

MANAGING EMOTIONS

Virgil Warren, PhD

INTRODUCTION

A. Examples of emotions by groups

pressure	hate	joy	burn out	jealousy	discouragement
worry	love	sadness	despair	anger	boredom
anxiety	prejudice		depression	guilt complex	low morale
fear			dread		
stress					

B. We live too much out of our emotions instead of living out of God's values.

There is a tendency to determine truth, make decisions, and even measure honesty on the basis of emotions. Such an approach is not good because emotions are not a good reading of reality, even though they may seem even more real than ideas and values.

1. Emotions often make matters bigger than they are.
2. Emotions often transfer themselves to objects other than their source.
3. Emotions are many times just plain wrong.
4. Emotions will change about the same thing in a relatively short time.

C. Inadequate ways of dealing with undesirable emotions:

1. Letting them go (release)
2. Stifling them (hiding them from other people or even ourselves)

Instead, we need to work at

3. Managing them and changing them (transfer to Christ)

curbing
controlling by expressing within boundaries

D. We can change and control feelings, or God would not give commandments about them:

Ephesians 4:26: "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath.*"

I. FORMULAS FOR MANAGING EMOTIONS



The event is what happens objectively.

The interpretation has to do with the way we take it or look at it, which supplies a subjective component to the total experience.

The feeling is the emotion that attaches to the experience.

Behavior is action by which we respond to the interpreted event overlaid with emotion.

The arrows in the preceding diagram indicate that feelings come both from the event interpreted and from the behavior generated by the affective overlay of the original experience.

We proceed with the assumption that emotions can be habits of response as well as anything. Consequently, we change them the same way that we change any other kinds of habits:

1. Raise them to the conscious level.
2. Substitute other behavior in place of them.

A. Change the Interpretation

Example: We meet someone on the street and slow down to talk, but the person goes on. We feel rejected and put down. The next time we meet we do not speak or look directly at her, and a widening breach develops between the two of us.

1. Think whether there was some other way to take it.

In the example, the other person was preoccupied with some problem or simply did not notice you pass.

2. Look for the positive things that can come out of it.
3. Imagine how the situation could be worse.
4. Get out of the habit of running everything through a good-bad grid.

Being evaluative itself can be a habit. You do not have to make judgment on the morality or quality of every act, because you are not in a position that calls for action affected by such a judgment. Admit that you often do not know the motives that lie behind people's actions and words.

5. Stop and figure out why you feel the way you do.

Changing the interpretation of an experience can have far-reaching effects on your emotional condition.

B. Change behavior

In the previous example, it may be true that the person does not like you, but do not let it “get you down.” You can apply a value: that is dumb, or I’ll change.

The conviction here is that emotions arise significantly from actions. If this is so to a significant degree, that fact affords another procedure for managing emotions by changing behavior. It is easier to will an act than a feeling; so look ahead to what feeling an act of behavior will elicit; then do it as a way of producing the feeling you need. You cannot deal effectively with emotions by exerting the will on them directly, but you can deal with them indirectly by exerting the will on actions that produce different feelings.

1. Choose to act as if the event were different from what it first seemed.

Romans 12:17-21: “*Overcome evil with good.*” Good and evil are kinds of action. If good action overcomes evil, it overcomes the feelings created by our response to evil.

You may know that the person was in a hurry but still “feel” rejected. You must do something. Go and be accepted by someone else.

2. Many feelings tend to disappear if you get busy.

Give attention to frustration, despair, boredom.

Do something; otherwise, you will not get over from the unwanted feeling.

II. ACTIVITIES FOR MANAGING EMOTIONS

Most activities recommended in the treatment on “Psychological Strength” apply here as well, especially the ones that deal with maintaining desirable emotions: recognize limitations, rank things, reduce life to manageable units, emphasize eternal things. Here are further suggestions that change undesirable emotions and retrieving you from specific occasions where feelings have already occurred.

A. Get some exercise. (exercise)

One possible translation of 1 Timothy 4:8 says, “*Bodily exercise is profitable for a little.*”

Jogging, for example, relieves tension,
 removes that sluggish sensation,
 dissipates anger, frustration, anxiety.

B. Watch what you eat. (nutrition)

Caffeine and salt can aggravate hypertension and stress.

Sugar can relate to hypoglycemia and that “teary,” worn-out feeling.

Overeating can foster sluggishness, boredom, and depression.

C. Get enough sleep. (rest)

Sometimes young people try to go on too little sleep, which leaves them feeling foggy, which resembles feeling discouraged and unmotivated.

D. Plan time to relax. (relaxation)

Shift from goal orientation to existential orientation once in a while.

Listen to soothing music (note music therapy).

Develop a hobby, where you can do something you enjoy for its own sake rather than for what it can produce.

Take time for yourself aside from interaction with other people. Watch the sun go down, the snow fall, the rain come down, the wind blow, the creek run, the fire burn, the fish swim around in the aquarium.

Break routine once in a while. Mothers with young children can get away from the continual emotional pull that children can exert on them, “Mom, Mom.”

Even Jesus and his disciples went aside for a while to get away from the constant demand of the multitude for their time, attention, help (Mark 6:31; 7:24-40).

E. Do something new. (variety)

F. Talk to a positive person. (conversation)

1. General pattern

a. When we are by ourselves too much, we nurse our feelings.

recycle problems.

brood over difficulties.

At the very time when we do not want to see anyone, we probably need most to see someone to “get out of ourselves.”

b. Avoid complainers or otherwise negative people.

Complaining is (1) an excuse for not trying.

(2) a way to get attention and sympathy.

(3) a way of controlling the situation by putting a mood over it.

2. Specific situation

a. Talking about anything will help, but

b. Talking about a problem that is bothering you is the main thing.

Putting problems into words

(1) makes them seem more manageable.

Feelings disregard size and intensity; putting feelings into words creates a sense of reducing them to manageable size and mastering them.

(2) clarifies and organizes it.

(3) gets rid of them.

Gets them off your chest

Gets them out there

Gets it out of you

Objectifies it

This observation lies near the center of counseling technique.

Sometimes we cannot get around positive people; but we can

G. pray.

Pray aloud with our eyes open. Praying silently may seem too much like meditation/talking to ourselves. Praying aloud is more normal talking.

H. even let yourself cry.

I. create a Plan B.

Tension comes from the feeling that something must happen that can't; having a plan B gets rid of that no-escape feeling.

J. You can let time do its part.

You have to understand that your emotions are not the reality; their negativity erodes with time.

Note as well observations made in previous studies:

K. Maintain a righteous lifestyle.

L. Feed your mind wholesome things.

M. Set realistic goals.

N. Take initiative.

III. VALUES OF EMOTIONS

The values of emotions are the “flip side” of their detriments. They . . .

- A. add color.
- B. supply fuel.

Mind creates ideas but emotions help give the energy to fulfill them.

- C. give warning.

CONCLUSION

We must not let our emotions control us so that we feel trapped, locked in, and victimized.
We can manage our emotions.

christir.org