Understanding Our Feelings

Why Do I Feel This Way?

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Course I – Unit 3, Lesson 1
(New Life Behavior English Edition)

Dallas, TX

"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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Why Do I Feel This Way?

Before starting this lesson, take a few minutes and write a statement that expresses the feelings you have about God and Jesus. Next, try to explain why you feel the way you do. **Write your responses on the enclosed response sheet and then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson**. Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up the scriptures. Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the **Response Sheet**.

Unit 2 helped us to understand our behavior. We observed that "New Life Thinking" has an impact on the way we behave. The way that we think and feel controls how we behave. In this series of lessons we will look at our emotional side and why we feel the way we do.

I. Introduction

A story is told of a mother who had been informed by the military that her son had been killed in action. She grieved and mourned for months over the loss of her son. After some time it was discovered that a mistake had occurred and that her son was indeed alive. But the woman's grief during the long months of mourning could not have been any greater if her son had actually been dead because she *believed* that he was dead. This story is a good example of how we base our behavior and emotions on what we believe to be true, *even though* we may be mistaken.

A. Facts Are Not Feelings

Today there is an erroneous belief advocating the philosophy, "If it feels good, do it." It is believed that one should do only those things that encourage good feelings. We are told to pursue adventures stimulating excitement and good feelings and avoid those bringing negative or bad feelings.

B. Wise Decisions Require More Than Emotional Guidance

Each day we will make decisions that affect our destiny. When making decisions we must be careful not to depend only on our feelings. Feelings are not necessarily facts. Many of us make decisions based only on our feelings. Others make decisions based only on things they know to be true, *even though* their feelings would have them behave otherwise. The question we need to ask ourselves is this, "Are our feelings a safe guide?"

We are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7). As such, we are the most unique of all God's creations. Being created in God's image we have a special ability to

feel and to experience emotions. Unlike animals, we are capable of experiencing a greater variety of emotions and feelings, as well as feeling these emotions more deeply. Since God designed us with feelings, we need to express our feelings in our decisions.

Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, said, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. There is a way which seems right to man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 12:15, 14:12) Solomon is saying that without God we tend to choose our own steps. If we rely on the feelings that seem right to us, or that satisfy our biological appetites, we may reject knowledge and instruction (Proverbs 1:7). A wise man, Solomon says, is one who will hear and increase in learning and will seek to acquire wise counsel (Proverbs 1:5-6).

In I John 4:8, we learn that God is love. In verse 18 we learn that the two basic emotions are fear and love. In 2 Timothy 1:7, we learn that God gives us the spirit of power, love, and self-control.

In this lesson we will seek to answer these questions: Why do we feel the way we do? What are feelings and emotions? How do feelings affect the decisions we make? Can we control the way we feel?

II. Feelings

A. Feelings Influence Our Behavior

At any time it is possible to encounter a situation that will produce a positive or negative feeling. The result of that emotional response will have an influence, productive or destructive, on the way we behave or respond to the event. It is possible to experience sadness, grief, rage, ecstasy, apprehension, joy, happiness, anger, fear, distraction, boredom, disgust, annoyance, resentment, surprise or excitement all within a short time. Any one of these responses will produce an observable behavior. These experiences may create sudden behavioral responses, or they may lie dormant for a period of time before the behavioral response is observed.

We express our negative and positive feelings with verbal behavior (words) or with non-verbal behavior (actions, reactions or inactions). Our personality reflects the combination of our thoughts, actions and feelings. The way we behave will depend upon what we think and how we feel about what we think. What we do and how we behave communicate as much, if not more than, what we say.

B. God Gave Us Feelings

God created us with the capacity to feel or experience emotions. We can therefore conclude that God has also given us the ability to understand these emotions so we can enjoy them and use them rather than be victimized by them. The challenge we have is to understand the nature of emotions, how they affect our decisions and how we can learn to harness them for God's glory.

C. Feelings Are In Our Mind

Emotions, be they feelings of love or fear, are in the mind. They are the product of what the mind dwells on or perceives. Emotions respond to our thoughts and behaviors. It doesn't matter whether the mind knows if a statement or event is true or not; it will produce emotions in harmony with what it's thinking. Placing a wrong interpretation on a fact will create an inaccurate emotion. It is not the actual event but our *perception* of the event that results in changes in our feelings. A distorted view and interpretation of a fact will produce a corresponding emotion.

