

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY EIGHT

The Spirit and Our Emotions

Selected Scriptures

There are times in the Christian life when the Spirit of God ignites our emotions and prompts our feelings. When He does that, it is nothing short of electrifying.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

MANY Christians view their emotions with a wary eye. As young believers, perhaps they were warned not to pay much attention to their feelings because they can be unreliable and fallible. Mature Christians, they were told, keep emotions in check and certainly never trust them as spiritual guides.

Do these cautions sound familiar? Have others told you to discount your feelings or even stuff them away for the sake of your faith?

If so, remember that God created our emotions, including them in His original blueprint for humanity. “If He created us with the capacity to feel,” writes Pastor Chuck Swindoll, “shouldn’t we be free to talk about our feelings, to express them, and to value them in ourselves and in others?”¹ Yes!

Additionally, because God Himself has intellect, volition, and emotions, wouldn’t He want to relate to us on all three levels, including our emotions? Yes, He would, and He gave us His Spirit to help us do just that.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Our relationship with God flourishes as we relate to Him as whole people—mind, will, and emotions. Open the Word with this simple prayer from your heart,

Father, I long for a more intimate relationship with You that includes my emotions. Help me flourish as a whole person and to understand more clearly the role of my feelings in my walk in the Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Genesis 1*, we discover the origins of human personality and the theological framework for our feelings. Read the chapter, noting the progression of creative acts from simple to complex, culminating in the crown jewel of God's handiwork.



Observation: God's Crowning Creation

Genesis 1 is full of repetitive themes and phrases, contrasts and comparisons, and subtle emphases—all of which we observe in the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures*.

According to *Genesis 1:11–25*, God made plants, trees, fish, birds, animals, and insects. What repeating phrases appear in this section with a kind of literary rhythm? The New American Standard Bible translates these repetitions in ways that may be easier to identify.



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The cadence of “after their kind” (Genesis 1:11–12, 21, 24–25 NASB) suddenly stops in [Genesis 1:26–27](#). What did God pattern humans after? What contrast was the author making between God’s other creations and humans?

These verses contain a fascinating phrase on which a great deal of our understanding of the human personality rests: *the image of God*. In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we dig deeper into this concept.



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Image of God”

According to the first part of [Genesis 1:26](#), for what reason did God make human beings in His image? According to the second part of 1:26, what were humans to do as God’s image-bearers?

God made humans to reign over creation like He reigns—not in His place but under His authority, ruling in the same good and wise manner as He rules. But there’s more to the meaning of “image of God.” Let’s turn to Genesis 2 to see how the first man and woman were like God as whole persons.



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The Mind of God

Creation's intricate design showcases God's magnificent mind. He endowed humans with minds as well, giving humanity a level of intelligence higher than all the other creatures. How was Adam's mind at work in *Genesis 2:19–20*?

The Heart of God

The heart of God is evident in His relational nature and the love He expresses toward His creation. How did Adam express his God-given heart toward Eve when God brought her to him in *Genesis 2:21–25*? How did their hearts join together in the purest form of unity and love?

By "heart" we mean the seat of our emotions—love, joy, delight, affection, elation, sorrow, longing, hope, passion. God built into us a full range of emotions to complement our intellect. Emotions also spur us to action, energizing our will—the third element of our personhood.



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The Will of God

God bestowed on humans a will that frees us to make our own choices. How did God's command in *Genesis 2:16–17* demonstrate Adam and Eve's capacity to choose? Why do you think this capacity was necessary to have a relationship with God?

Mind, heart, will. These three essential marks of God's image blend together to make us whole people. No facet of the gem that is "us" is dispensable. All are vital for our spiritual life to flourish.

God gave humankind something He did not give the plant kingdom, animal kingdom, or even the angels. When He created humans, He gave them a personality like His own.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The Significant Role of Our Feelings

Emotions add vibrance to our relationship with God, and in Scripture we see a full spectrum of them. In the chart below, write down the emotions you find in the verses and how they benefit your spiritual life. We've filled in the first blank as an example.

Verses	Emotions and Spiritual Benefits
<i>Psalm 146:1–2</i>	God invites me to praise Him with my whole being, including my emotions. Praise draws me closer to Him.
<i>Proverbs 1:7</i>	
<i>Acts 16:18</i>	
<i>Romans 12:9–13</i>	
<i>Romans 12:14–18</i>	
<i>2 Corinthians 4:8</i>	
<i>2 Corinthians 9:7</i>	
<i>Ephesians 4:26</i>	
<i>Philippians 4:6–7</i>	
<i>Philippians 4:11</i>	
<i>1 Thessalonians 4:13</i>	
<i>1 John 4:19</i>	

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The chart could go on for pages! Emotions range broadly in our walk with God. Christ Himself wept with grief, felt deep compassion, rejoiced, was moved by anger, was troubled in His spirit, and prayed with an intensity that left sweat pouring from Him as drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

Let your emotions take their rightful place alongside truth in your relationship with the Father. Free yourself to love extravagantly. Be tenderhearted. Feel deep grief and sadness. Express your joy to the fullest! Be the vibrant image-bearer God created you to be.

Humans were given a mind to know God, emotions to love God, and a will to obey God. We are not whole, in the sense of complete in our God-given personality, unless all three are present and at work in us and in our walk with God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Next Steps

As we fly closer to the flame emotionally, the Holy Spirit acts as our spiritual gyroscope, keeping our mind, emotions, and volition from tilting too far to one side or the other. By walking closely with the Spirit, we avoid intellectualism (overemphasis on the mind), emotionalism (overemphasis on feelings), or fanaticism (overemphasis on the will). We stay balanced.

Specifically, how do our emotions enhance our spiritual life? Pastor Chuck explains the spiritual benefits based on his experience.

Rather than their being unimportant, I have found that my feelings often represent some of the most sensitive areas in my life touched by the Spirit of God. Not infrequently do my emotions play a vital role in how and where the Spirit is guiding me, giving me reasons to make significant decisions, cautioning me to back off, and reproofing me for something in my life that needs immediate attention.²

Reflecting on Pastor Chuck's example, how has the Spirit of God touched your life emotionally in the past?

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Is the Holy Spirit tugging on your emotions today, perhaps regarding a decision, a person, or a personal issue? Search your feelings for the Spirit's touch and write down what you discover.

Certain aspects of God go beyond the human mind's ability to grasp. We need emotions to fully experience the love of Christ that "is too great to understand" (Ephesians 3:19) or the peace of God that "surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7 NASB).

If you've locked up your feelings in your relationship with God, what might open the door?

God never intended your relationship with Him to be dispassionate, all facts and no feeling. Let the flame of the Spirit warm you up to your own emotions, freeing you to be real and whole.



A FINAL PRAYER

In the following space, pour out your heart to God in the form of a prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your heart. Let your feelings flow.

Father,

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 154–55.
2. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame*, 155.

