

Men and Their Emotions: The What

The last two posts explained the “Why” we need to manage our emotions and the “How” of God gifted us the emotions that became distorted by original sin that still affect us today. Those two posts, plus this one about the “What” to do, provide the backbone for how we can become more godly men by controlling our emotions.

Here is the list again of the emotions that I believe men need to learn how to manage:

1. Anger
2. Fear (especially, our fear of failure)
3. Sadness
4. Happiness
5. Pridefulness (Ego & Power)
6. Guilt (Shame)
7. Anxiety (Worry)
8. Boredom (Aloneness)

As I go through the “What” of each emotion, I will organize each post into 4-parts that I hope you will find helpful:

- define the emotion
- describe the environmental and physiological reaction
- provide some biblical context
- suggest an appropriate response for God Buddies

Emotions Fundamentally Defined

Let's first understand that emotions are a part of who we are.

As long as we are alive, we will experience varying types of emotions. Typically, we want to enjoy positive emotions but will also suffer through some of the negative emotions. We try to conquer the negative ones but often end up being a slave to those if we fail to manage them well.

Irish poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde once said, "I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them."



Leonard Nimoy as Dr. Spock

What would it be like if we never became emotional or if we were capable of controlling emotions at all times? Perhaps we would be like Mr. Spock on *Star Trek*, whose responses to all

situations seem to be purely logical and never emotional.

While some people believe, they will be fine if they can learn to release their emotions, others think suppressing their emotions is the way to go. Learning to control them (or as Wilde says, “dominate” them) can actually relieve us rather than conquer us.

But God created us in His image, therefore, we are created as emotional beings; not emotionless beings. We feel, we love, we experience joy, we feel happy, we are strapped by guilt, we are angry, we are disappointed, we fear, etc.

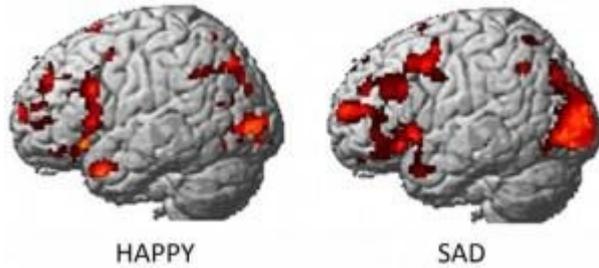
Sometimes these emotions are pleasant to experience and oftentimes not. Sometimes our emotions are grounded in truth, and sometimes they are based upon false premises that can lead to fear or despair or anger based on that false belief that God is NOT in control or has left us.

Physiological Reactions of Our Emotions

According to research from Northeastern University, how your body physically changes during our emotions varies widely, which upends hundreds of years of conventional wisdom, dating back to the time of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Psychologists have long operated under the notion that categories of emotion have their own uniform physiological fingerprint. For example, your blood pressure should go up when you’re angry or your heart rate should rise when you’re scared.

That assumption, however, is not true.



This new study showed that bodily responses such as brain function, heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure fluctuate significantly across all the emotion categories, which suggests there's not a single physiological fingerprint but a population of potential responses.

“Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotions, and knowledge.”

– Plato

Not surprisingly, physiological responses also vary by the person, which necessitates our need to understand our personal reactions to emotions in order to manage them.

