

CHAPTER FOUR

A LIFE OF FEELING

THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE

When believers have a love relationship with the Lord and are fully satisfied with Him, they usually enter into the experience of a life of feeling. Such an experience is very precious to them. It normally comes after the experience of being freed from sin and before entering into the experience of an absolute spiritual life. Because many believers lack spiritual knowledge, they often regard this experience, which comes after their freedom from sin and gives them much happiness, as the most spiritual and heavenly experience. Since the happiness which proceeds from a life of feeling is so satisfying, they find it difficult to part with this experience.

A believer with a life of feeling senses that the Lord is so near, as though he can touch Him. He feels that the Lord's love is so sweet; he also feels that he loves the Lord very much. A fire seems to burn in his heart, and he enjoys a kind of unspeakable happiness that makes him feel as though he were already in heaven. Something seems to stir in his heart, and it yields an unspeakably comfortable feeling as though he had seized the most valuable treasure. This kind of feeling remains with him wherever he goes and in whatever he does. When a believer goes through such an experience, he has no idea of where he is; it seems as though he has soared out of this world to be with the angels.

At such times, reading the Bible is very enjoyable. The more he reads, the more the feeling of happiness increases. Praying also becomes very easy. He finds it gratifying to express his feelings to the Lord. It seems that the more he prays, the brighter the heavenly light shines. He is also able to make many resolutions to the Lord as an indication of his love for Him. He loves to be quiet, alone, and face to face with God. If he could, he would forever shut the door behind him to fellowship with the Lord because he experiences a happiness which no tongue or pen can describe. Previously, he enjoyed living among the crowd, finding something there that could fill his need. Now, however, he prefers to be alone since the happiness which he obtains before the Lord cannot be compared to that which is derived from the crowd. When a believer feels this way, he desires to be all the more quiet, for fear of losing his happiness among the crowd.

During this time, working for the Lord becomes very easy. Formerly he did not have much to say to others. Now it seems very enjoyable to tell others about the Lord because of the fire of love burning in his heart. The more he speaks, the better he feels. He is also very willing to suffer for the Lord because he feels the Lord is so close. He even rejoices at the thought of dying for the Lord. All burdens become light and all difficulties become easy in this kind of feeling.

When a believer feels this way, his behavior also changes. Perhaps he was talkative. Now he can be quiet with the help of his feeling. When he sees others chattering, he secretly condemns it. Perhaps he was frivolous. Now he can be very solemn. When other believers lack godliness in certain aspects, he senses it most acutely and condemns it. When a believer goes through such an experience, he definitely becomes more sober in his conduct. Furthermore, he seems to have developed a keener sense of judgment which enables him to see the shortcomings of others even more.

Such a believer tends to secretly feel sorry for others because he thinks they do not have his kind of experience. He considers his own happiness as an excellent thing and pities

his brothers and sisters for not being able to comprehend it! When he sees them calmly serving the Lord, he invariably concludes that their lives are boring. Only a life like his, full of God's happiness, can truly be the highest life. It seems that the other believers are merely walking in the valley, while he alone soars on the mountain top.

However, does this kind of experience last? Can a believer feel this way every day and be happy all his life? Many believers do not have this experience for long. What grieves the believer the most is that in less than a month or two (generally speaking), the happiness which he most desires suddenly vanishes. One morning when he wakes up as usual to read the Bible, the former taste is gone. He may pray, but after uttering a few phrases he runs out of words. He feels that something is missing. In the past it seemed that other believers were lagging behind him spiritually; now he feels just like one of them. His heart seems to have cooled off considerably. The feeling of a warm fire burning within has disappeared, and he has no idea where it has gone. He does not feel the Lord's presence or His nearness; the Lord seems very far from him. He does not even seem to know where the Lord is. When he suffers, he feels the suffering, not the happiness. When he preaches, it is no longer enjoyable. He utters a few sentences and finds himself with no desire to carry on. In short, everything seems dark, dry, cold, and dead. It appears as though the believer has been left by the Lord in the tomb with nothing to comfort his heart. The lasting joy which he hoped to retain is now lost.

