

LESSON 2

Emotions Were Designed by God

"Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

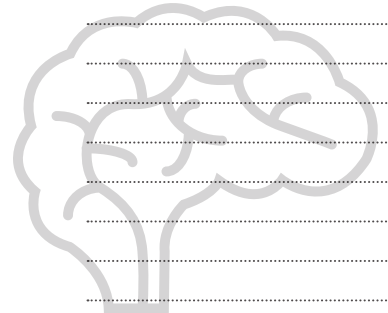
Psalms 32:11

Emotions move our relationships, both positively and negatively

Emotions influence most of what goes on in this world. Whether it's the romantic attraction that draws a couple together, the sacrificial love of a parent for a child, the desire to build a successful ministry or business, the bitterness that corrodes a friendship or the anger that fragments a family or church—emotions play a powerful role in every aspect of life.

And yet most of us know far too little about the source and dynamics of our emotions. Let's begin to deepen our understanding by taking a quick look at eight basic facts about emotions.

1 Emotions are built into all people in all cultures by God's design. They are hardwired into our brains and bodies through the neurological and hormonal systems that he designed at creation and weaves into every baby as he forms it in the womb (*Gen. 1:26-27 | Ps. 139:13-14*). Thus the human vocabulary—and the Bible—are filled with emotional terms.



Core Emotions

	Sadness	Shame	Fear	Enjoyment	Love	Surprise	Disgust	Anger
High	Despair Depression Grief Loneliness Hurt	Guilty Sorrowful Worthless Disgraced Dishonored	Terrified Dreading Fearful Afraid Frightened	Ecstatic Overjoyed Excited Thrilled Delighted	Worship Adoration Infatuation Loyalty Attraction	Shocked Stunned Alarmed Astonished Perplexed	Revulsion Despising Detesting Loathing Contempt	Fury Hostility Hatred Animosity Bitterness
Medium	Hopelessness Sorrow Self-pity Distress	Humiliated Remorseful Unworthy Embarrassed	Anxious Insecure Intimidated Nervous	Passionate Cheerful Happy Satisfied	Respect Compassion Fondness Friendliness	Bewildered Disoriented Confused Wondering	Scorn Aversion Rejection Disrespect	Exasperation Antipathy Resentment Mad
Low	Unhappiness Gloom Disappointment	Bashful Regretful Uncomfortable	Worried Uneasy Concerned	Glad Contented Pleased	Kindness Liking Acceptance	Unsettled Puzzled Bemused	Disapproval Dislike Distaste	Frustration Annoyance Irritation
	Spirit of Fear			Spirit of Power, Love, and Self-Control		Spirit of Anger		
	"God gave us a spirit not of fear... (2 Tim. 1:7a)			... but of power and love and self-control." (1:7b)		"Be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the bosom of fools" (Ecc. 7:9)		

2 Emotions are complex and involve our whole being. More specifically, emotions: (1) are a God-designed part of our personhood; (2) are usually triggered by sensory perception (sight, sound, touch, etc.); (3) are influenced by and reveal our values, beliefs, thoughts, concerns, experiences and evaluations; (4) produce automatic neural, hormonal, muscular, respiratory, cardiovascular and facial reactions; and (5) energize the will and move us to action (*Exod. 32:19 | 2 Sam. 18:33 | Mark 1:40-42*). In fact, the word “emotion” comes from a Latin word that means “to move.”¹



Emotions are designed to **move** us to action, just as the wind moves a sailboat.

3 Emotions drive some of our most noble and constructive behaviors.

Positive emotions such as love, joy, delight, kindness and compassion move us to form strong relationships, to comfort and serve others and even to forgive them when they have wronged us. These emotions are found in both saved and unsaved people and drive much of the kind and beneficial behavior that goes on in the world. *Exod. 2:5-6 | Dan. 1:9*

4 Emotions can also drive some of our most regrettable and destructive behavior. Negative emotions like fear, bitterness, anger, jealousy, self-pity and lust frequently move us to speak and act in ways that damage or even destroy important relationships. *Gen. 37:11 | Matt. 27:3-5*

