

## Managing Emotions

I have come to see that emotions are a warning system: something in my life or myself needs attention. It's like physical pain, we can manage the symptoms, ignore the pain for awhile, but eventually we need to look at what's causing it.

In terms of *managing emotions*, there are healthy skills like: staying busy, exercise, hobbies and time with friends. One can even use distraction from stress in healthy doses. Of course, there are also unhealthy management activities like the over use of alcohol, food or electronics etc. A person can also overuse "avoidance of stressors", for example quitting every activity that feels hard or challenging.

While managing emotions is an important skill, it's not the whole picture. Simply put, there are reasons why emotions happen and only managing the symptoms does not give help to these underlying concerns. The tools of both *acknowledging and addressing* those causative reasons are skills which can be learned and practiced.

Common events that trigger emotional reactions are: someone is harming (or has harmed) me or someone I love. The issue could be a personal health problem or experiencing too many stressors. Often, negative emotions signal that the *way I'm thinking* is wrong or unhealthy (I might be believing some sort of lie or falsehood about myself or life or God.) Negative emotions can come from holding sinful attitudes or behaviors. Additionally, long term negative emotions can simply result from not knowing how to actually process and resolve emotional content (that's a skill set of it's own.)

In any case, symptom management is good, like taking an Aspirin for a headache, but long term engrained negative emotion patterns simply need more than management, they need actual help. Emotions in many cases are a gift of God, drawing our attention to something in our lives that needs His attention. "What issue is this emotion flagging for me?" "What kind of attention or help does that situation need?"

We've all ignored symptoms and let them fester, sometimes with catastrophic results. Better sit down with God in prayer, a friend or a professional therapist and take a look at what it's all about. Emotions are nothing to fear or avoid, they are part of God's creation. We can learn about them and learn to thrive with them.

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