Biblical Context

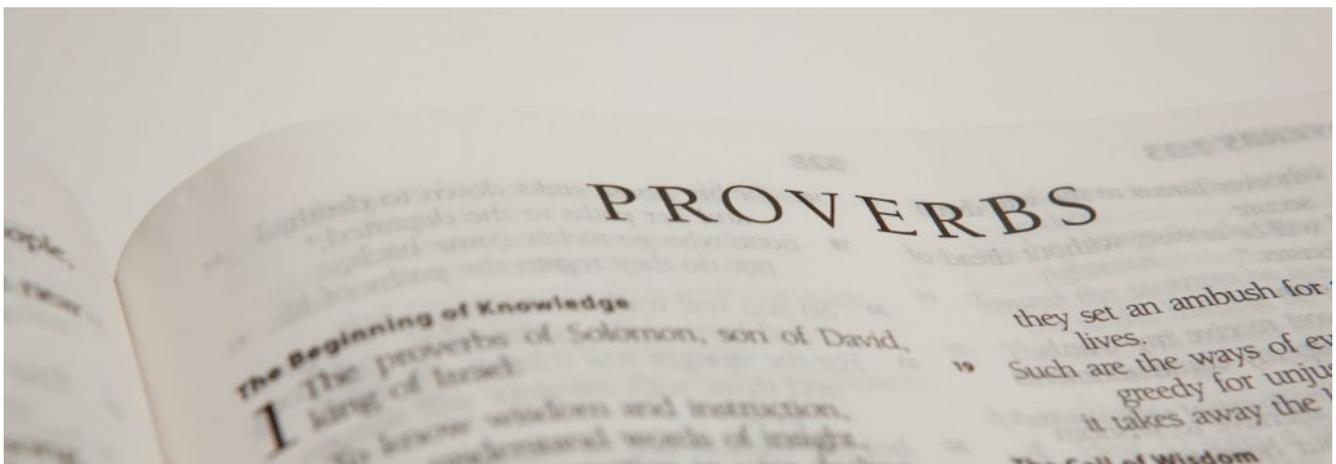
Regardless of the circumstances, our emotions are indicators of what is going on in our hearts, which is why we need a heart transformation rather than learning some simple behavior modifications.

We are to “guard their hearts and minds” which means that what enters and dwells in our hearts, becomes what controls us.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

– *Philippians 4:7*

King Solomon, the wisest of all men (well, except probably for Jesus!) and writer of most of the Proverbs, said it best: *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”* (Proverbs 4:23).



Solomon also reminds us *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6) and that *“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”* (Proverbs 25:28)

God Buddy Response

While much of this so far is about our individual response, I believe having a God Buddy can help you identify your struggles with your emotions. This requires a difficult conversation in which you open yourself for “constructive feedback” on what you feel or he identifies as your weaknesses.



As your GB first listens to your self-identified weaknesses, he may also point out some you do not necessarily see in yourself. Be open to this feedback. Don't be defensive but open your heart to some “truth in love” that may be difficult to hear. But trust me, it will be good for your development as a godly man.

All that said, here are three practical steps you can take:

Step 1: Identify the Emotion

Learn to notice and identify your feelings. Focus on your body's sensations during certain emotions. Perhaps your face gets hot, your jaw or muscles tense, or you start to cry or

get angry. Be aware of how you feel but don't hide from it. You might not want to broadcast your feelings to other people but don't suppress your feelings entirely. Simply naming it is better than pretending not to have it or exploding without thinking.

Step 2: Identify the Circumstances

Know when and why you feel the way you do. Figure out what happened that got you feeling the way you do at the moment. But don't blame it on someone else. You can control your attitude but not the other person's. Being able to recognize and explain the emotion that comes from inside you can also help you make sense of what's going on. Accept that your emotions are natural and understandable. Don't be hard on yourself but acknowledge it's normal so you can move forward.

Step 3: Take Action: Breathe, Pray, Talk with your GB

Once you've identified the emotion and the circumstances, decide what to do next. Think about the best way to express yourself. Is this a time to gently confront someone or just walk away? Most times it's enough to just realize how you feel and move forward. You can also release the tension by going for a walk, run, or bike ride to change your mood from negative to positive. Also, do things that make you happy, even if you don't feel like it, like watching a funny movie with friends. Then talk with your God Buddy about what you're feeling.

Get Professional Help if Needed

Sometimes, no matter what you do, you can't get away from a tough emotion. You may feel stuck in sadness or worry or get so upset that you think you might hurt yourself or other people.

If so, you likely need professional help. Talk to a trained counselor or therapist who can provide lots of tips and ideas to help you feel better or even prescribe medication if there are underlying health issues.

Remember, our emotions do not define us, nor should they control us. Our value and worth is in God alone, Who equipped us to manage our emotions instead of being controlled by them. We need not fear emotion nor should we try to be emotionless.

Emotion is part of God's design of you, so you can bring your emotions to Him, and trust He will guide you.

Next Up: The Emotion of Anger