

**3. Provide a biblical theology of emotions. What role should a counselor allow a counselee's emotions to play in counseling? How can one tell the difference between sinful emotions and righteous emotions? How would you use Scripture to help a counselee change improper emotions?**

**I. Overview**

- A. Provide a Biblical Theology of Emotions.
- B. What roles should a counselor allow a counselee's emotions to play in counseling?
- C. Describe the difference between sinful emotions and righteous emotions.
- D. Explain how to use the Scriptures to correct a counselee's improper use/understanding of emotions.

**II. Provide a Biblical Theology of Emotions**

- A. Society today has much to say about emotions. Today, if someone feels this way or that, then, for all intents and purposes, it is that way. For example, a teenager that is going through puberty may begin to feel that he or she doesn't fit in, that he or she isn't sure who they are attracted to, and that maybe they were born in the wrong body. This issue is hotly contested and fervently fought for by certain zealots within our society. Furthermore, they will say that to simply disagree with this teenager is to cause actual violence. In this context, that teenagers' perceived feeling is treated with complete and ultimate authority, that nothing can stand against it, and if anything dare, it will be wholly destroyed.
- B. The Bible has much to say about emotions, although you might not find the word emotions in the concordance of your Bible. It's typically discussed using other words or found baked into the experiences of those written about in Scripture.
  - 1. **Genesis 4:3-8** *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.*
  - 2. **Genesis 6:5-6** *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, and the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*
  - 3. **Exodus 32:19** *And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.*
  - 4. **Judges 21:25** *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*
  - 5. **Psalms 22:14-15** *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breasts; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*

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6. **John 2:14-16** *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."*
- C. Powlison "‘Feelings.’ What a difficult word to pin down when it is used to communicate four very different things: experience, emotions, thinking, and desires! How do you use the words, ‘I feel’? How do your counselees? Can you think your way through the traps that the language of feeling present to you? Do feelings typically reveal authoritative perceptions, emotions, opinions, and impulses which can be taken as givens? Or do they reveal facets of human life meant to be evaluated biblically? Do they typically reveal the real me, who is meant to be actualized and asserted? Or do they reveal the human drift from God and toward self, the flesh, autonomy, and subjectivity?"<sup>1</sup>
- D. Emotions as sense perceptions.
1. "Cut your finger, and you feel pain. You have experienced an external, physical event. People also experience other kinds of things. You experience internal events. For example, ‘I feel tense’ when my muscles knot and my stomach churns. You experience interpersonal events. For example, words can be like stabs of a sword or like rotten food (Prov. 12:18; Eph 4:29)."<sup>2</sup>
    - a. **James 3:3-6** *If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their who bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.*
- E. Emotions as expressed feelings.
1. Emotions are experienced by the individual due to some external or internal stimulus. For example, a person will experience anxiety before having to speak in front of a large group. A person will experience fear as they free fall out of an airplane when they are skydiving.
    - a. **Luke 22:44** *And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*
    - b. **John 11:35** *Jesus wept.*
    - c. Powlison "We do experience our emotions: ‘I feel angry or anxious, depressed, happy, affectionate, fearful, guilty, thankful, excited.’ . . . For example, to say ‘I feel angry’ does not bring out one important part of what is going on. But it hides other significant parts of anger. Anger, like all emotions, is something you do *as a whole person*. Anger involves

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<sup>1</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 215.

<sup>2</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 212.

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*active things* such as thoughts, attitudes, expectations, words, and deeds, as well as the more passively sensed ‘feeling’ of being angry.”<sup>3</sup>

2. “The need for an objective, moral evaluation is obscured when anger is viewed simply as a feeling. If anger is a feeling that happens to me, then it is intrinsically legitimate. ‘Just as when I cut my finger I feel hurt, so when you offend me I feel angry. I need only to get in touch with my anger and then express it in socially appropriate ways.’ But when anger is evaluated by God (e.g., James 1:19-20; 3:2-4:12) that simple equation breaks down.”<sup>4</sup>

#### F. Emotions express desires.

1. Powlison “‘I don’t feel like going to talk to him. I feel like leaving.’ This use of feeling is also fuzzy and problematic. It loads implicit authority into our impulses, desires, intentions, choices, expectations, and fears. Far from being givens to obey, these are meant to be examined biblically. . . the Bible teaches us that our ‘feel likes’ are frequently desires of the flesh. Most of our ‘felt needs’ are idolatrous desires. They are meant to be killed by the Spirit, not indulged.”<sup>5</sup>
  - a. **Genesis 20:1-11** Abraham says his wife is his sister in response to fear.
  - b. **Matthew 25:14-30** Bury the investment due to fear (specifically verse 24-30).
  - c. **Isaiah 41:10** *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

### III. What roles should a counselor allow a counselee’s emotions to play in counseling?

#### A. Beware of the two ditches with Emotions.

1. Powlison “Human beings instinctively oscillate between two sinful extremes. In the ‘objective’ mode we typically deny feelings and so avoid the realities of the interior life. Much of the time people are pragmatic, unreflective, driven by external pressures or by unstated demands, fears, and goals. In the ‘subjective’ mode, on the other hand, we typically indulge feelings and so make feeling supreme. ‘Getting in touch with’ denied feelings is the world’s way of addressing one problem by creating another.”

