

JULIÁN MELGOSA

Finding *Calm*  
in the **Chaos** of Life



**Pacific Press® Publishing Association**  
Nampa, Idaho  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
[www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

Cover design by Gerald Lee Monks  
Cover image from iStockphoto.com  
Inside design by Aaron Troia

Copyright © 2011 by Pacific Press® Publishing Association  
Printed in the United States of America  
All rights reserved

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible verses in this book are quoted from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scriptures quoted from KJV are from the King James Version.

You can obtain additional copies of this book by calling toll-free 1-800-765-6955 or by visiting <http://www.adventistbookcenter.com>.

ISBN 13: 978-0-8163-2569-6 (pbk.)

ISBN 10: 0-8163-2569-3 (pbk.)

# Contents

---

Emotions .....	5
Fear and Anxiety.....	16
Stress.....	26
Guilt .....	36
Depression.....	46
Addictions .....	59
Partnership With Jesus .....	71



# Emotions

---

Our dentist had referred my nineteen-year-old son Eric to an oral surgeon, who was to extract his wisdom teeth. When I made the appointment, I was given instructions regarding how to prepare for the extraction; and on the day before the procedure, someone from the oral surgeon's office called us to remind us of every step. We did everything as prescribed—diet, medication, and water—and I agreed to remain at the clinic while the procedure was done and to stay with Eric for the following five hours.

We arrived at the oral surgeon's office early to take care of the preliminaries. Eric was given some forms to fill out, and I was left to deal with the finances. After examining my insurance card, the receptionist told me I had to pay an amount that seemed excessive to me. I asked for an explanation, thinking that there might be a problem with the insurance. "No, there's no problem at all," she said. "We just require most of the payment before we do procedures. When we've collected from your insurance company, we'll refund your money."

"Well," I replied, "I haven't come prepared because nobody told me about this. Besides, all the other dentists I've gone to have honored my insurance plan and billed me later."

"We're not like other dentists," she said. "We collect our payments this way."

I didn't want to argue, so I pulled out my credit card and handed it to her, even though I would much rather have paid with a check. Then I took a seat next to Eric in the waiting room and sat and stewed about the payment. *Their instructions were so complete—except they didn't say a word about the payment!* I thought.

When I glanced at the clock and noticed that twenty-five minutes had gone by and they hadn't called for Eric yet, I looked at the receptionist. Though I hadn't said a word, she apologized. "Sorry. We're a little late, but I'll call you soon."

## Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life

The clock continued to run, and another twenty minutes passed. Eric read magazines while we waited, but questions and resentments ran through my mind. *Why was it so important to take the medicine exactly two hours before the procedure if they're not going to start it on time? What would they say to me if I showed up an hour late for an appointment? This tardiness shows no respect for the patient. I'm going to complain!* I was becoming quite angry and frustrated. My heart was pounding, my jaw was clamped shut, and my fists were clenched.

I had begun preparing my speech when my cell phone rang. A colleague from work wanted to discuss some mundane matters. We ended up chatting about some personal things, and by the time we hung up, my mood had changed completely. I said to myself, "Why make a big deal about this and ruin my day?" and I sent a short prayer upward: "Lord, help me to be patient, calm, and polite."

At that moment, the receptionist said, "Eric, we're ready for you. Please come in." They were more than an hour late in starting the procedure, but I was much less upset than I had been forty-five minutes before. The waiting room seemed nicer, and the magazines interesting. As for the receptionist, well, her smile didn't seem artificial anymore, and her voice no longer sounded high-pitched and annoying. And when she apologized again for being so late, her words seemed really genuine. I felt happy.

Emotions are the spice of life; for without them, life would be absolutely bland. Emotions help us enjoy people, places, and experiences. They enable us to be passionate about our beliefs and convictions. But they can also lead us to make mistakes, to hurt people, to feel awful, and to sin. In the Christian life, emotional experiences are a way to live the great controversy between good and evil. That is why it is of utmost importance for all believers to know their emotional strengths and weaknesses and to pray at the right times and with the right choice of thoughts and attitudes to preclude negative emotions and promote positive ones.

Love, joy, trust, tenderness, empathy, happiness, and forgiveness are positive emotions. Sadness, anger, fear, disappointment, remorse, disgust, and hatred are negative emotions. Much of the therapy that takes

## Emotions

place in the counseling room has to do with helping people to know and govern their emotions, to dispel their adverse feelings, and to harbor the positive ones in such a way as to avoid psychological pain.