5 Emotions are not inherently sinful. Jesus felt a wide range of emotions, including love, compassion, joy, pity, anger, sorrow and agony (*John 11:5 | Matt. 14:14 | Heb. 12:2 | Mark 1:41 | Mark 3:5; 14:34 | Luke 22:44*). Yet he never sinned (*1 Pet. 2:22*). His emotions never overwhelmed him or moved him to act contrary to his Father's will. *John 8:29*

6 Human emotions are often twisted by sin.

Because of the fall, sin has corrupted our whole being, including our thoughts, emotions and will (sometimes called the “noetic effects of sin”). Therefore, like a computer with a defective motherboard, we are unable to consistently understand and control the emotions that are triggered by people and events in our lives (*Gen. 3:6-13 | Jer. 17:9 | Eph. 4:22*). Therefore, while positive emotions usually move us to do good things, negative emotions often move us to sin against God and one another. *Gen. 37:11 | 2 Sam. 11:2-4 | Ps. 73:21-22*

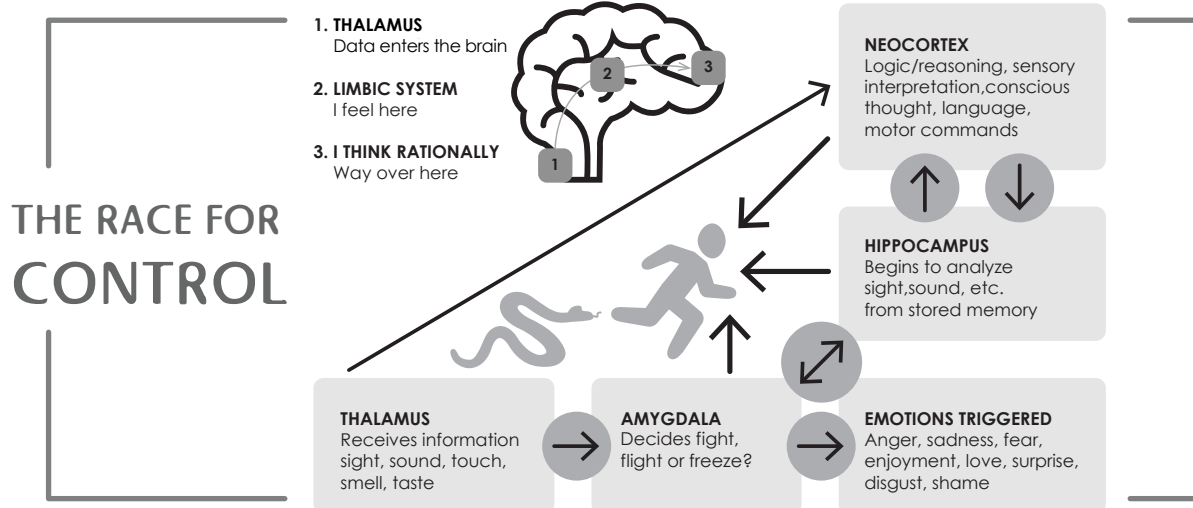


When my soul was embittered... I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. - Psalm 73:21-22

¹ This definition incorporates elements of three closely connected concepts that are often used interchangeably: feelings, emotions and affections. Each of these terms can be distinguished both neurologically and perhaps even at a theological level, but for the purposes of this study, they are combined under the term, “emotions.” For a more detailed explanation of these concepts, see David Powlison, “What Do You Feel,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice*, 10 no. 4. (1991): 50-53; Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Emotions in the Christian Life, Brian Borgman (Crossway, 2009); Sam Williams “Toward a Theology of Emotion,” *Southern Baptist Theological Journal*, 7, no. 4 (Winter 2003):

59-61; Jonathan Edwards, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections” (1746).

For example, in high stress situations, our emotions can overwhelm rational thinking through “amygdala hijacking” (strong emotions that trigger an impulsive reaction that is quickly regretted).



Data enters the brain through the thalamus, which sends impulses to other parts of the brain. Impulses arrive at the limbic system (amygdala) a few nanoseconds before they get to the neocortex, which can allow intense emotions to take control and trigger impulsive words or actions before you are able to rationally process the information (rw360.org/hijacking).

Thus, your emotions often act as an “invisible puppeteer,” jerking you around, provoking impulsive words and actions and damaging your relationships.