#### B. Feelings make a terrible Engine, but they make a great caboose.

1. When an individual allows their decision-making process to be controlled by their emotions, serious calamity lies ahead. The idea of listening to the heart for the answers or doing what is right in your own eyes is strongly discouraged in Scripture (Jer 17:9; Prov 12:15). Furthermore, mankind is repeatedly told to exercise self-control, not allowing themselves to be overwhelmed with emotions (Prov 15:18; 29:11; 25:28; 2 Tim 1:7). Therefore, we must view our, and our counselees, emotions in the proper context, as warning lights on the

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<sup>3</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 212-213.

<sup>4</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 213.

<sup>5</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 214.

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dashboard showing you that something is wrong, it's not going well, or it needs attention. Then, after sincerely seeking the Scriptures for guidance, we can make a decision, develop a plan, or renew our thinking with biblical principles, and our feelings will have been the catalyst that affected biblical change in our life (Prov 1:2-7; Prov 3:5-6).

- a. **Proverbs 12:15** *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.*
- b. **Proverbs 29:11** *A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.*
- c. **Proverbs 15:18** *A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.*
- d. **2 Timothy 1:7** *For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*
- e. **Proverbs 25:28** *A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.*

C. Emotions are the warning lights on the dashboard.

1. Emotions can be revelatory. They can reveal what motivations, desires, or goals that our counselees have deep down. This is especially true when our counselees have been subjected to a particularly difficult trial. How did they respond?
2. Adams "His (the counselee) conscience, i.e., his ability to make judgements about his own behavior (accuse or excuse), may trigger all sorts of pleasant or unpleasant emotions it is true. Sinful behavior leads to unpleasant emotional experiences."<sup>6</sup>

D. Emotions must be considered in its proper context, but never given the whole weight of authority.

1. Powlison "For more than twenty years biblical counseling has said that to be 'feeling-oriented' is the central motivational problem in people. . . . But a biblical analysis of motivation does not mean being against emotions. . . . Wise counselors care to know what a person is experiencing situationally or emotionally."<sup>7</sup>
2. Powlison "Serious problems arise because the word (feel) is typically loaded with authority: 'If I feel it, then it's inherently true, right, and valid.' Clear biblical thinking pierces the fog of ambiguity and authority that wraps itself around 'feelings.' As minds and hearts are renewed by the Spirit's life-giving truth, everything about us is touched."<sup>8</sup>
  - a. **Jeremiah 17:9** *The heart is deceitful above all else, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

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<sup>6</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 110.

<sup>7</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 214-215.

<sup>8</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 216.

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b. **Proverbs 28:26** *Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.*

#### 1) **Proverbs 1:2-7...**

3. “The Bible has devastating things to say about leaning on your own understanding, about being wise in your own eyes, about the way that seems right to a man, and about people who delight in airing their opinions (see Prov. 3:5; 3:7; 14:12; 18:2).”<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. **Describe the difference between sinful emotions and righteous emotions.**

- A. Emotions in and of themselves are not sinful. In fact, they are an aspect of mankind being made in the image of God. God experiences emotions, which are by nature always righteous. When we fail to uphold the perfect standard of God perfectly, he is angry and wants to pour out his wrath against us. However, because of his deep love for us, and because of his bountiful grace, we are spared.
- B. When we are angry because we don’t get our own way, this is wrong. Furthermore, when we act sinfully because of these emotions, we are further complicating the sinful situation.
  - 1. **James 1:20** *For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*
  - 2. **Ephesians 4:26** *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

#### V. **Explain how to use the Scriptures to correct a counselee’s improper use/understanding of emotions.**

- A. The Word of God must be the ultimate authority and our standard for right and wrong. When our counselee is experiencing a negative emotion, we should identify exactly why they are feeling that way. Is she angry and frustrated because her husband failed to fulfill the Law of God perfectly, or because he failed to uphold her laws perfectly? Is he depressed because he failed when he deliberately sinned against God, or because he just cannot seem to meet some legalistic standard that he arbitrarily set? We must examine our counselee’s emotions through the context of the Scripture to see if it was righteous or sinful. If it is determined that they are experiencing negative emotions because they are not getting what they want, as opposed to a failure to meet God’s standard, we need to show that in the Scriptures.
- B. We are called to be self-controlled
  - 1. **Proverbs 29:11** *A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.*
  - 2. **Proverbs 15:18** *A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.*
  - 3. **Proverbs 16:32** *Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*
  - 4. **Titus 2:6-8** *Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show*

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<sup>9</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 214.

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*integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.*

**VI. Suggested Reading**

- A. **Jay Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual, 109-116, 420-245.**
- B. **Jay Adams, A Theology of Christian Counseling, 102-105, 165.**
- C. **David Powlison, "What do you feel?" in Seeing with New Eyes, 211-224.**
- D. Brian Borgman, Feelings and Faith.
- E. Nicolas Ellen, "Handling Emotions and Biblical Counseling"  
[www.biblicalcounseling.com](http://www.biblicalcounseling.com) (Methodology Audio Track).