



Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Varius Passages	Title: Those Pesky Feelings	Date: 05.06.18
Website Writeup:			
How do we stop white-knuckling it in the spiritual life. And like David, see our negative destructive feelings crucified on the cross, replaced by feelings which reflect Jesus? To cultivate a life which doesn't just avoid sin, but avoids temptation all together with a glad heart?			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

In speaking of the transformation of our mind/thinking we come today to the slippery subject of 'feelings'. We say things like: 'He wears his heart on his sleeve' concerning a person who wears emotion openly. Or, 'She's levelheaded', or 'She holds her cards close to her chest', regarding a person cautious with their emotions.

If we could paint our feelings, they may look like a Jackson Pollock. Or, *The Scream*. Some days like *Starry Night*, by Vincent Van Gogh. Controlling them is difficult, since they're concerned with passion & desire; how those pull & lead us. Sometimes it feels like we're a 90 lb. jockey riding a 1500 lb. race horse of emotion without a bit & rein in its mouth to guide it; holding on for dear life, with little control over this juggernaut!

Feelings can drive us to do detrimental things to avoid or chase them. The junky shoots up & the alcoholic drinks to change or chase them. We hide our feelings in fear of being hurt. Feelings can be wonderful & problematic.

Our first question to someone is, "How are you (feeling)?," revealing the prominence of feelings. We even equate feeling with touch - when something touches our heart, it means we feel it deeply. Many live in bondage to feelings of fear, sadness, despair & anger. Or, in the avoidance of such feelings through the pursuit of elation, self-gratification & contentment by means monetary, intellectual, or medicinal.

We play with & strum someone's feelings. "He played me like a fiddle!" Means we've been manipulated through our feelings. I can evoke negative feelings in Kim by simply whispering in her ear, "Mmmmm, Pagi, Ibu..." Reigniting feelings of culture shock she had in Indonesia with older men always leering at her. I'm not fun to live with!

God speaks to this issue of our passions, desires & feelings saying, *"¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..."* (Ro 14:17). Or Galatians 5:24, *²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions & desires.* Feelings are tied to our physicality.

God speaks rather definitively to those controlled by these things in 1 John 2:15-17, *¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

To love the world is to have too strong an affinity for the things which make us feel. It means, not that we can't enjoy worldly things, but to give them what should be the rightful place of Christ in order to give us false meaning & purpose is to commit idolatry. A false destructive way to live. We're emotionally attached to the *ideas, images & information* which govern our thinking. We use our *ability to think* in things unhealthy.

In Christ we crucify the Old Self, enslaved to its feelings, passions & desires. We don't live for creature comforts, nor emotional pleasure. Not that we don't enjoy things, but they're put in right perspective under His Lordship & the satisfaction we receive in relationship with Him. We may have little control over what we feel, but we can take our thoughts captive to Christ, creating an environment for negative destructive feelings to die off, and healthy feelings to emerge. **Being spiritually formed well, feelings will be dealt with in healthy ways. Some removed altogether, then replaced; some modified.**

I like sex. It feels good. Lions like sex. It makes them feel good. But the difference is, a Lion doesn't extrapolate that feeling to put it above all else. We're truly unique in the created order. We have the ability to think & explore our feelings & direct our thinking accordingly; we must be responsible with that ability. To think about how we think.

No one can master their feelings head-on; resisting, or redirecting by sheer will-power in the moment they wash over us (white-knuckling it). To think we can, reveals how drastically we misunderstand how we're formed. In the end, we give in to wrong feelings, which may feel great in the moment, but it's a point of defeat, eventually bringing despair & further disconnection.

We live in a culture which values 'giving in' to desire, passion & feeling. We say, "Follow your heart!" But our hearts can deceive. Self-denial & self-control aren't valued & practiced. Whether that's 'giving in' to anger, fear, sexual attraction, gluttony of food or the pursuit of good looks, or even despair, victimhood, or wounded-ness. Those of us who live by 'giving in', even if we won't admit it, consider our feelings/desires more important, and deserving of satiation, than is Christ's Lordship.

