



The Journey of Thomas

Feelings – Should We Live By them?

By John J. Smid

Ephesians 4:22 – 32

You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that is may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, which whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

This passage encourages us toward change. But it centers on how to more effectively handle our feelings. There is a curious reference right in the center of this passage to anger. Anger is commonly known as a catchall feeling. When we don't know what to do with our passionate feelings, anger seems to work to vent them or to hide them. Frustration, confusion, and hurt all get caught up in anger. While there is an emotion known as "righteous anger" I do not believe this passage is relating to that particular expression. Most often, we are experiencing deep emotion in our hearts that is misunderstood by us and by others as we express it and it comes out in a strong expression we know as anger.

The other interesting fact about this passage is that it speaks to letting go of unhealthy and destructive habits that we get into. It talks about the ways we wound ourselves and others and calls us to account regarding these inappropriate actions.

I have seen many times that when I am not communicating my feelings appropriately that I can get into destructive habits. I may be trying to cover what is really going on inside in my patterns of sin.

The instruction in this passage is this:

- Put off our old lives that have been corrupted by deceit.
- Renew our minds.
- Be honest with others because we are one body.
- Acknowledge our feelings rather than stuff them.

After we have done this:

- Quit the addictive habits we have gotten into as a result of lying to ourselves and living in dishonesty with others about our feelings.

I believe the “putting off falsehood” that is spoken here may in fact be an encouragement to be more honest with each other about our feelings. One reason I believe this is that it is connected to the encouragement towards unity within the body. I know that when we are dishonest with each other it breaks unity. When we aren’t honest about our feelings this can bring about separation and disunity as well. If we haven’t defined what our feelings are – it is very hard to communicate them honestly.

God gave us two places in our brains that stimulate our eyes to tear up. One place stimulates a cleansing tear when we get dust in our eyes, while the other place starts the tears flowing when we feel strong emotion. I think it is very interesting that God created us with tears from our eyes – which He describes as the lamp to our soul!

I believe that the tears come in a very visible way so as to alert those around us that we have something deep to share with them. Sometimes we cannot get it out and our tears bring the subject to the surface! These can be tears of joy, pain, hurt, or just frustration. All of which God designed to be shared so that His body could be one.

Another interesting thing that helped me to see the value of our feeling is this; the disease of Leprosy is not a disease of the skin. Rather is it a disease of the nerve endings that lose their ability to feel. Due to the inability to feel pain people with Leprosy do not take care of wounds and they become gangrenous and eventually the skin becomes so wounded it falls off. Maybe we have developed emotional leprosy.

There are times when we can develop a defense mechanism that numbs our emotional feelings. This numbness causes us to lose the God given emotions that can provide safety, express joy, and overall they can bring our souls to life. As you think if these biological realities, here is a tool to help you to bring others into your emotions.

I Feel; about; because; simple, but complex.

I feel _____

About _____

Because _____

This format has worked to free men and women for many years in secular and Christian settings. It is so clear that following it can be done easily. The difficulty stems from the fact that it works so well that we become vulnerable to intimate places in our hearts.

This can be a written tool for sure but the most effective way to use it is when speaking with others. Again, the passage in Ephesians challenges us to not withhold that truth from others and to be honest to sharing our feelings with others is vital to the success of this tool.

I feel:

Describe a feeling that you are experiencing about something that is going on in your life, or has gone on in the past. This may be one feeling, or it could be many at the same time. As scripture calls us to honesty in this, it is very important that you dig to find the most honest feeling you have. It may also be the most difficult one to bring to the surface.

Typically, men have not learned to identify feelings at all or only to a place of a few simple words like; mad, glad, sad, or bad. As a part of this tool, we have a feelings list of over 200 words. It is very helpful to see a list that prompts us further into diverse words that can accurately describe what we are truly experiencing.

Generally, women struggle differently. They can experience something we affectionately call the “tangled ball of emotions”. This is where there are so many feelings whirling around that it is too hard to pick out just a few. It is important to work with tangible feeling words that can clearly express some things going on. The feelings list again, helps to sort this out for our ladies.

We don’t use the word “like” or “that” in this section because they can deflect the feeling! “I feel that” often goes right into a finger pointing. To say “I feel like” is not a feeling statement. It is more valuable to stay with the basic, “I feel frustrated”, rather than “I feel like you just.....”

So, in summary, on the line showing; “I Feel” we would put in a feeling word that clearly expresses our feelings about the situation.

About:

Next, it is very important that you figure out specifically the situation you are having strong feelings about. It is very important to be as specific as you can about this situation. What has gone on, or what are you going through right now that you are trying to sort out or communicate with someone?

The “about” part is vital because it helps you set the stage for your own understanding as well as those you are speaking with. This is the very heart of the matter that your feelings are attached to and if you don’t separate this out than it can lead to great confusion and a lack of finding the solution.

