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BEYOND

your

FEELINGS



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JOYCE MEYER

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LIVING BEYOND YOUR FEELINGS

CONTROLLING EMOTIONS SO
THEY DON'T CONTROL YOU

JOYCE MEYER



New York Boston Nashville

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FaithWords
Hachette Book Group
237 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017

www.faithwords.com

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition: September 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FaithWords is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc.
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Meyer, Joyce, 1943-

Living beyond your feelings : controlling emotions so they don't control you / Joyce Meyer.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: "A comprehensive guide to the range of emotions that we feel every day and shows how to manage them—instead of letting them manage you"—Provided by the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-446-53852-7 (regular edition)—ISBN 978-1-4555-0729-0 (large print edition)

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Emotions—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4527.M4385 2011

248.8'43—dc22

2011015387

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Feelings are much like waves, we can't stop them
from coming, but we can choose which one to surf.

Jonatan Mårtensson

INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that we talk about how we feel more than practically anything else. We feel good or bad, happy or sad, excited or discouraged, and a thousand other things. The inventory of the various ways we feel is almost endless. Feelings are ever changing, usually without notification. They don't need our permission to fluctuate; they merely seem to do as they please for no specific reason that we can find. We have all experienced going to bed feeling just fine physically and emotionally, only to wake up the next morning feeling tired and irritable. Why? *Why do I feel this way?* we ask ourselves, and then we usually begin to tell anyone who will listen how we feel. It is interesting to note that we tend to talk a lot more about our negative feelings than we do our positive ones.

If I wake up feeling energetic and excited about the day, I rarely announce it to everyone I come in contact with; however, if I feel tired and discouraged, I want to tell everyone. It has taken me years to learn that talking about how I feel increases the intensity of those feelings. So it seems to me that we should keep quiet about the negative feelings and talk about the positive ones. As you read this book, I am going to

ask you to make decisions; perhaps that can be the first decision you make. Write it down and confess it out loud:

Decision and confession: *I am going to talk about my positive feelings so they will increase, and keep quiet about my negative feelings so they lose their strength.*

You can always tell God how you feel and ask for His help and strength, but talking about negative feelings just to be talking does no good at all. The Bible instructs us not to speak with idle (inoperative, nonworking) words (see Matt. 12:36). If negative feelings persist, asking for prayer or seeking advice is a good thing, but once again I want to stress that talking just to be talking is useless.

In a multitude of words transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent. (*Proverbs 10:19*)

The main theme of this book is that although feelings can be very strong and demanding, we do not have to let them rule our lives. We can learn to manage our emotions rather than allowing them to manage us. This has been one of the most important biblical truths I have learned in my journey with God. It has also been one that has allowed me to consistently enjoy my life. If we have to wait to see how we feel before we know if we can enjoy the day, then we are giving feelings control over us. But thankfully we have free will and can make decisions that are not based on feelings. If we are willing to make right choices regardless of how we feel, God will always be faithful to give us the strength to do so.

Living the good life that God has made ready for us is based on our being obedient to His way of being and doing. He gives us the strength to do what is right, but we are the ones who must choose it...God won't do it for us. He helps us, but we must participate by choosing right over wrong. We can feel wrong and still choose to do what is right. Nobody can consistently enjoy life until they are willing to do that. For example, I may feel like shutting someone out of my life because they have hurt my feelings or treated me unfairly, but I can choose to pray for them and treat them as Jesus would while I am waiting for Him to vindicate me. If I act according to my feelings, I will do the wrong thing and forfeit peace and joy. But if I choose to do what God has instructed me to do in His Word, I will have God's reward in my life.

Feelings in and of themselves are neither good nor evil. They are just unstable and must be managed. They can be enjoyable and wonderful, but they can also make us miserable and drive us to make choices we eventually regret. Unbridled emotions might be compared to a small child who wants to have and do everything, but does not understand the danger some of those things present. The parent must control the child, or he will surely hurt himself and others. We must parent our emotions. We must train them to serve us so we don't become their slave.

If you are ready to master your emotions, this book is for you. I believe I will be able to help you understand some of your feelings, but understanding

If you are ready to master your emotions, this book is for you. I believe I will be able to help you understand some of your feelings, but understanding them is not nearly as important as controlling them.

them is not nearly as important as controlling them. Make a decision that you will no longer let your feelings control you.

