



What a feeling?

GENE HUNT Take a look at this picture. It's the character Gene Hunt from *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*. He's an old school cop who ignores protocol, ignores evidence and does his own thing because he gets a feeling about things. He goes where his NOSE leads him. ONCE A Villain always a villain. As the series pointed out, often Gene Hunt failed because his feelings got in the way of good judgement because he relied more on his feelings than the facts of the case.

TITLE Feelings are an important part of human existence. There is nothing better than those times when we are feeling good. We fall in love, we get enjoyment from doing something we like, we're happy when things go right or when something good happens in our lives.

Then of course, there are times when our feelings towards life may be very negative – anger, anxiety, unforgiveness. And as we shall see, these can give rise to discouragement and depression as well as moving us away from God and destroying our human relationships.

IF WHAT YOU BELIEVE The problem is that like Gene Hunt, what we feel about something may not actually reflect reality.

Take a look at this picture. **TORNADO**. It's Britain's latest steam locomotive. It isn't a replica, it's a modern locomotive designed to work on the main line. Here it is on its trials pulling a brake van. Why is it pulling a brake van? As a modern locomotive, it doesn't need a brake van as part of a train it pulls, but on this trip it was probably there in case of an emergency; for a technical team to be on hand if there were problems.

Look at this picture – **FACT, FAITH, FEELINGS** – for Tornado to run it needs obviously the main steam engine, it needs a tender for water and coal and of course there's the brake van which may or may not come in handy. That's the relation of feelings to the rest of our lives. What we should be basing our lives on is truth – how things are and then how we respond to them – faith – should be what controls our lives. How we feel about our fact and our faith can then help our spiritual journey a pleasant and joyful one. However, so often we base our lives on feelings – but feelings don't often get us anywhere. Put the wrong load on the back of a locomotive – a load that's too heavy or with defective wagons and not only will the loco find it hard going, the train may get derailed. Feelings that don't belong with God's truth and our faith in it, make the journey hard and hinder our relationship with God.

Let me give you an example. I've come across so many Christians that base their faith on feelings. They may have started out in their faith with believing the truth that Jesus has died for them and accepted God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life. But when bad things start to happen – as inevitably they will because God doesn't exempt His people from a sinful world – they turn around and question whether they are a Christian at all because they feel bad – bad about God, bad about their situation and bad about their faith. Surely bad things don't happen to good people – so I must be bad. Wrong. That's feelings. What's the truth? The truth is the promises of God. Remember them – they're all in Who I am in Christ? Whatever our feelings, God wants us to base our faith on fact, not feelings because it's the truth of God's word and not our feelings about life at any one time.

Here's a bit of Lamentations 3 where Jeremiah laments that God hasn't just deserted him but slapped him in the face: **SCRIPTURE**

3:1 I am one who knows what it is to be punished by God. 2 He drove me deeper and deeper into darkness 3 And beat me again and again with merciless blows. 4 He has left my flesh open and raw, and has broken my bones. 5 He has shut me in a prison of misery and anguish. 6 He has forced me to live in the stagnant darkness of death. 7 He has bound me in chains; I am a prisoner with no hope of escape. 8 I cry aloud for help, but God refuses to listen; 9 I stagger as I walk; stone walls block me wherever I turn. 10 He waited for me like a bear; he pounced on me like a lion.

TITLE

You could cut Jeremiah's depression with a knife – but his feelings were based on an absolute load of piffle.

The truth was quite different. JEREMIAH was a great prophet who faithfully lived out God's commission as a prophet and prophesied some profound things of God as well as some dire predictions for the people of Judah. For his faithfulness he was ignored, vilified as a false prophet even though he was the true one, beaten up, thrown down a well and left to die, condemned as a traitor and then he witnessed the event he prophesied – the destruction of Jerusalem.

And his conclusion – that God had let him down. LAM 3:18 That was his conclusion – but it was a long way from the truth – he was a man who was favoured of God; blessed with knowing the mind of God and his books stand as testimony of that – but he was also a man who had problems connecting his feelings with truth. Many of us may reflect on our lives; even right now and understand how he felt.

Do you remember this sentence from the other week? IF WHAT YOU BELIEVE DOES NOT REFLECT THE TRUTH, THEN WHAT YOU FEEL WILL NOT REFLECT REALITY. The problem is with the three pressures on us that pull us away from God – the world, the flesh and the devil – is that they fill our minds with lies rather than truth. They create strongholds in our minds (ideas that are false but we accept as true) and our feelings get based on them. TITLE That's destructive and can destroy our faith, our relationships and our lives if we don't deal with them, because anything based on lies will ultimately come crashing down. I'll give you one or two examples in a moment. The question is, if we know something to be true e.g. that God promised us all these things in His word which I accept in my head as correct; how can I change my feelings about being depressed when things go wrong and I blame Him for them even if God's word tells me something else?

CHANGING HOW WE FEEL Remember the story about David and Goliath. The people of Israel were in fear of this huge man. None would fight him because they saw him and saw themselves and said "not a chance". Then David came along and wasn't afraid. He looked at Goliath and he looked at God and said "you've had it mate" to Goliath. The situation was the same but the attitude was different – why? Because David saw God in the equation. The Israelites – the people of God – had left God out.

