

## Christian Growth Course - Learning to Rule Feelings

Introduction: Would you like to be able to

- Express objections and complaints to people calmly without losing control?
- Have the courage to speak your mind to people?
- Say no and still feel comfortable?
- Not have to be afraid of where your strong feelings might lead you?
- Introduce yourself to strangers?
- Be under pressure without your stomach knotting up or your head aching?
- Share warm, positive feelings with people without being afraid of the response?
- Express love without embarrassment?
- Have less ups and downs in your moods?

Emotions can be difficult for us at times. Yet emotions are not wrong. They were created by God as part of our makeup. God himself has emotions. Emotions are the motor that keeps us moving, the color that gives quality to life. Our emotions are a great blessing to us if they are controlled. But we must control them rather than being controlled by them - 1 Corinthians 6:12. Uncontrolled and mishandled emotions can paralyze us, do great damage, and even destroy us. It is important to let God rule in our emotional life.

1. Our emotions can motivate us to do good. Examples:

- A. Zeal for reaching lost people - Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.
- B. Drawing couples together in marriage - Genesis 2:24; 29:18, 20.
- C. Ensuring that parents care for their children - Isaiah 49:15.
- D. Zeal against evil - John 2:13-17; Acts 17:16, 17.
- E. Acts of mercy - Luke 7:11-15; Matthew 8:2, 3.

2. But much trouble comes when our feelings rule us instead of our ruling them.

Some problems caused by uncontrolled or mishandled emotions:

- A. Depression - 1 Kings 19:1-5; 2 Corinthians 2:7.
- B. Mental illness - 1 Samuel 18:6-11.
- C. Physical sickness - Psalm 32:3-5.
- D. Rejection of faith; opposition toward God - Acts 5:17, 18; Psalm 37:1, 8; 73:2, 3, 13-15.
- E. Divisions and broken relationships - Proverbs 29:22.
- F. Sins of all kinds, such as:
  - 1) Immorality - Genesis 37:3, 4; 2 Samuel 13:1-19.
  - 2) Murder - Genesis 4:3-8.

- 3) Suicide - Matthew 27:3-5.
  - 4) Addictions.
  - 5) Blind prejudice, spiritual blindness - Matthew 26:65.
- G. More frequent loss of emotional control because of old emotion stored up in inside.
- H. Emotional paralysis. Examples:
- 1) Always giving in to people, though you resent it afterward.
  - 2) Always seeking approval by what you do and say, and how you dress.
  - 3) Always doing favors, promising things and obligating yourself until hopelessly overloaded.
  - 4) Afraid to assert yourself, for fear of "blowing it" or suffering rejection.
  - 5) Avoiding social contact or emotional nearness for fear of hurt or rejection.
3. God expects us to control our feelings. This is part of our salvation.
- A. We are commanded and encouraged to control emotions - James 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:26, 27; Philippians 4:6, 7; Proverbs 16:32.
  - B. The Spirit of God helps us develop self-control - 2 Timothy 1:7; Galatians 5:22, 23.
  - C. God's word gives us wisdom for conquering any emotion.
    - 1) Anger, resentment:
      - a. Take control early before it grows - Ephesians 4:26, 27.
      - b. Voluntarily renounce your rights like Jesus did - Matthew 16:24; Philippians 2:7.
      - c. Forgive as you need to be forgiven - Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:32.
      - d. Communicate - Matthew 18:15; 5:23, 24.
      - e. Hand over resentments to God and leave vengeance to him - Romans 12:17-21.
    - 2) Anxiety fear:
      - a. Realize God's worthiness of your trust and his desire to help you - Romans 8:31-39.
      - b. Learn to give fears up to him in prayer and not take them back; to deliberately quiet your soul and trust him - Philippians 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:7.
    - 3) Guilt:

- a. Realize that Christ has already paid for your sins completely - Isaiah 53:4-6.
- B. Realize that God delights to forgive you - Psalm 103:11-14; Luke 15:21-24.
- c. Openly confess wrongs, taking responsibility for your actions - James 5:16.
- d. Make any possible restitution - Luke 19:8, 9.
- e. Come to God for forgiveness - Acts 3:19.
- f. Forgive yourself.
- g. Forgive others so that you may be forgiven - Matthew 6:12-15.