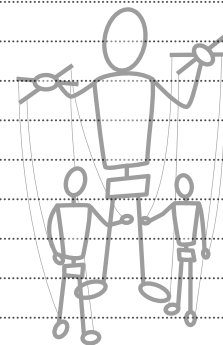
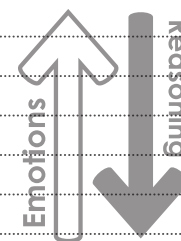
7 **There is hope! Through the gospel, God has redeemed us from the curse of sin,** made us new creations (which impacts our thoughts, emotions and will) and is now pouring his grace into us, giving us the ability to understand our emotions and progressively bring them under the Lordship of Christ.

Ezek. 36:25-27 | 2 Cor. 5:17 | Titus 2:14 | Rom. 12:2 | 2 Cor. 3:17-18

8 **The key step in redeeming and controlling our emotions is to bring them to God in humility, faith and prayer,** to examine them in the light of God's truth and to ask him for the grace, wisdom and strength we need to harness the power of our emotions so that their ultimate impact is to move us to love the Lord with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In other words, rather than simply listening to and following our emotions, we need to “preach God's truth to ourselves” in order to take every thought, emotion, word and action captive to Christ!

Ps. 51:6 | 1 Pet. 1:22 | 2 Cor. 10:5 | 2 Pet. 1:3-8



LESSON 7

READ Yourself Accurately

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." 2 Timothy 1:7

Emotions have the power to move us

Emotions are like the wind to a sailboat: they have the power to move us in many directions and even to capsize our relationships and lives.

With God's help, we can learn how to harness the power of our emotions

Just as good sailors learn how to read and use the wind, wise Christians learn how to anticipate and harness the power of their emotions (2 Tim. 1:7). You can develop this skill by practicing the READ acrostic.

To become more self-aware and self-engaging...
READ yourself accurately



Emotions are like the wind. They can either capsize your relationships or propel them on an exhilarating journey.

R Recognize your emotions.

Ps. 42:5 | Matt. 14:30 | Phil. 4:6

E Evaluate their sources (thoughts, values, experiences, etc.).

Ps. 73:2-3 | Prov. 20:5 | James 1:13-15 | see rw360.org/cccef-idols

A Anticipate the consequences of following them.

Prov. 22:3; 15:18 | Col. 3:5-6

D Direct them on a constructive course.

Prov. 15:1; 25:15 | John 12:27 | Col. 3:12-13



Since language skills are located in the neocortex, naming your emotions engages your entire brain in processing emotions and making wise decisions.

Buy six seconds

Your God-given neocortex is vital for impulse control. It's also where you store life lessons, sermons and memorized Scripture. Therefore, in emotionally charged situations it is essential that you find ways to give your neocortex time to engage along with your limbic system so you can think and respond with your whole brain, as God intended.



**Whoever guards
his mouth preserves
his life; he who
opens wide his lips
comes to ruin.
- Prov. 13:3**

For example, always take a bottle of water or cup of coffee with you during potentially difficult conversations. If you sense your emotions building, force yourself to take a sip of water or coffee before saying anything. This will give your mind six seconds to synchronize and could save you from hours or even months of relational damage repair. *Prov 13:3*

Another strategy for dealing with intense emotions is to ask for a brief pause in a conversation so you can think and pray about the issues. If circumstances permit, taking a brief walk around the block also gives your mind and body time to process emotions and plan a thoughtful response.

Do a 180

As soon as you sense strong emotions building, ask yourself whether they are likely to move you to do things that are honoring or dishonoring to God. If they are likely to move you to please and honor God, put up "full sail" and let those emotions move you toward godly words and actions.

But if you sense emotions that are likely to move you to dishonor God (e.g., anger, jealousy, bitterness, fear), try to discern what direction those emotions seem to be pushing you ... and then ask God to help you to **do just the opposite of what you feel like doing**, just as Jesus and Paul taught in Luke 6:27-28 and Romans 12:17-21.



**But I say to you
who hear, love your
enemies, do good
to those who hate
you, bless those
who curse you, pray
for those who abuse
you. - Luke 6:27-28**