People can initiate soothing emotions through religious practices—fervent prayer may be the most direct way. Reading the Bible, particularly Proverbs, Psalms, and the promises scattered through scriptures, encourages peace, tranquility, and the flow of positive emotions. Searching for stories of Bible characters who use their emotions appropriately, especially the stories that feature Jesus, can help us learn to face our emotions well.

### **Bible stories of negative emotions**

The Bible contains several stories in which people follow their emotional impulses with bad results for themselves and those entangled in their lives. Let us look at the stories of two such biblical characters, Samson and Amnon.

Samson's biography, found in chapters 13 through 16 of the book of Judges, is packed with strong emotions.

- Samson sees a young Philistine woman. Filled with infatuation, and before he knows even her name, he decides to marry her (Judges 14:1, 2).
- When Samson realizes that his wife has revealed the answer to his riddle, he kills thirty men to obtain what he needs to pay off his bet, and then he goes to his father's house "burning with anger" (14:19).
- Next, Samson finds out that his wife has been given to another man, so he burns the entire grain crop of the Philistines. This results in the death of his wife and her father, as well as Samson's slaughter of many more Philistines (15:1–7).
- Samson kills a thousand more Philistines when his own people are about to turn him over to them (15:15).
- He falls in love with Delilah, who, in turn, manipulates his feelings to obtain the secret of his strength, which God has

## Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life

forbidden him to reveal (16:15–17).

- Deprived of his strength, Samson is captured by his enemies, who destroy his eyes and his dignity. And the Lord also leaves him, which, we can imagine, drops him into the depths of despair (16:21).
- Brought to a feast in a pagan temple to entertain the celebrating Philistines, Samson manages to kill more of them in his suicidal death than he had killed through all the previous years of his life (16:30).

It is true that the Spirit of the Lord used Samson's behavioral quirks to fulfill the divine plan for the Philistines. However, Samson's reactions were full of hatred, revenge, sexual impulse, and the arrogant display of his strength. Had Samson been spiritually faithful, God would have found alternative ways of removing the enemy—ways that wouldn't have wasted the life of someone who had been set apart for God from birth. Ellen White commented that Samson's story teaches us that “the real greatness of the man is measured by the power of the feelings that he controls, not by those that control him.”<sup>1</sup>

Another story packed with emotions wrongly handled is that of Amnon and Tamar (see 2 Samuel 13). There we find a son of David frustrated because of his desire to possess his half-sister Tamar. His frustration is so great that he becomes physically ill.

Amnon accepts a scheme proposed by his friend Jonadab, and full of passion, assaults and rapes her. But then he hates her even more intensely than he had desired her. Refusing to listen to her plea to resolve the situation, he calls his servant to drive her out of his palace by force and bolt the door after her.

Amnon may have felt not only hatred for Tamar, but also remorse for what he had done and fear because of what could happen to him. Of course, his deed also brought a great deal of emotional pain to Tamar, who was the truly innocent victim of the story; and it filled other family members with grief and hatred. Two years later, Absalom crafted a plan of revenge and had Amnon killed. David, who suffered throughout the whole sordid affair, had failed to bring Amnon to justice. He now had



## Emotions

to endure the grief of losing his firstborn son by the hand of another of his sons.

### Positive emotions in the Bible

The Bible also contains many examples of people who experienced uplifting feelings and emotions. While Jesus' disciples were talking about the revelation on the road to Emmaus, the Lord appeared to them and greeted them. Although at first they were startled and frightened, they soon experienced joy and amazement at His presence.

The lives of the first Christians were also full of positive emotions in spite of the many adversities they suffered. Acts 2:46, 47 says, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with *glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people*" (emphasis added).

A woman in her fifties who had recently embraced the Adventist message joined a small church in Spain. One day as she was participating in a prayer group, she told her conversion experience. Halfway through, she was moved emotionally and became teary and had difficulty speaking. At this, a member of the group said to her, "Don't worry, those emotions will go away when you've been in the church for a while."

Not necessarily! Converted people can grow in their excitement about Jesus. Our Lord wants us to experience the highest level of positive emotions. He doesn't want us to live with the unpleasant consequences of hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfishness, dissension, and envy. Instead, He offers us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:19–23).