4. Steps to better emotional control:

- A. Decide if you really want to be emotionally free. Some people actually enjoy self-pity, fantasies of revenge, etc. Some people use their emotional instability to manipulate others or to get sympathy or to evade responsibility. Some people do not want to give up the familiar in order to be free.
- B. Decide that you really are going to conquer your emotions for Jesus' sake.
- C. Recognize that you cannot do this without God's help, and seek the help of God's Spirit.
  - 1) Ask for the Spirit - Luke 11:13; Ephesians 5:18.
  - 2) keep full of God's word which is the Spirit's sword - Ephesians 6:17.
  - 3) Stay near God's people for encouraging fellowship and worship - Hebrews 10:24, 25; John 7:37-39.
  - 4) Keep your body and your life morally and spiritually clean so that the Spirit will be pleased to live in you - 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:18-20.
- D. Strengthen yourself as much as possible physically and spiritually so that you will be able to cope.
- E. Increase your motivation by becoming very aware of what your runaway emotions are doing to yourself, others and the Lord.
- F. Visualize the peace, happiness and self-respect, and the improved relationships you will have through better emotional control.
- G. Learn to deal with negative emotions when they first emerge, while they are easier to manage.
- H. Realize that as long as you let the actions of others determine your emotions, you are under their control rather than you own.

I. Clean out the pools of repressed emotion associated with painful memories of the past.

- 1) Our present emotional outlook is affected by all our emotional experiences of the past. Some of our experiences have been painful. We may have repressed these emotions into the subconscious rather than face them. But they remain in the subconscious and re-appear as depression, aggression, illness, or emotional instability.

Samples of such traumatic memories of the past:

- Parental neglect
- Parental inability to give love
- Parental abuse
- Divorce of parents
- Loss of a parent or family member
- Sexual abuse or trauma
- Broken engagement or divorce
- Moral fall
- Extreme or repeated rejection
- Experiences of terror
- Privation
- Disasters

- 2) These often seem too painful to bring back and think about.

- 3) The emotions associated with these experiences were not dealt with in God's way and laid to rest, or were not processed in the way nature demands for healing. They must be brought out and faced so that these things can be done. They must be resolved in ways taught by scripture. Only then will they cease to cause trouble.

- Grief not worked through properly
- A trauma not accepted
- A parent not forgiven
- Sin not properly confessed and brought to God for cleansing
- A reconciliation avoided

See the excellent book [Making Peace with Your Past](#) by H. Norman Wright

(Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, NJ, 1985); and Redeeming the Past: Recovering from the Memories that Cause Our Pain by David Seamands (Chariot Victor Publishing).

6. A look at depression: (Based on material by Dr. C. Wayne Briggs)

A. Causes:

- 1) Behavior - How often do you do what you enjoy doing?
- 2) Reaction to loss - actual, perceived or anticipated.
- 3) Biological causes - genetic, family history, chemical imbalance, dehydration, hypoglycemia, inadequate or excessive sleep, influenza, effects of drugs, surgery, glandular disorders, cancer, etc.
- 4) Post-traumatic stress - combat, rape, crime victim, accident, bereavement, etc.
- 5) Beliefs - hopeless thinking, negative thought-life.
- 6) Inadequately processed emotion - anger, guilt, grief, etc.
- 7) Interpersonal relationships - Change, lack, need for emotional sharing and caring. Relationship problems.
- 8) Lack of realistic goals - no goals, existing goals already reached, lack of meaning in life.
- 9) Personality disorder - almost life-long patterns of behavior and thinking.
- 10) Mental illness - depression may be secondary to psychosis.