Feelings, some would say, "are the subjective awareness of one's own emotional state." In these New Life studies, we have come to understand that the mind is the core of our thoughts, feelings and actions. The "heart" is in the mind. Feelings are an important part of an emotionally healthy person. In the emotionally healthy person, these feelings tend toward love and away from fear, toward sharing and away from selfishness.

D. Feelings Are Reactions

Any given situation we encounter may trigger an emotional response. The following is a description of how we might react to an event:

- First we will experience a feeling or emotion (fear, panic, joy sadness, etc.).

- Simultaneously we will think about the event. We will realize or know what has just happened to us (cognitive reaction to the event).

- We then experience chemical changes in our bodies. These chemical reactions will either produce a natural calming effect (parasympathetic response) or will stimulate our bodies by producing hormones (sympathetic response).

- Lastly, there will be an observable response.

All four of these steps take place in a "split" second.

III. Examples of Negative Feelings That Caused Negative Results

In each of the following examples we will see how negative feelings affect decisions, decisions affect behavior, and in some case behaviors determine destiny.

A. Adam and Eve
In Genesis 3:1-24, Adam and Eve were put outside the Garden of Eden away from the presence of God because of their decision. Eve chose to follow her inward desires and feelings and ate the forbidden fruit. She then gave the fruit to Adam who chose to listen to Eve and disregard what God had told him. *Adam let his feelings determine his decision.*

B. Moses
In Numbers 20:8-12, Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land. His anger at Israel blinded his ability to think clearly. In his rage he disobeyed God. Anger caused him to die outside of the promised land. *He let his emotions control his actions.*

C. Peter
In Matthew 14:25-31, Peter, taking his eyes off of Jesus, began to sink. His fear caused him to doubt that he could walk on water. He trusted Jesus when he asked permission to walk on the water. However, when he became afraid, he realized what he was doing was not possible and began to sink. *His fear caused him to take his eyes off Jesus.*

D. Judas
In Matthew 27:5, Judas Iscariot hanged himself because of his behavior and the guilt attached to the behavior. In his greed Judas was wanting to make a few more dollars. This greed clouded his judgment. His decision was self-centered and self-seeking. Too late, he realized what he had done. His remorse, grief and guilt was more than he could bear. *Not wanting to face the others, he hanged himself.*

In each of these incidents we see decisions made on a basis that omitted love for God and a trust in God.

IV. Examples of Positive Feelings That Caused Positive Results

A. Joshua

In Joshua 24:15, Joshua expressed his commitment for himself and his household, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua served next to Moses as he led Israel through the wilderness. He witnessed (thinking) the power of God working through his servant Moses as He provided for and protected Israel for forty years. After the death of Moses, God commissioned Joshua to take Israel across the Jordan into the promised land. God promised to protect Joshua just as he had Moses. Joshua had love for and faith in God (feelings) and did as He commanded. He took Israel across the Jordan into Canaan. Joshua's decision to go forward into Canaan was based on his positive feelings of faith and love. He witnessed the power of Jehovah God and made his decision on a belief that God would protect and provide for those who trust and obey. *Joshua acted on faith, hope and love.*

B. Elijah

In I Kings 18, Elijah acted with confidence and bravery as God sent him to confront a king who rejected God and worshiped idols from other nations. God had worked miracles through the hand of Elijah. When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, he knew that his God was stronger than the pagan Baal gods. With confidence (feeling), he stood before 450 prophets of Baal. Without a knowledge of God, Elijah would have made a negative emotional decision based on fear, but this was not the case. *He was confident and was therefore able to confront the opponents of God.*

C. Ruth

In the book of Ruth, Ruth made a decision to follow Naomi back to her home in Bethlehem. Orpah decided to return to her own country when Naomi said, "the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me." This did not stop Ruth from making her decision to follow Naomi. Her love for and devotion to Naomi (feelings) were unselfish emotional responses, as were Orpah's. Ruth had possibly heard her husband and the faithful Naomi talk about Almighty God, Jehovah. Her faith led her to believe that Bethlehem was indeed the land of promise. She decided to follow Naomi. *As a result, Ruth found a better land, a better family, and most of all, she found Jehovah God.*

The decisions made by these people were based on feelings of love for and a trust in God's power.

