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# Harnessing Your Emotions

## Book Summary, Short Version

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Life would be pretty boring without emotions. We'd just move from one bland experience to the next like a bunch of robots. Fortunately, God created us to experience life with emotions—but He never intended for us to be ruled and controlled by them. Out-of-control emotions make life miserable. As believers, we can't afford to let emotions run our lives.

I doubt there is a single person who loves God who wakes up in the morning saying, "I think I'll be depressed today" or "I want to be miserable." I can't imagine someone wanting to be under the control of damaging emotions. Yet when bad things start to happen, most people feel completely powerless to prevent negative emotions from dominating them. They don't realize that they have authority over their emotions, and it is within their power to harness them.

The Word of God tells us, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

This is just one of many scriptures that tell us to rejoice in all circumstances. God wouldn't have commanded us to control our emotions if we couldn't do it. The simple fact that we are commanded to rejoice and to praise God at all times is proof that we can.

God says we can harness our emotions, but popular culture encourages us to do the exact opposite. Psychologists tell people not to hold anything back. They say you have to vent and let it all out. This viewpoint has its roots in the false assumption that our emotional state is an automatic response to the things that are happening to us in life.

The idea is that you can't do anything to prevent emotion from rising up and controlling you, so you may as well let it all loose. But that isn't true. I don't deny that we can be hurt, or that we have negative emotional reactions to upsetting circumstances, but we can deny those emotions the opportunity to rule our lives.

I remember an instance when I was working with a ministry in Charlotte, North Carolina, feeding some homeless people. I was talking to an alcoholic and he got so mad that he spit a big glob of tobacco juice right in my face. Initially, I was mad. For a fraction of a second, I wanted to punch his lights out, but I didn't.

I knew that Jesus loved him, and I knew that I had love, joy, and peace abiding in my born-again spirit (Galatians 5:22). So, I denied anger the privilege of retaliating. I wiped the spit from my face and kept on preaching. I didn't miss a beat. I just kept telling him about how much God loved him, and I was able to operate from my born-again spirit rather than from my emotions.

The inability to harness your emotions when somebody spits in your face, hits you, insults you, ignores you, or stabs you in the back, will put you in bondage.

**You aren't free if emotions are dictating your behavior. The circumstances of your life are going to dominate you as long as you allow emotions to govern you.**

Anyone who says that emotional responses to circumstances are inevitable, and that you can't stop those emotions from controlling you, has wrongly reduced human beings to merely evolved animals. You aren't a developed

animal. You didn't evolve from fish or animals. You were created in the image of God, and you have a spirit man on the inside of you that gives you the capacity to operate above the animal level. You aren't reduced to just responding to stimuli from your environment.

**Your born-again spirit gives you the ability to live supernaturally.**

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot  
Be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man: But every man is tempted,  
when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived,  
it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. James 1:13-15

People today narrowly define "lust" as illicit sexual desire for another person, and while it is often used that way in scripture, it also means to long for, or desire. The meaning of "lust" in this scripture is "desire." Every man is tempted when he is lured away and enticed by his own desires, and then when desire (or emotion) conceives, it brings forth sin. Here's the point: Emotions aren't a byproduct of your environment. They are where sin is conceived.

The picture of sin being conceived and then giving birth to death is a mirror of the natural process of conception and childbirth. It's pretty simple: sexual relations lead to conception, and approximately forty weeks later, the woman gives birth. In the same way, once sin is conceived in your emotions, it will ultimately give birth to death. You can't see it right away, and it might take time, but sin will eventually give birth to death.

In the natural realm, if a man and a woman don't want to conceive a child, then they shouldn't have sexual relations. It works the same way in the spiritual realm. Every time you allow negative emotions to run amuck, you are conceiving sin. The problem is, most Christians don't recognize, or feel any responsibility for, that conception.

People are letting their desires and emotions run wild, but then when the birth of sin and death starts to show, they don't want any part of it. Essentially, they have allowed the conception of sin in their emotions and now that they are nine months pregnant, they don't want to have a child. It doesn't work that way. You don't try to stop the birth—you stop conception. If there is a strong fight inside of you, pulling you toward sin, it's because you have already conceived the sin in your emotions. Stop the conception, and you won't have to worry about giving birth.

Sin doesn't come on you like the flu; it has to be conceived. You don't commit adultery accidentally; first, it has to be conceived in your emotions. It begins by allowing yourself to desire someone other than your spouse—that's the conception. It could be something as small as dreaming about the way some television character treats his or her spouse, and then beginning to indulge in fantasies and live vicariously. People think there isn't anything wrong with that. They think since they aren't actually doing anything that there is no harm in it. They feel no accountability toward controlling their emotions.

I don't mean to be offensive, but in a spiritual sense, every time you indulge negative emotions it's like having spiritual intercourse with the devil. The devil is planting a seed on the inside of you that is going to grow into a sin, which eventually brings destruction. If you would recognize that, I guarantee it would change the way that you look at indulging emotions.

Instead of allowing depression and discouragement and other negative emotions to overrule you, recognize that the Bible tells us to be strong and of good courage in the face of trying circumstances (Joshua 1:9). The Word of God commands us in many places to harness our emotions.

Every time you disobey those commands and allow yourself to slip into negative emotions, it's like having a spiritual

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affair with the devil. You know you shouldn't feel that way, but you feel like you can't help it so you give in. Giving up, or giving in, is going to plant a seed on the inside of you that will bring forth something you don't want.

When the birth comes around, you're going to be crying out for God to save you. You cannot afford to indulge your emotions and conceive sin if you want to live a victorious life. You have to learn to control your emotions.

The night Jesus was betrayed, He drew His disciples aside for some last instruction. The next day He would be crucified, and the disciples would be plunged into a terrible situation. Prior to the Resurrection, He knew that it would look like the devil had won. The crucifixion would make it appear like all of the faith and hope the disciples had put in Him was misplaced. Jesus was trying to build the disciples up to face that situation—to keep them from running away and being discouraged. The first words Jesus spoke during His last instructions to them were:

“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1)

"Let not your heart be troubled" is a command, not a suggestion. Jesus didn't say, "Try not to let your hearts be troubled." Our society, with its political correctness, would criticize Jesus for being so insensitive to the disciples as to suggest they shouldn't be troubled during a devastating time. Our culture would advise the disciples to let it all out and vent their emotions. Jesus did just the opposite.

I believe it is significant that the very first thing Jesus told His disciples to do was to harness their emotions. In my experience with myself and dealing with others in crisis, I have found that the reaction to the initial moments of a crisis is vital. If you fall apart like a two-dollar suitcase at the very beginning—if you let fear, despair, grief, and sorrow overwhelm you—it's nearly impossible to overcome those emotions and walk in faith later on. It's a lot easier to stop those emotions from ever entering in than it is to try to keep them from getting out after you have been entertaining them.

My oldest son Joshua called me one night and said, "Dad, I'm sorry to tell you this but Peter (my younger son) is dead." Joshua told me what had happened and explained that they were at the hospital. Peter had been dead about four hours by the time Joshua called. I said, "The first report is not the last report. Don't let anybody touch him until we get there."

My wife, Jamie, and I got into our car and began the long drive to the hospital. I started to have the same emotions that any parent would have in a similar situation. I began feeling grief, sorrow, confusion, and fear. All kinds of emotions were swirling around in me. But I remembered this teaching, that Jesus commanded His disciples to not let their hearts be troubled as they were entering into a crisis situation. So, I refused to give in to those negative emotions.

As we were driving toward the hospital, I started giving thanks to God and worshipping Him. I said, "God, I know You didn't kill my son. You are not the one who caused this problem, and whether he comes back to life or not, I want you to know that I am going to continue to serve You. You are a good God."

**I believe with all of my heart that praising God was the key to not letting my emotions run away. I kept them under control. I began to operate in faith and joy instead of grief and sorrow.**

I'm not condemning anyone who has experienced sorrow and grief in a crisis. I understand that we are human and that we have these emotions. I also know that experiences in life can knock the wind out of you. I'm just saying that we aren't only human. You can operate above your emotions when tragedy strikes, if you choose to.

When Jamie and I got into town, we found out that Peter had come back to life. After nearly five hours of being

dead, Peter suddenly sat up and started talking. There was no brain damage of any kind. Today he's not only alive and well, but we have a granddaughter who was born a year later. I honestly believe that none of this would have happened if I had let my emotions run away with me.

Jesus gave us a command to control our emotions in a crisis because giving in to fear prevents us from trusting in God, and it blocks us from receiving from God by faith. Venting or indulging negative emotions only makes them grow, like adding fuel to a fire—making it more and more difficult to walk in faith.

Over the years, I've had several horses, and I can tell you that if you let a horse run away with you, it is nearly impossible to rein it in. It is very difficult to overcome a horse's runaway momentum. On the other hand, I've taught a seven year-old boy how to control a relatively wild horse by following a few simple instructions. He rode my horse for nearly two hours without any problems.

Shortly after the seven year old dismounted my horse, a twenty-year-old young man showed up at my place wanting to ride. By contrast, the young man didn't want to listen to any of my instructions. Within minutes, the horse took off running and he couldn't stop it. Eventually, the horse threw the young man off, and he ended up making a trip to the hospital.

Emotions are like horses: it's a lot easier to keep them in check than it is to rein them in after they have begun to run wild. If you fall to pieces the moment something bad happens, it's going to be a lot harder to pull yourself back together and start believing God for a miracle. It's much easier to harness your emotions from the start. Thankfully, God has given you the power to do so.

You can rule over your emotions. You don't have to let them lead you around by the nose. Part of growing up is learning not to be controlled by your emotions. When you're a kid, all you want to do is go play and have fun. As you mature, you learn to work even when you don't want to. You may not feel like being the parent or going to work on a given day, but you do it anyway because it's part of being a responsible adult.

Being mature means doing things even when we don't feel like it. Being a mature believer means the same thing. You can choose not to let negative emotions run wild and dominate you. God has not only given us the authority to rule and reign over our emotions, He has also commanded us to use that authority. Jesus said:

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

The Lord is saying that you are going to have problems in this life, but He says, "be of good cheer." He's not saying we should only rejoice when everything is perfect in life. This is a command to be of good cheer regardless of our problems. God wouldn't command us to rejoice if we weren't capable of doing it.

**Harnessing your emotions is an essential component to living a victorious Christian life—not just in a crisis situation, but in everyday life. When bad news comes, don't give in to the temptation to let negative emotions like fear and depression rush in and take control of you. Instead, make the choice to rejoice in the Lord and remember that you have God's love, joy, and peace abiding in your born-again spirit. Even when life is going great, you still need to harness your emotions because that is where sin is conceived. Avoid the conception in your emotions, and you won't find yourself in a fight to avoid giving birth to sin.**