We choose this way of life since we see no other (no vision), don't realize we can actually change (no intention), therefore, don't replace feelings through spiritual formation (no means). We live the life of Adam, putting ourselves in the place of God. "I'll deal with my emotions, they're too precious to entrust to God!" We hear people say, "You don't understand! You haven't been through what I've been through!" But we're all human. We have the same emotion. None of us special - to think we're unique reveals our pride. We should submit ourselves to Jesus allowing him to do heart surgery under the skillful hand of his Spirit, the watchful eye of community, and the direction of His Word.

We see the result of the lack of spiritual formation in the Church, as whole denominations abandon Scriptural Authority, since the Scriptures call them to go against powerful feelings & desires of how we think it should be. Although they have a perceived religiosity, they forgo salvation in Christ due to their lack of knowledge.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 describes the situation...But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud,

abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

A picture of a people governed by their feelings born out of a humanistic logic, not the revealed Word of God. They have some form of godliness, a religious system, but deny the power. Jesus speaks simple Truth when he said in John 8:34, *“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”*

Paul said to the Philippians, *“...many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”* (Php 3:18–19)

To be enslaved to sin through our passions & desires - being led by feeling, is to be in bondage; like running on a treadmill while someone constantly cranks up the speed. Eventually we trip & fall. But those who walk with Jesus allowing him to be Lord of their hearts gain the knowledge & are empowered to accept, their feelings/desires don't have to be fulfilled - feelings aren't facts. Just because you feel mad, doesn't mean you have reason, or should act on it. Just because you *feel* like you want chocolate cake, doesn't mean you *need* it. Delusion comes by replacing the verb *want*, with the verb *need*.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. Kingdom Believers can withstand excruciating pain in loss & all knocks of life, as well as face sudden temptation, calling it calmly for what it is - a lie. They don't whine over the nonfulfillment of feeling, & desire. Rather, they live as to not need to have such feelings, or at the least, those feelings aren't as powerfully controlling as before.

They get off the treadmill of emotion before it's too fast. Living, not simply in the avoidance of sin, but avoiding temptation altogether. They plan their life well so that they aren't tempted & find joy & peace in such a lifestyle. They have the ability to do what they do not want to do, and not do what they want (Rm 6), in order to experience deeper life in Christ. *The longer we submit ourselves to the process of spiritual formation, the more our desires align with Christ's, and the easier it becomes.*

It's like the hedge Rob & I were working on out front. Neglected, weeds, trash & leaves fill the empty spaces. Over time the hedge becomes sparse & parts die off. Do the hard work of cleaning it out & maintenance is easier. Life & fullness comes back. We must allow God to clean us out & prune us to bring life where we've become dead & sparse.

The good news is what Paul said in Romans 8, Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, ⁿ God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. ^p And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Ro 8:1-8)

Notice how body-centric is this speech. Emotions, feelings, desires & passions attached to fleshly lives; felt & expressed through physical bodies. Dead people don't feel! It's through the body which we do - embodied spiritual beings. Christ did the necessary work in the body to enable us to live by the Spirit's desire & not controlled by bodily desires.

Remember Paul said, *I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* (1 Co 9:27) The overall consistent image is one of self-control & rightful placement of feeling & desire; putting ourselves in the position of receiving grace daily; made into the likeness of Christ.

It's not enough just to *not want to sin*, but actually to pursue feelings which *lead away from sin*. To have different feelings. We have to recognize within our own hearts & minds, there are feelings & desires in us contrary to the life of Christ & his created order; we must ask for a sense of revulsion towards such things. Recognizing how wrong they are, how they lead us away from Christ & damage relationship with others. We have to, like David, ask God to create in us a pure heart; to create in us a desire & feeling towards that which is godly. *This is a large part of putting off the Old Self (involving wrong feelings) & putting on the New Self in Christ (involving good feelings).* A good practice is, if you're having strong overwhelming emotion in something, you may need to step back & assess if there's something out off kilter in your heart with Jesus; maybe an idol which you need to sacrifice at the altar.

I don't just want to become more proficient in hiding my bad feelings, or white-knuckling my way through life. As a man, I don't want to walk around looking at the sky for fear of seeing a beautiful woman who might tempt me. I want to appreciate women for far more than just their physical bodies; appreciating them as a creation of God. To cultivate a life which isn't just standing on the neck of its lust, but sees lust change into something positive, good & expressible in healthy community.