V. Our Feelings Are Our Responsibility

A. We Produce Our Own Feelings

As they say, "No one can make me angry or glad." *I* decide to be angry or glad. *I* decide to feel disappointed or happy, loving or fearful. The more we let the mind of Christ take over our feelings, thoughts and behaviors, the more appropriate our anger or happiness will be. We will still be angry, but it will be of a "righteous indignation" rather than anger based on fear or selfishness.

Emotions involve reactions to experiences that come about as we adjust to life situations. Our cultural backgrounds and environments will have an impact on our emotional reactions. There are many aspects of our backgrounds affecting emotional responses. (Review the **Four G's** controlling our behavior, in Unit 2 - Lesson 1).

Proverbs 24:19 says, "Fret not thyself because of evil doers." (KJV) Many times we say, "that person made me mad." But actually what really happened is that we *chose* to become angry. We *could* have chosen a different response.

We can produce our own happiness by *choosing* to be happy. For example, as Steven Covey asks in his book *Twelve Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Are you gloomy when the weather is gloomy?" If so, that is your choice, to react negatively to a negative stimulus. Covey says proactive (rather than reactive) people choose to "carry their own weather with them" so that they are the same, rain or shine.

B. <u>Productive or Destructive Feelings</u>

Feelings, unlike behavior, are neither right nor wrong, *but productive or destructive.* It is not necessary to say that some emotions are all bad and others are all good. God has made the body so that all right emotions, right thoughts, and right attitudes produce right behavior (Galatians 6:7-8). Wrong thinking produces destructive emotions that produce wrong actions in our lives.

Feelings are the basis of positive and negative self-esteem. We like to think of ourselves as reasonable, rational, logical and intellectual. We like to talk about our cognitive abilities: perceiving, learning, remembering and problem solving. If totally honest, we probably would admit that it is our *emotions* that we think about most.

Feelings are the basis of positive and negative relationships with self and others. The result of improper emotions is very evident in our emotional makeup and social actions. Emotions produce feelings ranging from slight tensions to a complete breakdown. The whole body reacts to the thoughts in our minds.
If we don't win over destructive emotions (fear, anger, etc.), destructive emotions will win over us. If we are to be healthy and expect good relationships with others, we must develop our emotions as we develop our minds. We cannot let negative

emotions such as fear, anger, resentment, guilt, etc. control our lives. We cannot prevent an emotion, but we can choose what we do with the emotion.

As we draw closer to having the mind of Christ, we will come to accept the responsibility and consequences of our actions. The desired end of all our actions should be to glorify God. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul talks about what Jesus Christ did to set an example for us so we would know what the mind of Christ is all about. In verse 11, Paul writes, "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*." The end of all our behavior is to give glory to God the Father. When we are faced with a decision to say "yes" or "no" or to go here or there, we should ask ourselves the question, "Will it glorify God?" Our behavior can make God look good or bad.

V. Conclusion

Feelings are *not* facts! *Negative* thoughts create *negative* feelings. If we want to change our lives, we must change our feelings and thoughts. The key is how the mind handles what comes into it. We can learn to subjugate feelings for the sake of values.

We can improve or destroy the relationships we have worked so hard to build by the way we behave, think, and feel. Emotions such as love, hate, fear, anger, guilt and apathy cross over into our actions, feelings and thinking. Paul said in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person."

Isaiah 55:8 says, "My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts, says the Lord." As imperfect humans we have thoughts and "ways" that are according to our sinful nature— desires and wants of the natural man. But the closer we come to creating the "mind of Christ" within our minds, the more our thoughts will be God's thoughts, and the more our "ways" (behavior) will be God's way. We will be more able to see God's point of view. When we can really begin to look at things from *God's perspective*, it will make a tremendous difference in our feelings and behavior.

Our feeling patterns and habits can be modified. We should let Christ permeate our patterns and habits; in doing so, we let Christ control our thoughts, feelings and behavior. We cannot control what others say about us or think about us, but we can control how we choose to react. "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit." (Proverbs 25:28)

As Christians we should be striving to put Christ into our minds (Galatians 2:20) so that our feelings, thoughts and behavior reflect the love of God. When this happens, we will live the abundant life (John 10:10), starting here and now and continuing through eternity.

Now, please return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.