B. Symptoms of depression:

- 1) Mood is depressed, hopeless, sad, blue, "down-in-the-dumps" or irritable. Loss of interest in usual activities. May also be angry or anxious at times.
- 2) Sleep too little or too much, wake up early or sleep with difficulty.
- 3) Concentration, ability to decide, think or remember have decreased.
- 4) Loss of interest or enjoyment in pleasurable or usual activities.
- 5) Fatigue, lower energy level or chronic tiredness.
- 6) Feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem, inadequacy, excessive or inappropriate guilt or self-reproach.
- 7) Social withdrawal.
- 8) Decreased work or home productivity or effectiveness.
- 9) Irritability or excessive anger.

- 10) Inability to respond to praise or rewards with pleasure.
- 11) Tearfulness, crying or wanting to cry.
- 12) Recurrent thoughts of death, wishing to die, thoughts of suicide.
- 13) Suicide plans or attempt, even if only one time (does not have to be daily).
- 14) Pessimistic attitude toward the future, hopelessness, feeling sorry for self or brooding about past events.
- 15) Change in appetite or weight when not dieting.
- 16) Less active and talkative, feels slowed down or restless. Muscles, coordination or speech are slower or faster than usual.
- 17) Decreased sexual arousal or activity (sometimes, increased activity).
- 18) Increased physical pain or health problems.
- 19) Deterioration in personal grooming, appearance, housekeeping.

If a person is not sleeping six hours a night, or has thoughts of suicide or wish they were dead, professional help is needed as soon as possible. 95% of even severe cases of depression are completely curable if treated early enough. The biggest danger connected with depression is not doing anything about it.

C. Helps to overcoming depression:

- 1) Look for any physical, medical or nutritional factors. A good physical exam is helpful. Don't overlook reactions to medicine, caffeine, food allergies.
- 2) Get exercise and have a good daily routine for life with sufficient rest.
- 3) Do more of the things you enjoy doing. Learn how to manage and regulate stress.
- 4) Spiritual discussion and prayer are helpful; also rapport with someone who can give supportive care and concern.
- 5) Improperly processed emotions need to be dealt with when the person is able. If the depression does not improve within two weeks, medical help is advisable.

Recommended book: Happiness is a Choice by Frank B. Minirth, M. D., and Paul D. Meier, M. D. (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978). Also available in a video series (six half-hour segments).

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Students are not accountable on the test for the additional material below, but we urge you to study it.

The following material on Altering Thought Life is from Marital Counseling: A Biblically Based Behavioral Cognitive Approach by H. Norman Wright, Christian Marriage Enrichment, Denver, Colorado, 1981. Copyrighted material.

## **The Process of Altering Thought Life**

What are the specific steps involved in altering messages or thought life? We frequently use the phrase self-talk as we discuss a person's thought life. Often people spend years cultivating negative or maladaptive thought patterns. They develop false premises and assumptions which then create inappropriate emotional responses.

In the process of assisting in the analysis of self-talk, several steps are followed. First, a person must be aware of what he is thinking. This means learning to identify the messages or self-talk one makes about situations or other individuals.

Then the thoughts or self-talk must be evaluated or challenged in light of evidence and facts. In doing this it is possible to discover whether these thoughts are accurate or not.

Then one needs to learn how to counter or challenge the inaccurate self-talk. In doing this a person will learn to substitute accurate thoughts and judgments for inaccurate ones.

Here is an example of this sequence of analyzing self-talk:

A couple attended a party together. Shortly after they arrived, the husband began ignoring his wife and talking extensively with other women and men. That was the event. Then she began to think, "He really doesn't want to be here with me. Something is wrong with me. I know I'm not as good a conversationalist as the others. Maybe he's losing interest in me."

Perhaps this sounds extreme, but it isn't. To one degree or another, most people make some irrational thoughts. Her emotional response to her thoughts included withdrawing, rejection, depression and more irrational thinking.

The next step is to counter or challenge the negative self-talk. She could ask herself, "Now, just where is the evidence that he doesn't want to be with me?" Who says he is bored with me or that he is embarrassed to be with me? This doesn't mean there is anything wrong with me. Where are all of the facts for my questions?"