We don't want to just hide that we have feelings when walking by persons of different race on the street. Just swallowing those feelings doesn't solve the issue. We must confess we've believed lies about them. We want to grow to appreciate their culture & thinking in light of the fact - they too are a creation of God standing on equal ground with us; God created their culture in all it's glorious differences. The problem with feelings in this area are the images & ideas portrayed to us from movies, news, social groups, history, etc., which are detrimental & denigrative to a people's identity. They don't align with & reveal God's heart. Only the Scriptures do.

Growing up in a heavily Italian Catholic neighborhood in NJ, kids would often make racial jokes about other people groups. Polish jokes, very popular; although no one even knew a Pole! Those jokes left a feeling in me which weren't at all correct about a whole people group. I've had to crucify those feelings in order to redeem a right view. We all need to deal with our heart before God at some level in this area.

I don't want to just bottle my anger, clenching fists all the time. Anger should change to compassion, forgiveness & love. Bottling wrong feelings up is like a steam pot on the stove, eventually it's going to blow due to pressure. It's the spiritual equivalent of getting off the yo-yo diet, and changing your lifestyle in what & how you eat - your body begins to crave good things instead of junk food. In the spiritual life you begin to crave good healthy emotions, and desire stays in check as it should. We want a changed heart due to the Living Word & Power of the Spirit. To have a *Vision* for a changed life, an *Intention* for it, and to utilize the *Means* God provides to attain it. Some of which I gave last week.

However, many don't have a vision for the changed self. We identify with our habit-worn feelings. We can't see any other way; producing a person constantly living in disobedience to Christ. Kim recently said to me, "The older I get the more practical & truthful the Word of God becomes." That said in the context of watching people - those who choose not to live in obedience to Jesus end up in an emotional & sometimes physical train wreck. We often allow our feelings to govern us leading to bad choices which could've been avoided. We hit bottom when we could've been living in victorious ways by simple submission to the Spirit & Word.

If we can gain vision from the Scriptures, much like David was doing, crying out to God in the Psalms, we can find grace, mercy & power in our time of need. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *¹³No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

Practicing that we can experience verse 18 of that same passage, *¹⁸And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate ^a the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Taking the way out He provides, focusing our eyes on Him instead of wrong desire & feelings, we're transformed in His image with ever increasing glory! Feelings are important, they move us & we enjoy being moved. Some good, some bad. Without feeling we have no inclination to action. We lose interest if there's no feeling. The issue is that our feelings are discombobulated, mixed up. And we must stand outside ourselves, as David did, and see them for what they truly are; at times, destructive. Then we begin to practice something which promises things better & wait for feeling to follow - that's obedience. Doing what you do not want to do now, in order to experience the promise that it alone can give you what you truly need later. In that, eventually old feelings fall away, replaced with healthy life-giving feelings. We must take good care of our feelings, meaning we don't just let them happen, but submit them to God allowing him to reshape them.

Let's end today with a story in Luke 10:30-37, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Focusing on the three characters of Priest, Levite & Samaritan, all three were governed in this situation by feeling. The Priest & Levite were governed by either disdain, fear, or self-centeredness. Feelings drove them to disregard a man in need. The Samaritan however felt compassion. What was important to the Priest & Levite suddenly became unimportant to the Samaritan in light of the need before him. His own safety, differences, busyness & financial well-being took back seat to this man's situation. Jesus tells this story with the Samaritan being the good guy given the disdain & racism the Priest & Levite would have felt towards a Samaritan. But the Samaritan is the one who was 'the neighbor' of the man who fell to robbers.

In conclusion, I hope today we've at the least noticed how important our feelings are, and how they dictate so much of life. And that there's a need to see them transformed when they are not of God. We want to gain a vision here at Six:Eight like the Samaritan, in which our feelings are in line with the heart of God so much that we respond as God would without thinking! Right now we might react to life's situations in the priestly or levitical way, allowing the fears, busyness & self-preservation to dictate choice & action.

We want our Vision of Christ to be so clear, our intention becomes real, played out through the means of the spiritual life. And in doing so, we become more & more like Jesus in all situations.