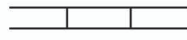


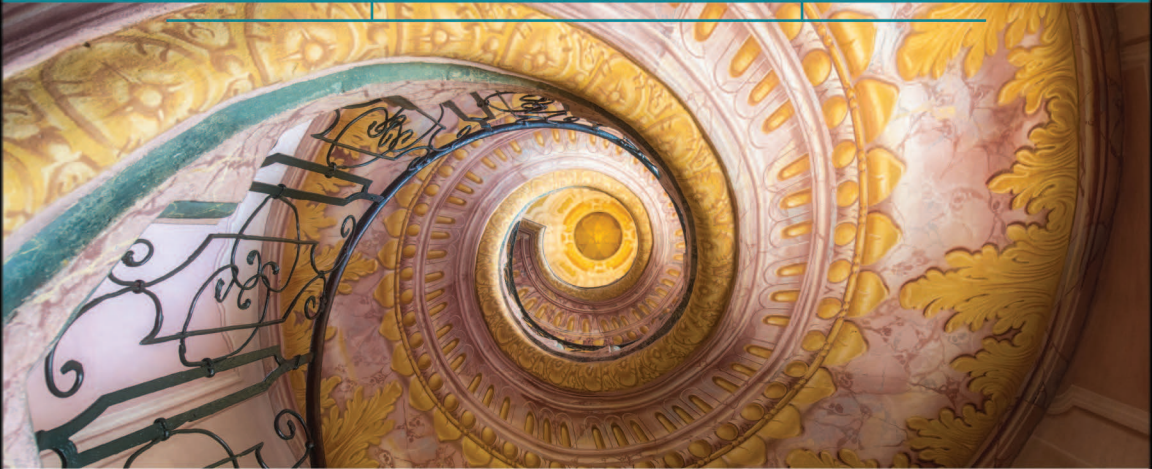
REVISED & EXPANDED

CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



BECOMING EMOTIONALLY WHOLE

CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS
TO BE HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER



CHARLES F. STANLEY

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CHARLES F. STANLEY



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

BECOMING EMOTIONALLY WHOLE
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INTRODUCTION

PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY INTO EMOTIONS

This book is intended for Bible study. My hope as you engage in this study is that you will turn again and again to your favorite version of the Bible—to highlight specific words, underline phrases, write in the margins, or circle verses that speak to you in a special way. My Bible is well marked with such dates, notes, and insights.

Bookstores these days are filled with numerous self-help books—many of which deal with the topic of this study on emotional well-being—but the Bible is the ultimate “help” book. However, the advice it offers leads not to self-help but to God’s help. The Bible holds God’s eternal wisdom about emotions and how we are to express them. So make your Bible your ultimate authority on emotions and how to communicate them.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a separate journal. As you reflect on your new understanding, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set

of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of them as you study a passage of Scripture and can freely express them to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus.

I encourage you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



UNDERSTANDING YOUR EMOTIONS

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: What should I do with my emotions?

Growing: What is the purpose of emotions?

“How are you feeling?” We usually ask that particular question about a person’s physical health, yet it is an equally valid question to ask about a person’s emotional state of being. Each of us has an emotional state of well-being that is just as vital to our overall wholeness as our physical or spiritual well-being. You cannot be a whole person in Christ Jesus if you are in bondage to your emotions or in denial of them.

I meet many people who try to deny they have an emotional response to the situations they encounter. They seem to believe that

it is weak for a person to cry, a flaw for a person to feel anger to express disappointment, or a lack of self-control for a person to laugh aloud. Such people are missing out on the fullness of what it means to be alive.

An expression of emotion is part of what makes us human. Emotions are a gift of God, who created each of us with a capacity to feel and to express them. Furthermore, emotions are vital to our ability to communicate to others the uniqueness of our personalities. They are also a means of responding to God, to other people, and to life in general.

However, the problem is that many people don't know how to express their emotions in healthful ways that promote good relationships with friends and family members. Learning how to deal with one's emotions is a vital skill. We need to understand how to direct them toward good outcomes, express them without sinning, and give voice to our emotions in order to improve our communication with friends, family members, and others in our world.

Some people allow themselves to have a free-flowing emotional response to life and have learned to control their emotions, but they are uncomfortable talking about the way they feel. Learning how to tell others what you are feeling is a part of becoming a mature person. It is a skill that is critical to the development of adult-to-adult relationships.