The final step is answering all of these questions that have been asked. "There isn't any reason or basis for him to be bored with me. We spent the last three evenings together. He tells me he loves me. He also said that there are many business contacts here. He believes that I can take care of myself socially."

In marriage counseling this process of challenging self-talk is aided by clarification of personal behavior by the spouse. (For additional information concerning the basis for the cognitive approach evaluated by a Biblical perspective, see "Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy: an Integrative View of Research" by Keith J. Edwards), *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Spring 1976, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 94-107.

Dr. Jerry Schmidt in You Can Help Yourself has clarified the practical use of self-talk. Scores of individuals and couples have used the following material from his book and found it to be beneficial. Many

have read this section week after week for reinforcement and clarification:

Rian McMullin and Bill Casey, have identified five methods to prove or disprove something. They are:

1. Use your senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling).
2. Ask an authority.
3. Find out what most people think.
4. Use your reasoning and logic.
5. Use your own experience.

The really important point is that while one method is good for some problems, that same method might be ridiculous for another. Let's return to a previous example to illustrate how some of these five methods could be used to challenge your negative self-talk.

**Negative Thought:**

"I'm just plain stupid." (Person who couldn't get car started) In order to put this thought on trial you might use **your own reasoning and logic** by asking some of the following questions:

What rational basis do I have for telling myself that I'm stupid? I can usually figure things out. How can one event in which I don't know something or can't figure something out make me draw the conclusion that I'm stupid?

You might also **find out what most people think** by asking these questions:

Where is the evidence that people think I am a complete idiot? Can I read other people's minds to know what they are thinking? Who has ever told me that I'm just plain stupid? What, in fact, do people say regarding my intelligence? Why wouldn't people think I'm simply another fallible human being like everyone else?

Or you could **use your own experience** by asking and answering:

What does my experience tell me about whether I'm an idiot or not? I succeeded in learning how to enclose my patio last year. I graduated from high school, and I succeeded in passing several college courses. That proves that I'm not stupid about some things and that I can learn about things that I don't know about.

Finally, you could **ask an authority**:

What have my teachers told me about my abilities? My professors? What kind of report did my boss turn in on me? She said I was one of her better employees in terms of getting the job done and doing it right. Who says that I should be able to do everything right the first time I try?

Let's look at another example and utilize again some of these methods for examining evidence.

**Negative Thought:**

"My boss is a horrible person. I am always being criticized and insulted by him. He makes me angry every day." (Employee who is criticized by boss.)

**Use your reasoning and logic:**

What rational basis do I have for telling myself that my boss is a horrible person? Isn't he just a



fallible human being who does things I don't like? Doesn't practically everyone do things that someone doesn't like?

**Use your own experience:**

Am I always being criticized and insulted? To say that I am always being insulted means that every second I am being met with critical remarks. That's silly. My experience tells me that only occasionally are critical remarks directed toward me.

**Countering:**

Putting your thoughts on trial and examining the evidence leads to a process called countering. When you "counter" an irrational, self-defeating thought you fight it with your reason. By asking some of the questions in the previous section you will discover counters that you can use on a daily basis to counteract irrational thoughts. Here are some examples of irrational thoughts and counters:

- Irrational thought: "Since my boss criticized me that means I'm no good."  
Counter: "My boss criticizes everybody!" (finding out what most people think)  
Counter: "That's the first time he's criticized me in over a week." (Using my experience)
- Irrational thought: "She looks like a very interesting person, but she probably wouldn't be interested in me."  
Counter: "How do I know? I haven't asked her!" (using my experience)  
Counter: "What can I lose by trying to meet her?" (using logic)
- Irrational thought: "I'd better not disagree with what they are saying, because then they might not like me."  
Counter: "If they don't know what I think they'll never have a chance to decide whether or not they like me."  
Counter: "That puts me in a horrible position, where I can only agree!"
- Irrational thought: "Healthy people don't get anxious or upset."  
Counter: "In my view, John F. Kennedy was a very healthy person, and he certainly got upset and anxious at times."  
Counter: "The Gospels certainly describe Jesus as feeling anxious and upset from time to time. If he wasn't healthy, who was?"