During such a period, the believer will think that he has sinned, and that God has forsaken him. If he has not sinned, why is the Lord no longer with Him? He may search his recent conduct to determine where he offended the Lord, hoping that upon confessing, the Lord will come back, fill him anew, and restore the intimacy and happiness. However, when he examines himself, he cannot find any particular sin; everything is generally the same as it was before. It seems that if his present condition caused the Lord to forsake him, why did his past condition not cause the Lord to forsake him? If he has not sinned, why did the Lord depart from him? He does not have the answer. He simply assumes that he has offended the Lord in some way and that the Lord has forsaken him. Satan also accuses him, making him believe that he has sinned. Hence, he cries for forgiveness before the Lord, hoping to recover what he has lost.

This kind of prayer, however, is ineffective. Not only is he unable to recover what he thinks is lost, but day by day he feels drier and colder. Whatever he does is not enjoyable. Sometimes his actions are even void of any taste. Even his prayers are forced. Previously, he could continuously pray for several hours; now he can pray only for a few minutes, and even they are a strain. As far as his feelings are concerned, his prayers are not even prayers at all. His Bible reading is just as dry. Previously, the more he read the more enjoyable it was; now the Holy Book seems like a field of stones that yields nothing. He finds no pleasure in any of his dealings either with men or matters. Although he obligingly does what is expected of him because he is a Christian, everything is dry and a strain.

Consequently, many Christians fall back. They often know that this is God's will, but they have fallen into such a grievous state that they do not care. They often neglect their duties because they have grown cold. Their conduct, which changed when they were living in their feelings, reverts back to its former state. Previously they felt sorry for those who did not behave as they did; now they are no different from them. They are just as talkative, frivolous, full of jest, and fun-loving as before. Although they experienced a change once, it is gone.

When the believer loses the feeling of happiness, he thinks that everything is lost. If the Lord's presence cannot be felt, he thinks that the Lord must not be with him. If the Lord's warmth cannot be felt, he thinks that the Lord must not be pleased with him. After a while, he does not even seem to know where God is. If he is not disheartened at this point, he will intently seek to recover what he has lost. Even though he loves his Lord and desires to be near Him very much, he does not have any feeling of the Lord's love. How can he bear this?

If the believer does not fall back out of discouragement, he will press on to seek God. However, in spite of his strenuous struggles, he is unable to free himself from the feeling of dryness. Good behavior at this time is a strain. In his heart he secretly rebukes himself for being hypocritical and for putting on a good front despite his inward condition. This pretentious effort does not succeed; it always leads to failure. These failures only serve to increase the believer's suffering. If someone praises him, he feels quite shameful because others do not realize the great darkness he feels in his heart. If someone rebukes him, he feels that it is justified because he knows his own weakness. When he sees how other believers are growing and how they have sweet fellowship with the Lord, he is very desirous. He feels that all the people around him are somewhat virtuous. He has nothing, and everyone else seems stronger.

Will this condition of dryness persist? Or will the believer regain his previous experience? He will, after a while. In a few weeks, the feeling which he lost may suddenly come back. This may happen after he has heard someone preach the word, or after he has fervently prayed; it may happen while he is reading the Bible early in the morning or while he is awake and thinking about the Lord in the middle of the night. The time varies, but the happiness does come back.

At this time, the condition that was lost is altogether restored. The Lord's presence is just as sweet, the love in his heart is just as burning, praying and reading the Bible are just as enjoyable, and the Lord Himself is just as desirable, approachable, and touchable. It is not a burden to draw near to the Lord; rather, it once again becomes the desire of his heart. Everything has changed. There is no more darkness, suffering, and dryness, but light, happiness, and refreshment. The believer, thinking that the Lord forsook him because of his unfaithfulness, after regaining the Lord, thinks that he must diligently keep what he has, so that he will not lose the experience of the life of feeling again. More than ever before, he becomes cautious of his conduct. Daily he serves the Lord with the best of his ability in hope of maintaining his happiness and never failing again.