In the blank next to “About” simply place a description of the situation.

Because:

This is where it gets real. This section is where you share your true heart concerning the matter. It’s one thing to talk about a situation you are having strong feelings about but underneath this is a very vulnerable place that lets others into your life in a very significant way.

You might share a past situation that ties in to the current one. You might talk about a wound that has plagued you and causes you to be ultra sensitive when something pokes into it again. This may be a place where you share about a value that you esteem highly or a personal conviction that is really important to you which produces passionate feelings in your heart.

If these feelings stem from a relationship concern, this may call you to a level of honesty with that person that you were afraid to approach but your strong feelings and subsequent behaviors have popped out and you can no longer ignore them.

This model of communication begins with a very stringent format that can feel awkward and stiff. Consider it this way. When you were young you were taught to write letters of the alphabet inside two lines with a dotted line between them. This too felt awkward and stiff and your teacher likely required a very specific pattern of control in order to meet her approval. This tool is like that. At the beginning it must be very specific and clear but in time you will learn to assimilate it into your natural communication and thinking process.

You might also find that when a relationship challenge becomes really sensitive this tool can become really valuable to keep the communication clear, succinct, and healthy. It can keep you honest in your motives and help greatly in working through the challenge successfully.

Let's look at a couple of aids and a helpful worksheet to further work through the application of this material.

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FEELING FACES



Contented



Depressed



Frazzled



Frightened



Happy



Thoughtless



Starry-Eyed



Disgusted



Shocked



Enraged



Out-Of-Sorts



Suspicious



Two-Faced



Sad



Tired



Stupid



Lively



Shy



Hopeful



Confused



Unknown



Worried



Embarrassed



Expectant



Concerned



Bright & Cheery



In-The-Dark



Devi'ish



Apprehensive



Affectionate

Designed by Barbara Lawson

Feeling Words

Affectionate

loving
passionate
longing
adoring
appealing
infatuated
sentimental
sympathetic
compassion
concerned
pity
tender
warm
close

Uncertain

questioning
suspicious
cautious
skeptical
doubtful
dubious
apprehensive
distrustful
distant
cold
jealous
envious
irritated
aggravated
nauseated
sick
evasive
wavering
hesitant
repulsed
resentful
hate
contempt
bitter
loathing
cruel
disgust

Secure

heroic
courageous
brave
daring
determined
bold
loyal
reassured
confident

Insecure

lonely
shy
awkward
torn
uptight
anxious
tense
stretched
timid
shaky
nervous
alarmed
afraid
fearful
panicky
terrified
shocked
horrified
paralyzed
isolated
neglected
rejected
alienated
abandoned

Joyous

ecstatic
elated
blissful
jubilant
playful
spirited
thrilled
amused

merry
happy
cheerful
lighthearted
delightful

Sorrowful

quiet
low
grumpy
somber
melancholy
unhappy
heavy-hearted
guilty
remorseful
moody
gloomy
deary
dismal
mournful
dreadful

Encouraged

hopeful
inspired
zealous
enthusiastic
desirous
excited
keen
earnest
intent
avid
powerful
strong

Discouraged

weak
tired
worried
hurt
upset
pained
injured
confused

messed up
distressed
powerless
depressed
aching
crushed
suffering
tortured
heartbroken
afflicted
despair
hopeless

Victorious

triumphant
respectful
proud
useful

Shameful

useless
worthless
pathetic
embarrassed
bewildered
annoyed
aggravated
offended
insulted
frustrated
disgraced
shameful
ashamed
humiliated
provoked
irate
indignant
furious
infuriated
inflamed
hostile

Engaged

enthusiastic
decisive
engrossed

absorbed
amazed
surprised
fascinated
intrigued
excited
curious
inquisitive
sincere
alive
feisty
concerned

Bored

flat
blah
sluggish
preoccupied
complacent
phony
insincere
indecisive
disengaged

Optimistic

content
satisfied
grateful
relief
carefree
peaceful
serene
comfortable
calm
relaxed
pleased

Dissatisfied

displeased
disappointed
perplexed
hollow
empty
defeated
discontent
pessimistic

“I Feel... About... Because...”

Practice Sheet

Complete the following six statements using “About’s” provided below. For inspiration, look at the list of feeling words on the previous page.

I feel _____

About - *my career, vocation or job* _____

Because _____.

I feel _____

About - *my connections with other people* _____

Because _____.

I feel _____

About - *my relationship with my dad* _____

Because _____.

I feel _____

About - *my relationship with my mom* _____

Because _____.

I feel _____

About - *my relationship with the Lord* _____

Because _____.

I feel _____

About - *greatest accomplishment* _____

Because _____.