Emotions can be utterly good or extremely bad. They are intimately related to mental and physical health. There is a long list of psychosomatic diseases—verifiable organic maladies that have their origin in emotional processes. They affect virtually every system, but most often the digestive, circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems. Positive emotional states, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bring about a sense of well-being, a positive outlook, and an optimal relationship with God and neighbor.

## Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life

### Jesus' emotions

The Gospels allow us to glimpse times in Jesus' life when He showed emotion. When we read those passages, we can identify with Him and learn to endure emotional pain and to maximize positive emotions.

Compassion is perhaps the emotion we see most often in the stories of Jesus' life. For example, we see a leper approaching Jesus, falling on his knees and begging to be cleansed. The text tells us that Jesus, "filled with compassion," reached out His hand and touched the man (Mark 1:41). As soon as Jesus pronounced the words, "I am willing. . . . Be clean!" the leper was clean.

Jesus was also moved by compassion when the more than four thousand people who came to hear Him went three days with little or nothing to eat (see Mark 8). Jesus was aware of their needs and wouldn't start them on their long journey home without nourishment lest they faint. So, miraculously, He provided food for them.

Jesus also expressed love, which is the supreme positive emotion, the central theme of the gospel. He showed His love for people on many occasions. He even set His love as the benchmark toward which His disciples are to aim, "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17, KJV). The Lord loved Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus, and He found solace in their house at Bethany when He was tired. But He didn't restrict His love only to those who followed Him. The story of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler teaches us that He loves His children even when they don't obey Him. Though this young man turned away from Jesus, He "looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21). What a remarkable lesson to those who disdain and hate people who don't respond to their requests!

Jesus often demonstrated His affection for people through touching them. He held little children and touched diseased people—including lepers—when He healed them. Ellen White wrote that Jesus' disciples tried to prevent their Master from touching a leper; for "he who touched a leper became himself unclean."<sup>2</sup> But Jesus, being the source of wholeness, wasn't defiled. And by His act of touching the leper, He sent the message that ill people—even those with the worst disorders—deserve love and affection.

## Emotions

In addition to enjoying the pleasure of positive emotions, the Lord Jesus also endured the pain of negative ones. The prophet Isaiah used powerful language to reveal the physical and emotional pain Jesus suffered. He said Jesus was a “man of sorrows,” “familiar with suffering,” “despised,” disdained, “smitten,” “afflicted,” wounded by human transgression, and bruised by human iniquity (see 53:3–5).

People tend to cry because of their own losses, but Jesus wept for the losses of others. He feels perfect sympathy and empathy for those who suffer. The Gospels tell us that Jesus grieved for those who rejected the appeals He made when He lived among them. Luke tells us that Jesus actually wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). He was fully aware that it would eventually be destroyed, and He wept at the suffering of its citizens. This is one of the two times Scripture says that Jesus wept. Meditating on this aspect of Jesus’ ministry can lessen the emotional pain we feel.

The second instance in which Scripture specifically says that Jesus wept is in the story of Lazarus’s death and resurrection. This story gives us additional information about the depth of Jesus’ feeling. John 11:33 says that He “groaned in the spirit and was troubled” (KJV), or that He “was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” This is a translation of the Greek term *embrimaomai*, which appears again in verse 38, where it is translated “groaning in himself” (KJV) and “deeply moved.” This is one of the most graphic pieces of biblical data telling us of Jesus’ emotions when He felt the consequences of sin. Jesus’ groan was probably audible. Certainly it showed the deep psychological turmoil He was feeling.

Here are some of the emotions the Savior experienced.

- *Grief and distress* (Mark 3:5). On one occasion, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand to demonstrate that people could be freed from the yoke of sin even on the Sabbath. Scripture says the Pharisees angered and distressed Jesus. They raised these emotions in Jesus because they would rather leave someone in excruciating pain than do what they could to provide relief on the Sabbath.

## Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life

- *Frustration* (Mark 8:12). The Pharisees came to ask Jesus for a sign from heaven, even though they had already seen plenty of signs. This scenario raised a set of emotions that are difficult to label. The King James Version translates Jesus' reaction this way: "He sighed deeply in his spirit." We don't know exactly what Jesus felt; it may have been a mixture of anger, frustration, pity, and sorrow.
- *Indignation* (Mark 11:15–17). Jesus had come to earth specifically to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, and the animal sacrifices in the temple were meant to point to Him in His role as the Redeemer. Yet, the worshipers and temple personnel were missing this point. Passover involved the sacrifice of thousands of animals, and for many people, it had become a great business with no connection to the Messiah. So, although some don't understand Jesus' forceful behavior in clearing the temple, apparently the seriousness of the offense required a clear and strong intervention.
- *Anguish* (Matthew 26:37, 38). At Gethsemane, the Man Jesus experienced anxiety far greater than any other human being has ever experienced. Evidences of this extreme mental torment are (a) the feeling that He was about to take upon Himself all the guilt of humankind, past, present, and future; (b) His need of support from Peter, James, and John; (c) the fact that He told His disciples about His agony, saying, " 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' "; and (d) His request to the Father that if possible, " 'this cup' " be taken from Him—in other words, that God's plan be changed, that Jesus be excused from what He was about to experience.

As we realize the intense emotional experiences Jesus went through, we can better bear the mental and emotional suffering that comes to us. We may also begin to understand Jesus' feelings now as well as then: is He smiling because we're behaving like His children should, or is He

## Emotions

sad or even crying—as He did over Jerusalem—because we’re not accepting Him fully?

### Promises regarding adverse emotions

The concept of emotional intelligence emerged in 1995 with the publication of Daniel Goleman’s book by that name, *Emotional Intelligence*. He refuted the traditional understanding of the intelligence quotient (IQ) and presented in its place a more global concept of ability—one that is now widely accepted in the field of psychology. Emotional intelligence (EI) isn’t just the ability to answer standardized items and perform a number of highly precise problems under time constraints. It has to do with the mastering of our emotions so that we can achieve goals and build relationships. One of the most desirable traits is the ability to transform negative emotions into positive ones. Another helpful trait is the ability to survive the painful emotional experiences that everyone must face sooner or later.

Christianity has a lot to offer us when we’re dealing with painful emotional experiences. One of the best ways we can gain help is by following the directions Jesus gave to His disciples when He was facing crucifixion and death. The passage that tells this story, John 16:20–24, is full of hope. When we’re troubled, we can gain much comfort, strength, and hope by reading Jesus’ words and realizing the following:

- *Life isn’t always fair, but joy is on its way.* Many people who reject the Savior seem to be happy and enjoy life, while many of Jesus’ followers weep and mourn. It isn’t fair that cancer strikes someone who has always tried to follow the health message and that accidents take away young lives, leaving parents and siblings crushed. But Jesus promises that grief will be turned to joy.
- *The change from grief to joy won’t take long.* The Lord won’t allow us to suffer more than we can endure—that’s a promise! People under severe emotional distress will leave their suffering behind as quickly as the sight of a mother’s

## Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life

precious newborn baby erases her memories of the pain of childbirth.

- *The unpleasant past will truly be forgotten.* Much of the emotional turmoil that harasses us issues from events of the past. That is why psychotherapists from some traditions labor session by session to help their clients deal with those past experiences that are still causing unhappiness. But Christ promises to wipe out that past as if it were no more.
- *We all must experience some grief.* Jesus pointed out that “ ‘now is your time of grief’ ” (verse 22). Sin touches everyone, and suffering and death follow their course in all lives. Seldom can we see the reason for the tribulation we experience. But reason and evil aren’t compatible. It suffices to know that Jesus adds, “ ‘But I will see you again and you will rejoice.’ ”
- *The joy Jesus gives lasts forever.* When Jesus returns, He will give His children a type of joy that nobody can take away and that will last for eternity—something difficult to understand, for joy as we understand it is evanescent. But we accept Jesus’ statement by faith.
- *We won’t need to ask Jesus for anything else.* Jesus affirms that although His disciples ask Him for all sorts of blessings, the time will come when those who love Him will want nothing, since all their needs will be fully met.
- *In the meantime, we must pray in Jesus’ name.* The Lord doesn’t leave His followers with nothing but a promise. He offers support today as His children face mental struggles and painful emotions. “ ‘Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete’ ” (verse 24).

Whenever anger, hatred, jealousy, or anxiety oppress you, when you feel impatient, guilty, inferior, or stressed, accept Jesus’ invitation. He promises the Father’s help—not when He returns at the end of time, but now, if you ask in His name.

## Emotions

- 
1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press®, 1958), 568.
  2. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press®, 1940), 266.