

RENEWING OUR FEELINGS

1 John 4:7-21

Feelings are, with a few exceptions, good servants.
But they are disastrous masters.¹

~ Dallas Willard ~

Feelings are essential to life.

God made us to feel and to feel deeply.

Jesus is a person of deep feeling. He was “fightin’ mad” when He cleared the Temple, He openly wept at the tomb of His close friend Lazarus, and in His anxiety, He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Feelings, per se, are not the problem. There are at least two challenges with regard to feelings. One challenge is not to be *ruled* by our feelings. The other challenge is to learn to *cultivate* the feelings that ought to characterize us as followers of Jesus.

This may be a new idea for some of us: that we can and must learn to cultivate specific feelings. But this is a hopeful discovery particularly for those of us who struggle with negative or destructive feelings. With God’s help, we can *replace* destructive feelings with the good feelings that flow from our relationships with Jesus.

In the transforming of our feelings, we must realize feelings cannot be changed by a direct act of the will.

Feelings cannot be changed by a direct act of the will.

In other words, in the heat of the moment, we cannot choose to stop feeling what we are feeling nor can we will ourselves in that moment to feel something different. Our inability to change feelings directly is true because feelings do not have a life of their own.

Our thoughts generate our feelings.

Our thoughts generate our feelings.

If we struggle with anxiety it is because we think/believe we or someone we love or something we value is at risk of harm or loss.

If we struggle with anger it is because we are being blocked from something we think/believe we or someone near us ought to receive.

Because our thoughts generate our feelings, we have, with God’s help, the ability to cultivate the feelings that should dominate the lives of Jesus’ disciples. By setting our

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 122.

minds on things above - letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly - the feeling tones of our lives can be transformed.

The mind set upon Christ will generate the three primary feelings of love, joy, and peace.

As we become more like Jesus, love, joy, and peace increasingly become the feeling tones of our lives.

When we grasp the deep love of God for us it awakens love in us for God and others. Love is the intent *to do good to the other*. We love something or someone when we do good to them for their sake. This love is not found in the unredeemed human heart, or in the world; its source is God. God is love. As His love saturates our minds it generates feelings of love, compassion and care for others. Consider love's progression explained by the Apostle John.

1 John 4:7-21

Love and the feelings associated with it such as a compassionate heart, kindness and patience become the consistent feeling state of our lives if we keep our minds centered on and saturated with God's love.

To gain a clearer picture of what we're talking about, consider the story of the Good Samaritan. What distinguished this man from the priest and Levite was the fact that when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, he felt compassion despite the fact that the wounded man, a Jew, was his cultural enemy. It was not that the priest and Levite had no feelings. But their feelings were such that they were unmoved by the suffering of this man. They had feelings that moved them to selfish actions and they hardened their hearts to any feelings of sympathy and concern.

Whom do you want to be like?

If you want to be like the Good Samaritan, cultivate a thought life that is saturated with God's love. Meditate and memorize on passages such as Romans 8:31-39.

Romans 8:31-39

In Colossians 3:16 we're taught to sing psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs. In addition to memorizing and meditating upon Scripture, listening to music is a powerful means of keeping our minds and hearts in God's love. Take advantage of the wonderful music available. Select a few songs that focus on God's love and play those quietly as you drift off to sleep. Use your commute to listen to Christian music. Play Christian music in the background as you work around the house or in the garage.

Saturating your mind and heart with God's love will, over time, transform your feelings. Love will increasingly become the primary feeling tone of your life in Christ.