**Counters should be statements of reality.** In other words, if your irrational thought is, "I am inferior in every way," a poor counter would be "No, I'm not, I'm superior in every way." A good counter will usually come from one of the five methods described earlier for putting your thoughts on trial. A realistic counter might come from simply asking other people for feedback about your ability. From this process you might come up with a counter such as, "everyone I asked stated that I was good at several things."

Counters should be personally believable. Your counter could include everything from a scripture

passage to a simple "baloney!" **The important point here is that you really "buy into" the counters your use.** For example, don't just pick a Bible verse because someone else in authority says it's the right one. Find one that speaks directly to you, both personally and emotionally.

Countering can either be done during a difficult situation or as part of what we'll call a rehearsal exercise. Let's talk about the **use of counters in real life situations first.** You are about to call an old friend. You give yourself some irrational thoughts like, "I'd like to call my friend, but if she hasn't called me by now, she probably doesn't want to talk to me." Then you remind yourself to counter and begin to actively think to yourself, "That's ridiculous! If I want to talk to her, it's my responsibility to call her!" The result is that you call your friend, she is delighted that you did and you end up setting a luncheon date.

The counters that you use on the spot should be as active and persuasive as possible. Shout them out in your head! Scream internally at those self-defeating thoughts! Use several arguments for each irrational thought.

**All the counters used in this chapter are arguments with thoughts, not emotions.** That's why a counter such as, "No, I'm not sad" is a poor one. That kind of argument only hides feelings and is potentially harmful. A better counter for "sadness" would be to attack the self-defeating thoughts which are leading you to escalate your sadness and make the situation worse than is warranted. Perhaps something like this would be better: "I'm sad because I failed to get the job I applied for, but that does not mean that I will never find work. I have other alternatives to interview for tomorrow."

**Argue with the thought, not the feeling.**

## The Stress of Crises

Check any item on this list which you  
have experienced during the last year:

RANK	LIFE CRISIS	
1	Death of spouse .....	100
2	Divorce .....	73
3	Marital separation .....	65
4	Jail term .....	63
5	Death of a close family member .....	63
6	Personal injury or illness .....	53
7	Marriage .....	50
8	Fired from job .....	47
9	Marital reconciliation .....	45
10	Retirement .....	45
11	Change in health of family .....	44
12	Pregnancy .....	40
13	Sex difficulties .....	39
14	Gain of new family member .....	39
15	Business readjustment .....	39
16	Change in financial state .....	38
17	Death of close friend .....	37
18	Change to different line of work .....	36
19	Change in number of arguments with spouse .....	35
20	Mortgage over \$50,000 .....	31
21	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan .....	30
22	Change in responsibilities at work .....	29
23	Son or daughter leaving home .....	29

24	Trouble with in-laws.....	29
25	Outstanding personal achievement.....	28
26	Wife begins or stops work.....	26
27	Begin or end school.....	26
28	Change in living conditions.....	25
29	Revision of personal habits .....	24
30	Trouble with boss .....	23
31	Change in work hours or conditions.....	20
32	Change in residence .....	20
33	Change in schools.....	20
34	Change in recreation .....	19
35	Change in church activities .....	19
36	Change in social activities .....	18
37	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000.....	17
38	Change in sleeping habits .....	16
39	Change in number of family get-togethers .....	15
40	Change in eating habits.....	15
41	Vacation .....	13
42	Christmas .....	12
43	Minor violations of the law .....	11

Total Value Points \_\_\_\_\_

Research indicates that if a person experiences a total cumulative score of the point value of the life events, he is liable to experience physical symptoms of stress according to the following scale:

CUMULATIVE CRISIS POINTS	PROBABILITY OF PROBLEMS
150 to 199 Crisis Points . . . . .	.37% likelihood of health change

200 to 299 Crisis Points . . . . .51% likelihood of health change

Over 300 Crisis Points . . . . .79% likelihood of health change

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