This book could be one of the most important books you ever read. The principles in it agree with God's Word and will put you in a position of authority rather than one of a slave. You can have victory rather than being a victim. You don't have to wait to see how you feel every day before you know how you will act. I believe this book will help you understand yourself better than ever before and also equip you to make decisions that will release God's best into your life.

Decision and confession: *I choose to do what is right no matter how I feel.*

PART I

CHAPTER 1

I Want to Do What Is Right, but I Do What Is Wrong!

We human beings are extremely complex. Our emotions are only one aspect of our being, but they are a very important one. Actually, it has been said that emotions are the Christian's number one enemy because they can easily prevent us from following the will of God. I think emotions have been a mystery for most of us. Frequently, we simply don't know why we feel the way we feel. We let emotions confuse us, and that often leads us to make decisions we later regret.

There may be a lot that we don't understand about ourselves, but thank God we can learn. If you stand in front of the mirror and look at yourself, you see your body, but that is only the outer shell of who you really are. There is a lot that goes on inside us that cannot be seen with the naked eye. We have thoughts, feelings, imaginations, and desires that reside in a much deeper part of us than what we see in the mirror. The Bible refers to that part as "the hidden person

of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4). Have you ever felt that there is a person living inside you who is quite different from the one you present to the world? I think we have all felt that way at times.

We are first and foremost spiritual beings; we have a soul and we live in a body. We should pay more attention to the inner person because when we die, our spirits and souls are the parts of us that will live forever, but our bodies will simply decay.

Let not yours be the [merely] external adorning with [elaborate] interweaving and knotting of the hair, the wearing of jewelry, or changes of clothes; but let it be the inward adorning and beauty of the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible and unfading charm of a gentle and peaceful spirit, which [is not anxious or wrought up, but] is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Peter 3:3–4)

This Scripture is not implying that it is wrong to fix your hair, wear jewelry, or have nice clothes. It is saying that if we pay excessive attention to how we look and ignore the hidden person of the heart, God is not pleased. It would be far better for us to work with the Holy Spirit to improve our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, imaginations, and consciences. If in the eyes of the world a woman is considered beautiful and well-dressed, but she is filled with anger, unforgiveness, guilt, shame, depression, and negative, hateful thoughts, then she is bankrupt spiritually and unattractive to God.

The War Within

We often feel like a war is going on within us. One part of us (the inner person) wants to do what we know to be right, and another part (the outer person) wants to do what is wrong. The wrong thing can feel right, while the right thing feels wrong. Remember that we cannot judge the moral value of any action by how we feel. Our feelings are unreliable and cannot be trusted to convey truth.

A Christian woman may become emotionally attached to a man other than her husband; she may feel that she could never be happy without him, yet deep inside she knows that leaving her family for the other man would be the wrong thing to do. She doesn't want to hurt anyone. She doesn't want to disappoint family and friends, but her feelings seem overwhelming. She battles with her thoughts and emotions and is in the midst of a terrible, relentless struggle.

She talks herself into doing the right thing, but when she thinks about or sees the man, she once again feels she cannot be happy without him. Part of her wants to do what she knows is right, and part of her wants to do what she feels like doing even though she knows it is wrong. She asks herself and perhaps other people time and again, "Why do I feel this way?" She may wish that she didn't feel the way she does. But then she reasons, *How can this be wrong since it feels so right?* She begins to justify her actions by making excuses and placing blame elsewhere. She says that her husband does not understand her and has never been emotionally available. She is

lonely and convinces herself that she married the wrong man. These arguments certainly sound reasonable, but still there is something in her that won't let her go without a fight. The Spirit of God who lives in her spirit is convicting her and trying to convince her to follow wisdom rather than emotions.

The woman is a Christian and has a reasonable knowledge of God's Word. As a believer in Christ she has a renewed spirit; God has given her a new heart and put His Spirit deep within her. In her spirit she knows what is right and wants to do it, but her soul, where her thoughts and emotions reside, has a different idea altogether. It wants what feels good at the moment, not what will produce good results later on.

