



Feelings Make Terrible Masters

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In his book, *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard observed, "Feelings make excellent servants, but terrible masters." In our culture, many slogans tell us our feelings should dictate how to live. If we feel bitter against another, we should allow that bitterness to burn. If we feel unimportant, we should run to music or substances to console the feelings. Feelings tell us where to go, what to say, and what to do.

Many addictive vices are more a matter of feelings than a matter of chemicals: compulsive shopping, pornography, alcohol, narcotics, gambling, gossip, selfishness, needing to be needed, wealth, video games, bossy behavior, and other vices that stem from feelings of fear and worthlessness. But vices are unable, by their very nature, to satisfy. Vices easily become things we habitually run to because they help us appease the enthroned dictator of our feelings.

But it isn't just the feelings of individuals. The feelings of society can also be masters. What about racism? When feelings become masters, people of all races feel the blow.

I was speaking with someone recently about society's feelings. She said, "Why can't we explain justice as a concept society created?" I asked her if she thought racism was wrong. "Yes," she said. I asked her if society thought it was wrong one hundred years ago. "No." I asked her if Martin Luther King was a good guy. "Yes." I asked her if Martin Luther King learned that racism was wrong from his society. "No." Then with an expression of discovery, she said, "Oh, I see. Well, it does seem that people do know what justice is in the back of their minds, even if they ignore it."

Feelings make terrible masters. But feelings make excellent servants. In the life of David, the young man is pursued by the envious King Saul who is trying to kill him. David cries out to God to be delivered from cruelty and injustice. Then with God's ironic timing, Saul steps vulnerably into a cave for a moment. David huddles in the shadows of that cave, remembering his prayers. How does David feel? Alone, unimportant, afraid, rejected. Though all of

his feelings were real and justified, David allowed them to be servants. And they drove him to God.

David showed mercy when his feelings wanted to lead him to vengeance. He declared, "I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed." (Footnote 1: 1 Samuel 24:10) You see, David was a man who developed a habit of seeking after God and was more concerned about God's kingdom than his own. He directed his feelings of loneliness, fear, and rejection to point him to a proper place. If his feelings were masters, David may have pitifully altered the rest of his life. But by making feelings his servants, David responded well.

Have feelings controlled your actions today? Have you allowed your feelings to dictate poor lifestyle habits? Look at them with scrutiny. Why are they there? What do they mean? Let me encourage you to direct your feelings to point you to God. Be deliberate to develop a wise mind that habitually seeks after God and chooses what is good. Then we may say with David, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears...The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Footnote 2: Psalm 34:4, 18)

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