When we are confronted with situations, how do we react? Like everyone else? Do we look at the situation and deem it hopeless? Do we see all the problems in it? Or do we see God. The God who makes a way where there seems to be no way. The God who makes us see possibilities, not problems. The God who turns minuses to pluses. And those minuses to pluses start in our minds when we base our faith on the facts of who we are in Christ rather than something less – our feelings then match truth.

The trouble is that often we ignore or accept the feelings we have as the way it is and ignore them. "It's only human to feel this way". Let's look at two negative feelings and see what the Bible says happens if we ignore them:

ANGER Eph 4: 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

ANXIETY 1 Pet 5:7-8 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Anger and anxiety are two human traits. If based on the truth of God they can be beneficial. Jesus showed right-placed anger. If we realise the truth of God, we should be anxious about it until we obey His will. So in one sense there's nothing wrong with those two. When based on truth, feelings help us do what God wants. The problem is, that when they aren't based on truth both of these are footholds and the devil can get in and destroy us through them. How many relationships have been destroyed by anger? How many lives have been blighted by fear. But both these verses have solutions that are of God when we shine the light of God's truth on them.

TITLE

There is one feeling as such I haven't dealt with – the most significant in fact which is unforgiveness. It's not because I'm remiss, but that it's going to be dealt with next Sunday. So let me leave you with something practical this morning. How do we handle our feelings and emotions? We can either handle them badly or properly. THREE WAYS So here are three ways I would suggest we can handle emotions:

Cover it up, Explode, or be Honest. Let's look at them in a bit more detail.

COVER IT UP Most English people are very reserved. When something happens in our lives that's

traumatic, or disappointing, or upsetting we show – the stiff upper lip. We just squash the feelings to the back of our minds. let's see what the Bible says about this.

It's Unhealthy Ps 39:1 *I said, "I will be careful what I do and will not let my tongue make me sin; I will not say anything while evil people are near." 2 I kept quiet, not saying a word, not even about anything good! But my suffering only grew worse, 3 and I was overcome with anxiety. The more I thought, the more troubled I became*

It's Dishonest *Prov 10:18 Anyone who hides hatred is a liar. Anyone who spreads gossip is a fool. And Prov 13:10 Arrogance causes nothing but trouble. It is wiser to ask for advice.*

The problem with suppressing our feelings is that they get buried – and they simmer, and simmer. In fact it may be years and years before they ever surface again. But in the meantime, our judgement will be influenced by them. That's how we stereotype people. We have a bad experience of someone, so we treat all people like them in the same way. One person breaks our trust and we don't forgive them – and so we see all people like them in the same way: untrustworthy. Or someone lets us down or upsets us. Rather than deal with the issue we let it simmer. And we never trust them again, we avoid them and they are probably wondering what they have done. This is the most common way of people dealing with feelings – and it is extremely prevalent amongst Christians.

We deal with God in the same way. We think He has let us down – maybe over some crisis in our lives, bereavement, sickness, relationships, unexpected disasters. And we simmer and never trust him. We may come to church but our spiritual lives are blighted. Churches are full of Christians who have issues with God. They're a bit like Jeremiah.

I said simmering, but in fact dealing with issues like this is more like microwaving a TV dinner without piercing the lid. It simmers and simmers and then pow! It explodes.

EXPLODE Which of course is our other method of dealing with feelings. Simmering eventually ends up in explosions.

STEVEN GERRARD There is a good example on the news of the trial of Steven Gerrard. Here's a man of good character that got himself into a bit of a muddle because he exploded over an argument about a remote control for a CD player. That explosion of temper nearly destroyed his reputation as a nice bloke.

There are some folks on a short fuse who just explode anyway – it's a very kind of Latin thing to do. People get hurt – sometimes literally. Sometimes it's not an explosion that hurts others, it's an implosion that hurts you. We've realised that there are many people who have left this church or other churches because they feel that Christians let them down or God let them down. That's what they feel – the truth may be very different. But they let it simmer – never dealt with God or dealt with the issues and eventually it imploded in them; and where are they now?

James 1:19 Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.

WARNING The warning of scripture is that failing to deal with feelings on the basis of truth will damage us spiritually.

BE HONEST We just have to face facts. If we have negative feelings about someone or particularly God, we need to deal with them. If we need to deal with the person, rather than having the scene, we need to resolve it according to scripture in Matthew 18. Often when we talk things through with people, we find that the situation is really quite different to the one that we have allowed to simmer away in our minds. If we struggle with even talking to them, as we may, we need the help of others in prayer and advice in getting us to the point where God wants us to be – in dealing with feelings in the light of truth and bringing that truth out to a place we'll accept it. That's particularly true with God.

The most amazing truth of Scripture is that the Father always welcomes us into His arms when we turn to Him and bring Him our pressures and feelings. The Bible is an honest book because it shows God's feelings for us and when Jesus was on this earth, He readily showed His feelings for others: JESUS WEPT and GETHSEMANE.

BE HONEST God just wants us to be honest about how we feel with Him. WALL Let's go back to Jerusalem in ruins and find Jeremiah. READING What we had read earlier was telling God what he jolly well thought.