If a woman has no knowledge of God's Word and no relationship with Him, she may not care if what she wants is right or not, but the Christian is unable to sin and not care. She may choose to sin, but her choice is not due to ignorance. It is due to rebellion and perhaps a lifelong habit of letting her emotions rule. The Bible teaches us that those who are born of God cannot willfully, habitually, and purposely sin, because God's nature abides in them (see 1 John 3:9). They may sin, but they cannot do so comfortably and continually. They are very much aware of their wrong actions, and they are very miserable.

The child of God frequently finds that she wants to do right and wrong at the same time. Her renewed spirit craves holiness and righteousness, but the carnal (fleshly) soul still craves worldly things. Even the apostle Paul describes feeling the same way in Romans chapter 7: "I do not understand my own actions [I am baffled, bewildered]. I do not practice or accomplish what I wish, but I do the very thing that I loathe [which my moral instinct condemns]" (v. 15).

Paul goes on in the same chapter to explain more of what we feel by saying that he has the intention and urge to do what is right, but he fails to carry it out. He fails to practice the good that he desires to do and instead does evil. Thankfully, by the end of the chapter, Paul has realized that only Christ can deliver him from the fleshly action, and as we continue to study his life, we learn that he developed an ability to say no to himself if what he wanted did not agree with God's Word. He learned to lean on God for strength and then use his will to choose what was right no matter how he felt. Paul said that he died daily, which meant that he died to his own fleshly desires in order to glorify God: "I die daily [I face death every day and die to self]" (1 Cor. 15:31).

Christians were regularly persecuted during Paul's life, and he certainly faced the possibility of physical death daily, but he also experienced a soul death as he laid aside his own will in order to live for God. He chose to obey God and walked in the spirit (wisdom) rather than in the soul (flesh). He walked according to what he knew was right, not according to how he felt or what he thought, and he expressed those right decisions as dying to self. I will use the phrase "dying to self" in this book, and although it sounds unpleasant and painful, the truth is that we must die to ourselves if we want to genuinely and truly live the lives God has provided for us through Jesus Christ. When we are willing to live by principle rather than emotion, we are dying to selfishness and will enjoy the abundant life of God. I am sure you've heard the saying "No pain...no gain!" Every good thing in life requires an initial investment (which is usually painful!) before we see the reward.

Exercise is painful, but it produces a reward. Saving money means we need to deny ourselves some of the things we want, but the reward is financial security later in life. Working through difficulties in relationships eventually provides the reward of good companionship. Taking time to study God's Word and learn His character requires discipline, but it brings a great reward.

Learning to understand the difference between soul and spirit is vital if we can ever hope to have any measure of stability and victory in life. We must learn to live out of the new nature God has given us while denying the old nature (flesh) the right to rule.

Dave has told me that he remembers the time when he would drive home from work in the evening thinking, *I wonder what Joyce will be like tonight?* He never knew because I changed frequently. Even if I was in a good mood when he left that morning, there was no guarantee I would still be that way in the evening. Sadly, I didn't know how I would be either until my feelings informed me. I was completely controlled by how I felt, and even worse, I didn't know that I could do anything about it. God's Word says that people perish for a lack of knowledge (see Hosea 4:6; Prov. 29:18), and I know from experience how true that is.

I am writing this book because I believe millions of people live that way and are looking for answers. They want more stability. They want to be able to trust themselves and have other people feel they can depend on them to be stable, but they have never learned that they can manage their emotions rather than letting their emotions manage them.

A New Nature

God's Word teaches us that when we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, He gives us a new nature (see 2 Cor. 5:17). He gives us His nature. He also gives us a spirit of discipline and self-control, which is vital in allowing us to choose the ways of our new nature. He also gives us a sound mind (see 2 Tim. 1:7), and that means we can think about things properly without being controlled by emotion. The way we once were passes away, and we have all the equipment we need for a brand-new way of behaving. God gives us the ability and offers to help us, but we are not puppets and God will not manipulate us. We must choose spirit over flesh and right over wrong. Our renewed spirits can now control our souls and bodies or, to say it another way, the inner person can control the outer person.

