

FOCUS ON FAITH

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MIXED EMOTIONS

Emotions are an emotive subject – many of us are ruled by them; some of us try to hide and deny them; others desperately try to keep them in check whilst for yet others it seems necessary to vent them anytime, anywhere, anyhow.

But we are emotional beings – we all have them. Imagine a world where the emotions of love, joy, hope or compassion were missing or were outlawed from being displayed. On the other hand we have the opposite emotions to the ones I've just listed – hatred, sorrow, despair, indifference. Sometimes we have to know what we are missing in order to know what we hold dear.

I recently came across the following quote from Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, "**The degree of one's emotions varies inversely with one's knowledge of the facts.**" I think it was a somewhat tongue in cheek comment on the way some people give vent to their emotional energy without engaging their brain – you know, the folks we often disparagingly consider allow their emotions to hang out in public.

The Bible has a great deal to say about emotions. It tells us that God has emotions – He has compassion on those who act righteously and stand up for people when they are taken advantage of and He detests discrimination. Jesus demonstrated righteous anger when He witnessed the injustice and cheating of traders in the Temple. The Book of Psalms tells us that God rejoices and delights over His people and He is saddened and disappointed when people disregard or ignore Him. Although most of us would probably consider it inappropriate to hate, the Apostle Paul tells us to **'hate what is evil'** (Romans 12: 9). But this instruction is given in the context of love being sincere and hanging on tightly to what is good.

Virtually everyday all of us have to deal with issues which can have either a negative or positive effect on our emotions. And that to me seems to be the key – it's not just the type of emotion but the extent and direction of our emotions that should be of prime concern.

We can't avoid what we feel inside but we can regulate how it affects the way we live. When we receive an adverse health report it is bound to be upsetting. Those who are going through bereavement will undoubtedly feel sadness and it's appropriate to grieve. A redundancy will produce feelings of anxiety for the future. The issue is whether we indulge those feelings

and emotions and allow them to control us.

Guilt, fear, worry, inferiority, resentment may be negative emotions but they often turn out to have physical expressions. But thankfully the converse is true – our health can be positively enhanced when we don't allow ourselves to be dominated by harmful external factors.

So what's the solution? How can we get the right balance in our lives? Let's face it we probably know people who are afraid of their emotions and treat them as their enemies and others who view them as their masters and are intimidated by them.

I believe that one of the key ways is to recognise that we are never in this life alone – there is always God. Other people may let us down, reject or abuse us in some way – accidentally or by design – and this is bound to cause distress and emotional scarring. But God says that He will never leave us or abandon us. His desire is that we should be in permanent, eternal relationship with Him. Jesus is both the expression of His deep love for us and the means by which we enter into that relationship. Jesus said, "**If you have seen me you have seen the Father.**" He literally carried God's DNA and we can too.

Understanding ourselves is vital. We need to know what 'pushes our buttons' and causes us internal turmoil. It may take courage and determination to face feelings that we have repressed or denied. Owning up to the way we feel rather than telling someone how they make or made us feel is also crucial. But it is even more essential that we begin to understand the depth of love that God has for us and begin to seek His comfort and strength.

Many of us at times have mixed emotions about things that happen in our lives – but our emotions don't have to be mixed up. When we know personally the God of love who cares for us as intensely as He does, He not only rescues us from the power of emotions such as guilt, regret and despair but He fills us with his love, peace and joy. And that will change our lives!

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If you would like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to **www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk** where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.