

Spiritual Depression-Its Causes and Cures

-A study through D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sermon series-

Chapter 8 - Feelings

We now come to the topic of feelings. God created humans with feelings and feelings are not bad. The goal of Christianity is not to suppress our feelings and to live as if we did not have them. Feelings are a gift from God. However, feelings need to be kept in their _____ and they must never be given the place of supremacy in our lives.

“Perhaps there is nothing so frequently encountered as a cause of spiritual depression and unhappiness in the Christian life as this very problem of feelings...I am sure that all who have been engaged in pastoral work will agree that there is no particular subject that brings people so often to the pastor as this very problem of feelings. Now this is very natural because, after all, we all desire to be happy.”

“We have been made in such a way that they (feelings) play a dominant part in our make-up. Indeed, I suppose that one of the greatest problems in our life in this world, not only for Christians, but for all people, is the right handling of our feelings and emotions.”

To begin to understand the place feelings play in the believer’s life we must first acknowledge that they _____ indeed have a _____. Christianity is not a feeling-less religion. The goal of the Christian life is not to strip oneself of all feelings and to live the always unaffected life of the stoic.

“First and foremost, obviously, in a truly Christian experience, the feelings must be engaged. They are meant to be involved...The gospel of Jesus Christ is so great and glorious that it takes up the whole man and not merely a part of man.”

The second element that Lloyd-Jones wants to emphasize in this discussion is the fact that we cannot _____ feelings. Dealing with feelings is not as easy as simply forcing yourself to feel differently.

“We cannot create feelings, we cannot command them at will. Let me put this quite plainly. You cannot generate feelings within yourself. You can, perhaps, make yourself weep and bring tears to your own eyes, but that does not of necessity mean real feelings...looked at psychologically it is one of the most remarkable things about man that in this respect he is not master of himself.”

A third truth to acknowledge is the changeableness of our feelings. Feelings _____. Feelings come and go. Therefore, what the Christian must do is to strive to not be controlled by their shifting feelings. Just as the Christian cannot be ruled by their natural temperament, so too, a Christian should not be ruled by their feelings.

“There is nothing that is quite so variable about us as our feelings. We are very variable creatures, and our feelings are, of everything that belongs to us, the most variable of all. This is because they are dependent upon so many factors...our feelings are variable, and I would emphasize the danger of being controlled by them.”

“Our feelings are always seeking to control us, and unless we realize this, they will undoubtedly do so. That is what we mean when we talk about moods and moodiness.”

With all of this being understood we also must understand that we are not to use feelings as a judge of _____. Something is not true or untrue simply because you feel it to be so. We do not believe the Bible to be true because we feel good about it. Likewise, we do not judge ourselves to be outside of Christ because we do not and have not had certain feelings.

“Finally under this heading I would draw attention to the danger of thinking that we are not Christians at all because we have not had some particular type of feeling or experience. This from a spiritual standpoint is one of the commonest manifestations of this condition...feelings must be engaged in true Christianity, but the mere fact that we have not had certain particular feelings does not of necessity mean that we are not Christians.”

“Feelings are essential, but if we postulate certain particular feelings as being essential we may very well become victims of the devil and spend the whole of our lives in unhappiness and ‘bound in shallows and in miseries’, though the whole time we are truly Christians.”

So, according to Scripture then how are we to deal with these feelings? How does Scripture help us to not be controlled by our feelings? There are several different answers to these questions. The first thing Scripture tells us to do is to _____ of known sin. Harboring sin and living with unconfessed sin will impact a persons feelings.

“If you are at all depressed at this moment you should make certain that there is no obvious cause of the absence of joyous feelings. For instance, if you are guilty of sin, you are going to be miserable. ‘The way of the transgressor is hard.’ If you break God’s laws and violate His rules you will not be happy. If you think that you can be a Christian and exert your own will and follow you own likes and dislikes, your Christian life is going to be a miserable one.”

Secondly, a believer should remember to not overly _____ on their feelings. How you feel is not the most important thing about you. How we feel should not drive our lives.

“Avoid the mistake of concentrating overmuch upon your feelings. Above all, avoid the terrible error of making them central...Feelings are never meant to take the first place, they are never meant to be central. If you put them there you are of necessity doomed to be unhappy, because you are not following the order that God Himself has ordained.”

“It is primarily Truth; and Truth is addressed to the mind, God’s supreme gift to man; and it is as we apprehend and submit ourselves to the truth that the feelings follow. I must never ask myself in the first instance: What do I feel about this? The first question is, Do I believe this? Do I accept it, has it gripped me?...Do not spend too much time feeling your own pulse taking your own spiritual temperature, do not spend too much time analyzing your feelings.”

We must remember that there is a difference between being happy and rejoicing. We may rejoice even if we do not feel happy. Rejoicing comes from _____ on Truth. Happiness is a feeling that can come and go. We must not focus on our feeling but “stir ourselves up” as Paul told Timothy.

“But how do you do that? In this way-your business and mine are not to stir up our feelings, it is to believe. We are never told anywhere in Scripture that we are saved by our feelings; we are told that we are saved by believing...Never once are feelings put into the primary position. Now this is something we can do. I cannot make myself happy, but I can remind myself of my belief.”

“Talk to yourself, and though the devil will suggest that because you do not feel, you are not a Christian, say, ‘No, I do not feel anything, but whether I feel or not, I believe the Scriptures. I believe God’s Word is true, and I will stay my soul on it, I will believe in it come what may’.”

“Seek for happiness and you will never find it, seek righteousness and you will discover you are happy-it will be there without you knowing it, without you seeking it...really seek Him, seek Him Himself, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself...If you seek the Lord Jesus Christ and find Him there is no need to worry about your happiness and your joy. He is our joy and our happiness, even as He is our peace...Seek Him, seek His face, and all other things shall be added unto you.”