The Bible frequently uses the term "the flesh" when referring to a combination of the body, mind, emotions, and will. The word *flesh* is used synonymously with the word *carnal*. Both come from a word that means meat or animalistic. In other words, if the flesh is not controlled by the spirit, then it can behave quite like a wild animal. Have you ever done something ridiculous in a moment of intense emotion and then said later, "I just can't believe that I behaved that way!"? We've all had times like that. I like dill pickles, but when I was pregnant I could not eat them because I had to stay on a low-sodium diet. I wanted pickles so badly that after I came home from having my baby, I sat down and ate a quart jar of dill pickles. Of course they made me sick, and later I realized doing that was excessive and definitely not wise. The way I

went after those pickles was not unlike the way an animal goes after a piece of meat.

Without God's help we have difficulty doing things in moderation. We frequently eat too much, spend too much money, have too much entertainment, and talk too much. We are excessive in our actions because we behave emotionally. We feel like doing a thing and so we do it, without any thought to the end result. After the thing is done and cannot be undone, we regret doing it.

We do not have to live in regret. God gives us His Spirit to enable us to make right and wise choices. He urges us, guides and leads us, but we still have to cast the deciding vote. If you have been casting the wrong vote, all you need to do is change your vote. Forming new habits will require making a decision to not do what you feel like doing unless it agrees with God's will. You will have to say no to yourself quite often, and that is "dying to self."

Please remember that wise choices may well have nothing to do with feelings. You may or may not feel like doing the right thing. *You can feel wrong and still do what is right.*

You can feel wrong and still do what is right.

I can want to do what is right and what is wrong at the same time. It is not always easy to choose to do what is right, but it is easier than choosing the wrong thing and going through the misery I feel afterward. I may feel like pouting and feeling sorry for myself all day if I don't get my way about something, but through Christ I can choose to have a good attitude and trust God to get me whatever He wants me to have at the time.

Dave owned a rare, high-performance car for a number of years, and I tried on numerous occasions to get him to sell it. He steadfastly refused, which at times made me quite angry. He rarely drove the car, but we paid insurance fees and personal property taxes yearly. We even had repair expenses. He said he was willing to sell it, but he wanted quite a bit more money for it than anyone was willing to pay. It cost money to have it just sit in the garage, and it frustrated me terribly. Why would he want a car he rarely ever drove when we could sell it and use the money for something else? Even if we didn't get the price Dave wanted, at least we could stop spending money on it! After about four years of letting it irritate me on and off, I finally prayed and gave the entire situation to God and decided that even if Dave kept the car until we were both dead, it wasn't worth letting the emotion of anger control me.

Another two years went by, and then one night our son Dan called and said, "I think Dad should sell his car. After all, he never drives it." I said, "He won't sell it because he wants more money for it than it's worth, but I would be more than happy to watch you try to talk him into it." I gave the phone to Dave, and within less than a minute he said, "Yes, I agree; let's sell it. After all, I don't drive it much anyway." Amazing! Why wouldn't he listen to *me*? It really wasn't about me. It was about Dave and when he was ready to make the decision to sell his car.

I could have gotten angry because he didn't say yes to me but agreed with our son when he said the same thing I'd been saying for years. But I know that God has timing for everything, and it's usually not our timing. I was angry on and off for several years, but once I gave the situation to God,

I had peace while God convinced Dave to sell the car. Notice that I said *God* convinced Dave. He used my son, but God was behind it. God was actually answering my prayer, but He did it in His own way and timing.

Quite often Christians are carnal. They believe in God and have received Jesus as their Savior, but their whole lives appear to revolve largely around the impulses of emotion. The sooner we learn that feelings are fickle, the better off we are. Feelings are often unreliable and not to be trusted while making final decisions. It is nice if we have feelings to support us when we are taking action, but we can do what is right with or without the fuel of feelings. You may have a habit of following your feelings in order to stay happy and comfortable, but you can also form new habits. Form a habit of enjoying good emotions, but don't let them control you.

I love a statement Watchman Nee made: "As emotion pulsates, the mind becomes deceived and conscience is denied its standard of judgment." Remember the woman who became emotionally attracted to the man who was not her husband? She knew deep inside that her actions were wrong, but her emotions were pulsating, and the devil used her mind (thoughts and reasoning) to deceive her. The voice of her conscience was drowned out by her own soul-driven thoughts and feelings.

Let me state again that wanting to do what is right while wanting to do what is wrong at the same time is not alien to any of us. We all fight the same battles, but I want you to make a decision right now that with God's help you are going to win the war.

Decision and confession: *I follow God's principles, not emotions; therefore, I am a winner in life.*