Wherever you are on the spectrum of emotional growth—from denial to full expression—Jesus wants you to have emotional health. He wants you to express emotions in the way He created them to be expressed. He wants you to admit to emotions, to know how to control them and use them in right ways, and to discuss your emotional responses with others.

1. "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. . . . A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4). What is a particular

“season” of life that you are in right now? What type of emotions is that bringing to the surface for you?

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2. In what areas have you struggled with certain emotions in the past? How do you feel about expressing your emotions? About discussing your emotions with others?

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EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Are there good and bad emotions? Yes and no. Emotions in themselves are *neutral*. Their expression takes on the nature of good and bad. All emotions are valid, and each has a place in God’s design of your human psyche and spirit. God created your emotions so you might enjoy them and communicate to others by using them.

Each person is going to have a unique response to life’s situations, problems, and challenges. One person may weep at the beauty

of a moving piece of music, while another person may sit in silent awe, and yet still another person may stand to give thunderous applause. We must allow others the privilege of their expression.

We also must give one another the privilege of expressing emotions privately. I advocate the healthful and free expression of emotions, yet I do not believe that a person should be required to express emotions in the presence of others. Conversely, we must be careful not to assume we have the right to express our emotions freely and fully in the presence of others. Every public expression of emotion should take into consideration the people witnessing the emotional display. Courtesy and respect should govern our behavior. As we will discuss in this study, restraint is not denial of emotions. It is control of them in the presence of others.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who expressed their emotions in both good and bad ways. But perhaps no book in Scripture contains more heart-felt emotions than the Psalms. King David, in particular, wrote a number of these songs and poems that express a wide range of emotions. Consider the following sampling of just a few of these emotions from Psalms:

- Joy: “You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased” (Psalm 4:7).
- Peace: “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).
- Grief: “My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of all my enemies” (Psalm 6:7).
- Anger: “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1).
- Love: “I will love You, O LORD, my strength” (Psalm 18:1).
- Fear: “I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).
- Loneliness: “Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted” (Psalm 25:16).

Understanding Your Emotions

- Hope: “Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, just as we hope in You” (Psalm 33:22).
- Regret: “I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin” (Psalm 38:17-18).
- Discouragement: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?” (Psalm 42:5).
- Shame: “My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me” (Psalm 44:15).

Sometimes we are overcome with emotion. We may lose control in a particular situation. At those times, we may feel that we should apologize for our lack of restraint, but we should never apologize for having feelings. After all, none of the psalmists held back in expressing their full range of human emotions to God. When we apologize for having emotions, we are in danger of stuffing them, with a possible eruption later. As we will discuss in future lessons in the study, stuffed emotions can only be damaging.

- 3.** How do you respond to the idea that emotions are *neutral*—that they are neither inherently good nor bad? What makes it difficult to accept this truth?

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4. As you look at the list of emotions expressed in the book of Psalms, which sentiment can you relate to the most right now? What are some emotions you need to express to God in prayer?

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PURSUING EMOTIONAL WHOLENESS

From the outset, I want to establish that the goal of embarking on this journey is to lead you to a place where you can become emotionally whole. With this in mind, we will first explore how God created emotions, examine the foundation for building healthy emotions, and then look at how you can deal with specific emotions, including fear, guilt, anger, rejection, loneliness, and discouragement. In everything, the goal is to get you to a better place in your life—so you can be at peace with yourself, with others, and with God.

Let me ask you this question: *Is there something in your life that you prefer over contentment?* If so, you can stop reading this study at this point . . . and, while you are at it, stop asking God to make you content. If you are resolved to hold on to negative emotions like anger, fear, and discouragement—and refuse to forgive those who have wronged you—then you will not be able to get to this place of contentment and peace in your life.

However, if you are ready to move toward emotional wholeness—and engage with this study—then let me give you an overview of how we are going to proceed. *The first practical step begins with repenting of any sin that is keeping you from having a right standing with God and experiencing His joy and peace.* One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict you of sin (see John 16:8), so you will be in a state of conflict until you yield to Him. Repent to God.

Second, rebuild your thought structures. What do I mean by this? You need to begin to think about your life with God at the center . . . and not yourself. There is no such thing as being contented and emotionally healthy when your entire life is revolving around you and the only thing that matters in your life is just you. There is no such thing as selfishness and contentment possessing the same heart. You have to rebuild your thought structure, get God into the center of your thinking, and interpret your life in the light of what He wants.

