

# Emotions: What Good Are They?

There are few things in life that possess as much power as emotions. The Scriptures are filled with examples of individuals exhibiting powerful emotions, and these emotions seem to affect their actions. We see similar influence in our own lives. The same event viewed through different emotional lenses will lead to very different experiences. Though emotions have incredible influence in our lives, they are often quite confusing. If you pay attention you will likely hear or say something like: “I don’t know why I feel ...”, “I should feel ...”, or “How do you feel about ...” Bring up the topic of emotions and you will likely get a wide variety of responses. Some see tremendous value in emotions while others see them as unhelpful or irrelevant. Whether we realize it or not, we tend to approach topics with preconceived beliefs and can have a negative characterization of those who disagree with us. Unfortunately, this can lead to attacking or misrepresenting other perspectives and keep us from learning from these perspectives.

Our statements, or lack thereof, reveal our beliefs about emotions. Consider the beliefs each of the following statements communicate about emotions:

- I should just stop worrying.
- I need to be strong.
- You always seem so steady.
- They are so emotional.

The first statement seems to indicate emotions are like a light bulb which can easily be turned on or off with the flick of a switch. Depending on your personality and life experience this may ring accurate or may be totally foreign. The other statements likewise hold inherent beliefs about the emotions within them. The goal is not to consider the validity of the above statements but to evaluate our own beliefs about emotions. We tend to have beliefs about emotions that we do not realize we hold and therefore never consider. Often, emotions are either overemphasized or minimized, and these tendencies can have a very real impact on our life.

Have you even wondered why you did or did not do something? Emotions are likely at least part of the answer. As powerful as emotions can be, they often are the unidentified agent working behind the scene. One way to think of emotions is to see them as something that helps inform us. The challenge is knowing how much to rely on these emotions as a helpful source of information. Consider the drastic difference in the following three beliefs about emotions: 1) emotions are truth, 2) emotions can provide helpful insight, and 3) emotions are useless.

The first perspective will lead to emotions ruling and guiding our life. Emotions, no matter how clear or powerful, are not the ultimate source of truth. For example, there are many times in life when our emotions don’t fit the situation. This might be feeling sad when the circumstances seem to call for rejoicing or feeling very intense emotion when the circumstance seems to warrant a minimal emotional reaction. The third perspective will likely lead to ignoring or even villainizing emotions which can easily lead to relational disconnection or relationships dominated by the Works of the Flesh rather than Fruits of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:19-23*).

When we hold very black and white beliefs about emotions, we can jump to conclusions which may or may not be accurate. As the second perspective above states, believing emotions can provide helpful insight allows us to consider emotions while also not giving them too much importance. Slowing down and allowing ourselves to identify, experience, consider, and learn from emotions can be helpful for ongoing sanctification. By allowing ourselves to consider the emotions which are in play, we might have a greater capacity to connect with others and share God’s message with them. However, by not allowing these emotions to hold too much importance, we will be better able to allow the truth of the Scriptures to guide our thoughts and actions rather than emotions.

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Whether we minimize or over-emphasize emotions, we can live as if emotions reveal truth without even realizing it. When fear shows up, we can run or hide without considering if there is significant danger. When we feel anger, we can lash out and feel justified rather than considering if there was a wrong that justified anger or if we just wanted others to be more like us. Emotions that rule will lead to ongoing pain and potential stagnation. However, if we can appropriately open ourselves to our emotions and identify and learn from them, they can provide helpful insight. For example, knowing you are prone to fear can allow you to recognize and have a healthy level of distrust toward your emotions the next time you are fearful. Knowing you tend to be easily angry can help you be more aware of this emotion and the lies that might be feeding your anger. Thus, emotions kept in the right perspective can add color to life and insight into our ongoing need for transformation. Let emotions fulfill the role that God intended them to fulfill without giving them control of our life, bringing all of our life into subjection to the truth of the Scriptures (*Heb. 4:12*).