

Mastering Your Feelings

by Lory Lina

I came from a lifestyle where a show of temper was a mark of “strong personality” and a suitable “expression of command” for leaders. Impatience was merely an indicator of frustration by a quick and creative thinker whom lesser minds could neither appreciate nor fathom.

Anger was deemed appropriately “righteous,” particularly when defending one’s rights or when hurled against an oppressive socio-political situation. So also, the blatant expression of it was merely a necessary prerogative in the waging of war against wrong. Jealousy was acceptably “romantic” and one who was not prey to it was downright “cold.” The need for emotional outlets or for habits that diffused personal tension was considered “healthy” (like “TGIF” and “Saturday Night Out,” among others). In a life where one was in constant struggle for something or against someone, a level of rage was even necessary to keep the human spirit alive and in fighting form.

So what happens when one meets the Prince of Peace?

Revolution, that’s what.

Not the type where innocent heads roll and a thousand heroes fall. A radical change is definitely in order but there’s only one victim and one victor. One person. You. That is, if you’re willing.

Willing

You’ll have to be. Because everything must go — anger, wrath, jealousy (from *Proverbs* 27:4); along with bitterness, fury, rage, foul and obscene language, shouting, malice (a list from *Ephesians* 4:26-31). And to these add disobedience, immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, slander and lying (additional list from *Colossians* 3:5-8); and not to be forgotten, acts of selfishness, dissension, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies and the like (coming from *Galatians* 5:19-21). All must go!

The letter to the Galatians is most direct on what these “must go” items are. They are works of the flesh that oppose the Spirit. Even more clearly, Paul’s epistle warns us that “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Therefore, those who desire to belong to Jesus must “crucify their flesh with its passions and desires.” There is no room for unbridled feelings where Jesus is concerned. There must be a willing and conscious effort

to set aside the ways of the flesh, which is the horrible “must go” list above. In its place, we need to be revived — that is, restored to God’s original plan in the way of the Spirit.

Able

Willing is easier said than done. Actually getting into the task of mastering one’s emotions will mean earnestly praying and asking to be delivered from these works of the flesh. It means seeking constant counsel from a spiritual elder on how to deal with your feelings from day to day, because the human heart is so “desperately wicked” (*Jeremiah 17:9*) that we cannot trust it until it has been spiritually renewed. It means praying for the desire in the heart to bear the sweet fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, generosity and self-control (*Galatians 5:22*).

I remember praying and dwelling upon this verse week upon month upon year, one word at a time, urging the Spirit to be stern with me and to try me well so that I might be formed in each “fruit” on the list. Later, I learned that only one fruit, not many, is meant, and that the effort of a lifetime is necessary so that the lasting sweet fruit that Jesus wants may be borne. In all these, the enabling grace is the power of the Holy Spirit, without whom nothing would be possible.

Receive

The Holy Spirit is the Master Teacher when it comes to feelings. If you are willing and He enables you, then you will surely receive His teaching.

I won’t second-guess how the Spirit will work on you, but let me share how He dealt with me: He put me on the receiving end. Rather than the giver, I became the receiver of various outbursts of emotion. Over the years I have seen anger, bitterness, jealousy. Rage, foul language, malice, etc flung at my person in unbridled passion. And each time, the Spirit would bring to my mind one incident in the life of King David.

In 2 Samuel 15:5ff, Shimei, a relative of Saul, walks alongside King David as he journeys through a certain place. All the while, Shimei shouts curses and accusations while throwing stones and dirt at him. His adjutants beg to kill Shimei, yet David prevents them, “Suppose the Lord has told him to curse David,” he says, adding, “Perhaps the Lord will look upon my affliction and make it up to me with benefits.” The man after God’s own heart saw the Spirit moving to humble, teach and bless him although the situation was personally and publicly painful and humiliating.

Each time I face the humiliation of receiving the brunt of emotional outbursts, I remember David. And then I become aware of the pain I have caused by my own awful display of feelings and I know that the Spirit really wants me to bear good and not bitter fruit. So He guides me to still waters, beyond emotion, to peace and love and compassion.

Do

I do what Colossians 3:12-17 says. It's a mighty "to-do" list of how one ought to live in order to master one's feelings and live a life belonging to Christ. In essence, it says:

1. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
2. Bear with one another.
3. Forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you.
4. Put on love.
5. Let the peace of Christ control your heart.
6. Be thankful.
7. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly to teach and admonish.
8. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Mastering one's feelings in not and will not be easy. But it is — thank God — life-changing.

Lory Lina is a fulltime servant of the Lord and a Teacher of the Word in Elim Communities.