He was being honest. He knew he shouldn't feel that way, but he did. What happened next? Here's the reading:

Lam 3:19 The thought of my pain, my homelessness, is bitter poison. 20 I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed. 21 Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing: 22 The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue, 23 Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. 24 The LORD is all I have, and so in him I put my hope. 25 The LORD is good to everyone who trusts in him, 26 So it is best for us to wait in patience--to wait for him to save us-- 27 And it is best to learn this patience in our youth.

JEREMIAH found peace when he realised just who God is. We need to evaluate our lives and feelings in the light of who Jesus is and what God has done for us – and ask God to change us when we find our feelings are out of line with His word.

TRAUMAS One of the amazing things when we come before God is that He starts to deal with the truth issues that burden us. The problem is that many of our feelings can be shaped by what happened a long time ago. Psychologists tell us that our attitudes and feelings are strongly shaped by our childhood. What happened then can deeply influence our life and attitudes with us being barely aware of them. They'll be things about ourselves that we feel we can't change. They come out in all sort of ways – being afraid of the dark, or spiders, having a problem with authority, having feelings of inferiority, having superstitions. These are just the trivial ones. That's apart from all the unforgiveness, resentments, suspicions, fears and anger we may have acquired as adults. I talked about strongholds the other week. These are exactly what I was talking about. They block our lives and our relationship with God and provide footholds for the devil.

GOD DOES NOT WANT US TO BE LIKE THIS. No surprise here. God has called us to be like Jesus, in our behaviour and in our feelings. Counsellors may offer you therapy for it. That can be helpful. God offers you the Holy Spirit – He changes people from the inside out. How?

WE REMAIN IN BONDAGE not because of the trauma but because of the lies. Strongholds are always based on lies, which funnily enough is how the devil works – on lies. If it's bereavement we can't get over, the problem is usually the lie that "I'll never get over it". If it is a problem forgiving someone, it's the lie that "he deserves it, or I'm quite right to feel that, what he did was bad". If it is a problem with God then we say "I'm sure God understands". I'm sure He does too – only too well. And like slaves or prisoners, we are chained up with the enemy fully in control of the stronghold.

BUT ... God has made us someone new in Christ, so we can face the past, discover the truth and have the right attitudes, emotions and feelings towards God and in our relationships to other.

GOD CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST – but He can change our attitude towards it. I've given you some examples this morning of things that happen in life that affect our feelings towards God and others in a negative way. In a way that destroys relationships. In a way that means we don't grow spiritually as we should

STRONGHOLDS – remember this from the other week? We had a scripture for it. We have a God who has given us the ways and means to break these strongholds down, to understand the truth and to match how we feel with the situation as it is. That's through His word and by His Spirit. As we go back to the promises of God we see what He has done. As we reflect on our lives and see what He has done – as we count our blessings – we see God's perspective.

Confession

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid 26/7/09
MRBC Felixstowe
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by Neil Anderson and Steve Goss.*

Who I am in Christ

I am Accepted in Christ

<i>John 1:12</i>	I am God's child
<i>John 15:15</i>	I am Christ's friend
<i>Romans 5:1</i>	I have been justified
<i>1 Cor 6:17</i>	I am united with the Lord and one with Him in spirit
<i>1 Cor 6:20</i>	I have been bought with a price, I belong to God
<i>1 Cor 12:27</i>	I am a member of Christ's body
<i>Ephesians 1:1</i>	I am a saint
<i>Ephesians 1:5</i>	I have been adopted as God's child
<i>Ephesians 2:18</i>	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit
<i>Colossians 1:14</i>	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins
<i>Colossians 2:10</i>	I am complete in Christ

I am Secure in Christ

<i>Romans 8:1-2</i>	I am free forever from condemnation
<i>Romans 8:28</i>	I am assured that all things work together for good
<i>Rom 8:33-34</i>	I am free from any condemning charges against me
<i>Romans 8:35</i>	I cannot be separated from the love of God
<i>2 Cor 1:21</i>	I have been established anointed and sealed by God
<i>Colossians 3:3</i>	I am hidden with Christ in God
<i>Philippians 1:6</i>	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected
<i>Phil 3:20</i>	I am a citizen of heaven
<i>2 Timothy 1:7</i>	I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power love and a sound mind
<i>Hebrews 4:16</i>	I can find grace and mercy in time of need
<i>1 John 5:18</i>	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me

I Am Significant in Christ

<i>Matt5:13-14</i>	I am the salt and light of the earth
<i>John 15:1,5</i>	I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life
<i>John 15:16</i>	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit
<i>Acts 1:8</i>	I am a personal witness of Christ's
<i>1 Cor 3:16</i>	I am God's temple
<i>2 Cor 5:17-20</i>	I am a minister of reconciliation
<i>2 Cor 6:1</i>	I am God's co-worker
<i>Ephesians 2:6</i>	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm
<i>Ephesians 2:10</i>	I am God's workmanship
<i>Ephesians 3:12</i>	I may approach God with freedom and confidence
<i>Philippians 4:13</i>	I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me