doctor of Ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life that Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .