

WHY DID GOD GIVE US
EMOTIONS?

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT SCIENCE HAS
DISCOVERED ABOUT EMOTIONS

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PREFACE

I did not grow up in a Christian home. However, my mother wanted my brother and me to have some moral training, so she would drop us off at a Baptist church where we attended Sunday school. She would then pick us up and take us home. While I do not ever remember formally accepting Christ as my savior during my childhood, I do remember that I considered Him a friend. I would often have long conversations with Him, especially when I was angry or hurt.

When I was eight, my father ended a twenty-one-year career with the navy and we moved to the outskirts of Sacramento, California. I enjoyed church and helping in Sunday school and continued to attend faithfully until I reached junior high school. My parents did not object to my going to church, but they also did not really encourage or support my attendance. So around the seventh grade, I stopped going. I still considered Jesus to be a good friend; however, my junior high school eyes saw a lot of hypocrisy

in those attending church. Deciding that I could know God on my own, I quit attending church.

During high school I turned to science as my source of truth. I was even given the nickname “Spock” by some of my friends because I reminded them of Mr. Spock in the TV series *Star Trek* that was popular at the time. I graduated from high school in 1967, the year of the “summer of love” in the not-too-distant Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. While I was never a “hippie”, the influence of the movement was certainly felt in Sacramento. This was especially true at the junior college I began attending. I spent the next two years drifting through college and playing blues guitar.

In 1969 I joined a Buddhist group and became an active member. During this time I advanced in their study department and became a teacher of their doctrine. This was when I met my wife, Michiyo. After five years I became disillusioned with Buddhism and turned to New Age teachings. After another five years, I became disillusioned with New Age teachings, and psychology became my new truth as I pursued my master’s in counseling in preparation to become a marriage and family therapist. During this time my first child, a son, was born. When he turned four, I decided it was time for him to go to church, the way I had, so he could receive moral training.

At the time I was developing a home study mail-order program for people with panic disorder. I knew the lady who was helping design my material was a Christian so I asked about her church, and she invited me to attend. I began taking my son and attending the worship service while he was in Sunday school. I had not really read anything about the Christian faith in all my years since leaving the church and only remembered the stories and precepts I had been taught in Sunday school. Thus, as a young adult I considered the Christian faith to be somewhat simplistic. Now, I heard the

gospel from an adult perspective, and it captured me. My search to find God was over, and I was baptized on December 2, 1984.

When I completed my first book, *Anxiety, Phobias & Panic: Taking Charge and Conquering Fear* in 1988, I knew that I wanted to write a companion version from a Christian perspective. However, after being back in church for only four years and with so many conflicting ideas from my wanderings still in my head, I knew I wasn't ready. So, I had the wife of our head pastor write a supplement to the first book. Although it was not what I envisioned, it was a start.

In 1995 I started attending classes through Fuller Seminary's extension program to deepen my understanding of the Bible. At this time I learned Greek and began studying the New Testament in Greek. A year later I wrote the first draft of this book but realized after several chapters that I was not yet mature enough in faith or understanding to write the book I wanted to write. So I put it aside. I made another attempt to write it about five years later, but again was dissatisfied with the results.

Now, after twenty years of being humbled and growing in Christ, I believe that God has helped me write a book that will be useful to many. From the very start I've had two goals: I wanted to look at what science has learned about emotions from a biblical perspective, and I wanted to do it in a way that would strengthen the readers' walk with God. Over the last two decades I've seen the strengths of science and psychology in helping people and making our lives more comfortable. I've also become acutely aware of the inability of science and psychology to address the true source of human misery: sin and our separation from God.

My prayer is that you are blessed by what I've written.

THE MYSTERY OF EMOTIONS

Jerry and Kathy had been married for only a year when they heard the news that Kathy was pregnant. The doctor's report of Kathy's pregnancy brought them both a joy they had never before experienced. A short time later, their joy was multiplied when they learned that Kathy would be giving birth to twins. They constantly thanked God as they decorated the nursery that would soon shelter their new arrivals. Then, on the day that Jerry and Kathy went to the hospital for the delivery, tragedy struck. The first baby, a girl, struggled to live but died after only an hour. The second twin girl was delivered still born. As Kathy wept, Jerry sat too stunned to respond to the stabbing pain that had suddenly overtaken him.

In an instant, joy had been transformed into a grief that was almost too much to bear. In the days that followed, Jerry and Kathy

wondered if their faith had failed them. If it hadn't, why were they so angry over their tragic loss? As they struggled with the flood of emotions, it seemed like it was all too much, too sudden, too confusing.

Emotions are a mysterious gift. As with Kathy and Jerry, they take us to heights of ecstasy then dash us on the rocks of despair. But emotions do much more than this. They can bind us together and tear us apart. They can move some to noble acts of courage and self-sacrifice while in others they are the force behind terrible acts of evil and destruction.

Why did God make us this way? How are we supposed to manage this wonderful and mystifying gift we call emotions? In the pages that follow, you will explore these two simple, yet profound questions. In the process of seeking answers, you will gain skills that can help you manage your emotions more effectively, and learn how your emotions can help you both understand God more fully and draw closer to Him.

THE ELEPHANT NATURE OF EMOTIONS

A well-known Indian parable tells of six blind men who encounter an elephant for the first time. As each one touches a different part of the elephant, they arrive at conflicting conclusions as to what the elephant is like. The first man touches the elephant's leg and states that it is like a pillar. The second touches the tail and declares it to be like a rope. The third touches the trunk and says it is like the thick branch of a tree. The fourth touches the ear and shouts that it is like a big fan. The fifth touches the side of the elephant and declares it to be like a huge wall. The sixth touches the tusk and says it is like a spear. Although each man's perception of the part he touched is accurate, none has really understood the true nature of the elephant.

The same type of misunderstanding can happen when

individual aspects of emotions are studied without stepping back periodically to see how they interconnect. The four main aspects of emotions most often studied separately include:

- *The subjective nature of emotions:* This includes how they make you feel, how they focus your energy and attention, and how they urge you to take actions to obtain the things you want and avoid the things you don't want. This aspect of emotions also includes the experiential understanding of events and concepts that is much more powerful than simple knowledge.
- *The physical side of emotions:* This includes the various parts of the brain associated with emotions, the physical reactions they cause in your body, and the ways injury, illness, or other malfunctions of the brain can affect how you think and feel.
- *The mental side of emotions:* This includes the role that your thoughts and beliefs play in generating emotions and how emotions, in turn, affect your thoughts.
- *The spiritual side of emotions:* This includes the way emotions reveal both your true character and the nature of your relationship with God as you struggle to live in a broken world. It also includes the way emotions give us insights about the nature of God.

In the next seven chapters you will begin your exploration of emotions. Like the blind men, you will look at each of these four basic aspects of emotions separately. Once you have explored each aspect individually, you will be ready to step back in chapter 10 and see them as parts of a whole and how each part interacts with the others. However, before beginning our journey, I would like to address two issues briefly.

ARE SOME EMOTIONS GOOD AND OTHERS BAD?

Christians sometimes spend a great deal of time pondering whether some emotions, such as love, are good and others, such as anger, are bad. It is similar to wondering whether your hands are good or bad. Emotions, like every other aspect of your being, were originally intended to help you enjoy and serve God. However, just as the actions of your hands can be pleasing or abhorrent to God, your emotions can also serve good or evil. What we need to focus on is the source of the emotion or action.

When the Pharisees saw that Jesus' disciples were not performing a ritual washing before eating, they questioned Him about it. After pointing out how the Pharisees had become consumed with ritual and failed to do what God commanded, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (Matthew 15:10–11). When Peter questioned him further on this point Jesus explained that "the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'" (18-20). Keep in mind that when the New Testament refers to the heart, it is not just looking at it as the center of emotions as modern English does. Instead, the New Testament uses the heart to represent your entire inner being: your mind, desires, emotions, spirit, and soul.

The point is that the source of evil lies in a mind and heart tainted with sin. The actions you take and the emotions you experience are just the outer expression of what is in your heart and mind. Yielding to the Holy Spirit transforms your inner being into

what God intended it to be. As this occurs, your emotions, desires, and thoughts are transformed so they function more closely to what God intends.

DON'T JUST READ, EXPERIENCE

Many different types of people will be reading this book. Some will simply be reading it out of intellectual curiosity. Others will be reading it because they or a loved one is struggling with some emotional issue in their life. Regardless of the reason, I encourage you to take your time as you read through the book and do the Recommended Activities at the end of each chapter before you go on to the next. While simply reading the information will provide you with new insights, many of the ideas discussed in the following chapters cannot be fully grasped until you experience them through the activities at the end of each chapter.

As you work through the activities for a given chapter, you will probably find that some are easy, while others are more difficult for you or make you uncomfortable. The easy activities probably address aspects of emotions with which you are comfortable, healthy areas of your life, or skills that you have mastered. The difficult or uncomfortable activities probably involve areas of your life where growth or healing is needed or call on skills that you have not yet developed. Because of this, you may be inclined to spend less time with some activities and more with others. That's fine, as long as you spend some time doing all the exercises. Even though a particular exercise may seem uncomfortable or irrelevant to you at first, the results of doing it may surprise you.

If you are reading this book because you have issues that you've struggled with for a long time, keep in mind that you have spent your entire life developing your current emotional, thinking, and

behavior patterns. Changing any one of them takes time. More importantly, changing them into what God wants them to be depends on your relationship with God and the degree to which you allow the Holy Spirit to control your daily walk. Be patient and trust that the Holy Spirit is involved with the process and moving you along at a pace that is just right for you. In fact, when an important change occurs, you probably won't even notice it until later. This is how growth takes place. If you have a strong commitment to use this book as it is designed to be used—to do the reading and apply as many of the suggestions as possible even when they seem frivolous or beside the point—not only will you gain a fuller understanding of why God gave you emotions and the role they play in your life, but you will also gain new skills in managing your emotions in a way that pleases God.

In closing this chapter, I join with Paul and pray that God will use this book in such a way that it will help you

always honor and please the Lord, and your [life] will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

[I] also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. (Colossians 1:10–14, NLT)

► RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

ASK GOD TO USE THIS BOOK TO HELP YOU DRAW CLOSER TO HIM

It is no accident that you discovered this book and decided to read it. There is something in it that God wants you to learn. The best way to ensure that you don't miss what God wants to reveal to you is to invite Him to participate in your reading. Each time you pick up this book or work in your journal, take a moment to ask God to open your heart and mind to the things He wants to reveal to you through this book.

KEEP A JOURNAL AS YOU WORK THROUGH THE CHAPTERS

I strongly recommend that you keep a journal while you work through this book. A journal gives you a place to do the written exercises so you can refer back to them. It's also a natural place to make notes about what you are learning.

You don't need to use an expensive or fancy volume for your journal. A simple spiral-bound notebook is fine. Some like to record their thoughts on a computer. Feel free to choose whatever is most comfortable for you. As you work with your journal, keep in mind that privacy is essential, in order for you to write frankly and freely. Do not write for an "unseen audience" because attempting to please invisible watchers can cause you to lose much of the benefit of keeping a journal. You also do not need to write something every day. Although some do find that keeping a daily journal is best, others find that working in their journal two or three times a week best suits their situation.

As you add to your journal, keep in mind that its main value

is not the permanent record it represents but the work you put into creating it. The act of writing is a powerful way to learn because it involves several parts of the brain. This is why written homework is a fundamental part of formal education. When you are grappling with emotional issues, a journal also helps you be more objective. People often find that thinking about their emotions on a piece of paper is much easier than thinking about them in their head.

TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF THIS BOOK

Take some time now to answer the following two questions:

- Why am I reading this book?
- What do I want to get out of it?

Record your answers in your journal. Here are examples of what four different people wrote:

I would like to understand my emotions more. Sometimes I get angry more than I should, and I would like to learn how to stop doing this.

I'm curious about how my emotions fit into God's plan for me.

I don't understand why my husband reacts like he does. I'd like to understand him better and learn how to not be so angry or hurt by some of the things he does.

I would like to understand why, being a Christian, I sometimes get very depressed. I have even considered suicide. I know this is wrong, but I can't seem to snap out of it.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GETTING READY

You are about to take a journey together. During this first session it is important to get to know one another and set a direction for you personally as well as for the group.

- If there are members of the group who do not know everyone, it is recommended that everyone have name tags for the first three meetings.
- Everyone should have their own copy of the book by the start of the first meeting. If books are going to be purchased in bulk, they can be distributed during the first meeting.
- Make a group decision as to whether there will be snacks. If so, how will they be provided?
- Decide whether one person will lead each meeting or whether leadership will be rotated. If it is to be rotated, how will this be done?

- A common format for many small groups that are meeting outside of church is:
 - Study
 - Prayer
 - Fellowship/Refreshments
- If you are meeting at church on Sunday during the adult Bible study hour, a discussion followed by a short time of prayer is common.

As you go through the discussion questions for each chapter, do not feel as though you need to complete every question. They are simply meant to be a starting point. Sometimes groups find that a thorough discussion of a few questions is more beneficial than completing them all. There also may be times when a chapter generates a valuable discussion that is not related to the questions. Be willing to go where the Holy Spirit leads you.

CHAPTER 1: THE MYSTERY OF EMOTIONS

1. Take time to get to know one another by sharing:
 - Your name
 - Your favorite thing to do
 - Why you joined this group
 - What you would like to get out of this study
2. How, in the past, have you viewed emotions? What are they and why do we have them?
3. Read Genesis 1:31. How does this apply to emotions?
4. Have you heard or believed that some emotions are bad? If so, which ones? Why?
5. Can the various forms of anger and fear ever be good?

6. Are emotions like jealousy or greed ever good?
7. What role did emotions play in Jesus' life?
8. Give an example of when your emotions helped you.
9. Give an example of when your emotions either led you astray or caused problems.

CHAPTER 2: THE SUBJECTIVE SIDE OF EMOTIONS

1. What did you especially like or dislike about this chapter? Why?
2. The chapter stated: "Because we have no way to 'get inside' of another person's head, we never really know exactly how another person is feeling or experiencing some event." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Does the idea that we can never really know exactly how another person is feeling or experiencing some event have any importance to how you interact with others? Explain.
4. The chapter opened with the story of John's experience on the freeway and how it brought new meaning to things he learned about driving in school. Describe an incident when an experience aroused emotions that reinforced the importance of information you had learned.
5. How does your experience of a worship service differ when you are emotionally involved with it as opposed to when you are not emotionally involved?
6. The chapter stated, "Experiences that affect you in some important way receive an emotional 'stamp.' The emotions associated

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