You say, “That will not be a quick or easy process.” This is exactly right. I will not be providing any push-pull, click-click, turn-on-the-button, turn-it-off answers in this study, because no single emotion can be corrected overnight. So when I say rebuild your thought structures, I’m talking about you beginning to back off and look at the way you’ve been thinking about your life. God needs to be the *hub* of your life, because when this happens, you begin to relate Him to all aspects of your life. He is your Father. He is your provider. You can rely on Him. He is your loving heavenly Father who has already provided what you need. He is faithful.

Third, refocus your emotions. It is critical for you to refocus your emotions on God. “Lord, I want to love You. I want to honor You. I want to praise You. Lord, I want such a hunger in my heart for You that whatever else You send me, I’m going to leave that to You—but what I really want in my heart is You. I want You to saturate and permeate and color every single emotional desire of my life. I want it to be filtered through You.”

Here is what we do all too often. We get up in the morning and say, “Lord, thank You for a good night’s rest. Please bless my family today. Bless me on my job. I want to meet that financial need today.” When we get through praying, we might as well have not even had time with God. What we really did was focus our emotions on the things God provides. As a result, we miss *Him*. That will never produce contentment and emotional wholeness in life. God isn’t about to allow you to be content by ignoring Him.

Fourth, redirect your goals. You likely have many goals, and it is great to have them, because accomplishment is part of what God wants to do. But you need to redirect your goals so the primary one is to discover the will of God for you. Once that becomes the number one goal, it becomes easy to relate to Him and see Him as your provider. As we will discuss, many of our negative emotions come from a basic mistrust in God's faithfulness to provide for our needs. As we learn to trust God, we learn to surrender our lives and emotions to Him.

Finally, reproduce your life in someone else. It is interesting that in the Bible, God is always admonishing His followers to share their testimony. You can come to church, not miss a single service, give triple your tithe, read your Bible, pray, sing in the choir, and do anything else—but you will not find wholeness and contentment if you do not open yourself up to others. You will just be a locked-in lake that is quickly becoming a stagnant pool. Instead, your life needs to be a stream through which God is able to move and flow.

5. What are some negative emotions that you know you need to address in order to move into wholeness?

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6. Are you willing to let those go? Why or why not?

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- 7.** Which of the steps to contentment listed above especially stand out to you? What do you need to do to start moving toward putting that step into action?

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UNCHARTED WATERS

For most of us, the realm of emotions has uncharted territories. We are unsure of the language of emotions. We have neglected or feared to explore areas of the inner life. Recognize at the outset of this study that if this is true for you, it is likely to be true for every other person that you know. Give family members, your circle of friends, other church members, your Bible study group, the freedom to err on their way toward emotional health.

God made you to have feelings. He wants you to experience His presence with your emotions, to express yourself emotionally, and to have an emotional relationship with other people. The Lord wants you to become emotionally whole!

- 8.** What new insights about emotions do you think God may have for you personally?

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9. In what areas do you feel challenged to grow emotionally as a means of becoming a more effective witness for Christ Jesus?

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10. What are some specific things you hope to take from this study?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today: God created all people with emotions, and they are a gift from Him to me.

Tomorrow: I will begin to recognize that there is nothing wrong with emotions—it is my response to them that matters.

CLOSING PRAYER

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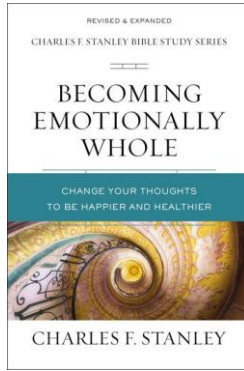
Heavenly Father, thank You for creating our emotions. Today, we pray that we will not seek to hide or run from our feelings but start the process of embracing them and yielding them to Your control. Thank You for giving direction in our lives—for being our shield, our protection, and our provision. Help us to continually learn to trust in You in all things so that we know that we never have reason to fear, or be discouraged, or give in to anger . . . for You are always with us.

NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS



Use this space to write any key points, questions, or prayer requests from this week's study.

A series of horizontal dotted lines providing a space for writing notes and prayer requests.



BECOMING EMOTIONALLY WHOLE

by Charles F. Stanley

God's wisdom about expressing emotions.

Emotions are a gift from God, who created each of us with a capacity to feel and to express our feelings to others. For this reason, we need to know how to express our emotions in healthy ways, learn how to cope with negative emotions, direct our emotions toward good outcomes, and give voice to our feelings in order to improve communication. In *Becoming Emotionally Whole*, Dr. Charles Stanley reveals how regardless of where we are on the spectrum of emotional growth—from denial to full expression—we can take the necessary steps that God wants us to take to have truth and lasting emotional health.

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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