

Understanding our Feelings

Juanita Ryan

Feelings are part of our basic equipment for knowing and experiencing ourselves, each other, our world, and God. They are an important source of pleasure for us, and an important source of pain. They give us information about what we need and want. And they are an important part of the way God designed us to experience Himself, and the world He created for us.

In spite of this, it is not uncommon for people to live as if certain feelings were unacceptable. The feelings which are considered unacceptable are often the feelings most commonly experienced in response to _____. Some people believe they need to be cheerful and optimistic even in the face of a crisis. Unpleasant feelings such as sadness and anger and fear are rejected, in spite of how normal these feelings are as a response to enormous and common threats.

The Bible provides many examples of God's faithful people experiencing anger and depression and fear. Jesus himself expressed a wide variety of emotions which we often do not allow in ourselves. Jesus angrily drove the money changers out of the temple, he grieved over Jerusalem, he wept at Lazarus' grave, he groaned in Gethsemane. The experiences of anger, sorrow, and agonizing struggle are part of the rich experience of being the people God created us to be.

When we label some feelings as "good" and some as "bad" we usually try very hard to not feel the "bad" emotions. This leads only to falsehood and pretense. It causes us to hide our feelings from ourselves and from others. When we try to "keep the lid on" our feelings they do not go away. Keeping the lid on only redirects them into physical tension, mental distress, or spiritual discouragement. Deception about our feelings will result in bondage. Truth, however, can free us.

_____ evokes intense, unpleasant feelings. When we are unaccustomed to living with unpleasant feelings, we may become confused or alarmed by them. What can be helpful to us during times when emotions are intense is to write about them and to talk about them with God and with a trusted friend. We can learn to respect our feelings and value them as one of God's gifts to us.

Creator, God,
You gave us a wonderful gift when you gave us the capacity to feel.
You gave us the ability to laugh,

Credit: Juanita Ryan is a therapist in private practice at Brea Family Counseling Center, Brea, California. You can find many excellent articles related to issues of recovery by Juanita and her husband Dale at nacronline.com. This article is taken from the following:

[Unit 1: Understanding our Feelings](#)

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to celebrate and to love.
You also gave us the ability
to be angry at injustice,
to fear danger
and to grieve over our losses.

Give us wisdom to respect our feelings
as they come and go.
Give us honesty to live with our feelings
and to talk to you and others about them.
Give us compassion to care for each other
when feelings are intense.
We ask this in the name of Jesus
who wept when it was time for weeping.
Amen.

Feelings

...are an important part of our basic equipment for knowing and experiencing the world.

...enrich our lives as a source of pleasure and displeasure.

...tell us about ourselves, about our expectations, perceptions and needs.

When we ignore or suppress our feelings we

...spend energy to do so.

...may experience a "pressure cooker effect."

...miss out on the enriching experience those emotions bring us.

...miss out on the information those emotions can give us about ourselves.

...redirect the emotions into physical tension and spiritual or mental distress.

...give the emotions control over our behavior that we may not be aware of.

When we accept and experience our feelings

...our self awareness is increased.

...our experience of life is richer.

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...we are able to live more honestly.

...problems can be identified and resolved.

...the physical, mental and spiritual tension is relieved or avoided.

Feelings need to be

...identified.

...respected.

...experienced.

...verbalized.

...put into perspective.

Discussions Questions

1. How were feelings expressed in your family when you were growing up?
2. Think of a time you were angry or sad as a child. What was your family's response to your feelings?
3. What strong emotions have you been especially aware of since your journey with _____ first started?
4. What helps you to live with these strong feelings?
5. How have you responded to the strong emotions that _____ has brought?

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6. When you are sad or angry or afraid what do you most need from a friend?

7. How might it be helpful to you to talk to God about your strong emotions?

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