Even though he is so faithful and diligent, the Lord surprisingly leaves him again after a while. His feeling of happiness disappears again, and he sinks back into a state of suffering, darkness, and dryness once more.

If we examine the history of a believer, we will realize that after a person has been freed from sin and is in touch with the person of God, he frequently has this experience. In the beginning the Lord causes him to feel His love, presence, and happiness, but this feeling disappears after a while. When it comes back, the believer recovers his joy once more, but then it goes away again. Generally, the believer will experience this several times in his lifetime. This kind of experience may not happen to a believer who is still fleshly and has not yet learned to love the Lord. Only when a believer has made some progress and has learned to love the Lord will he experience this.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EXPERIENCE

The believer who goes through such an experience thinks that his spirituality is at its highest when he has this experience and at its lowest when he loses it. A believer often speaks of his own life as constantly being up and down. He means that his spirituality is at its highest when he feels happy, when he feels that he loves the Lord, and when he feels the Lord's presence; his spirituality is at its lowest when he feels dark, dry, and bitter. In other words, he is spiritual when he can sense warmth in his heart and soulish when he feels cold. A believer usually thinks in this way, but is it true? These thoughts are based entirely on a misconception. If we are not clear concerning this misconception, we will utterly fail.

The believer must know that "feeling" is forever a part of the soul-life. When he lives by his feeling, no matter how he feels, he is soulish. When he feels happy, when he feels he loves the Lord, and when he feels the Lord's presence, he is just living by his feeling. When he feels dry, sorrowful, and dark, he is still living by his feeling. He is just as soulish when he feels dry, sorrowful, and dark as he is when he feels nourished, happy, and bright. The spiritual life is never regulated by the feeling, nor is it ever in the feeling. The spiritual life should regulate the feeling; the feeling should not regulate the spiritual life. Today the experience of feeling is most commonly, but erroneously, regarded by believers as a spiritual experience. Many Christians have never entered into a spiritual life. Therefore, the sensation of being filled with happiness is interpreted as a spiritual experience. They do not know that it is simply soulish. Spiritual experience is the experience of the intuition; the rest is soulish.

Herein lies the believer's greatest mistake. The effect of the emotion causes him to feel that he has ascended into the heavens. Hence, he thinks that he is in possession of the ascended life, without realizing that this is just something which he feels. When he feels the Lord's presence, he thinks he possesses the Lord; when he does not feel His presence, he thinks that the Lord has forsaken him. He does not realize that this is simply what he feels. He thinks that he really loves the Lord when he senses a warm fire burning in his heart and feels that he loves the Lord very much. When he feels a coldness instead of a burning within, he thinks he has truly lost his love for the Lord. He does not realize that this is only his feeling. Facts do not necessarily correspond with our feelings because our feelings are very unreliable. Actually, a believer is the same with or without a feeling. He may feel he is progressing when he is not; or he may feel he is regressing when he is not. These are just his feelings. He thinks that he has progressed whenever he is full of feeling. He does not realize that because he is still soulish, he is merely advancing in a spurt of emotional excitement. When this feeling subsides, he remains the way he used to be. The effect of the emotion helps a soulish person go on; the power of the Holy Spirit helps a spiritual man go on. Of the two, only the power of the Holy Spirit can truly cause a person to go on.

GOD'S PURPOSES

Why then does God give the believer such a feeling and withdraw it again? He has a few purposes for doing this. It is a pity that the believer does not understand God.

God gives the believer happiness for the purpose of drawing him even nearer to God. He draws men to Himself through His gifts. He hopes His children would realize how gracious He is and how much He loves them so that they would believe in His love under any kind of circumstance. Yet believers only love Him in the presence of feeling and forget Him in its absence.

Moreover, God deals with a believer in this manner so that he will know himself. The most difficult lesson for a believer to learn in life is that of knowing himself—knowing his own corruption, vanity, sinfulness, even knowing that he has no goodness at all. This is a life-long lesson. The more he learns, the deeper the lesson becomes and the more he realizes how filthy his life and nature are in the sight of God. However, there is not the willingness in him to learn, nor is his nature able to learn. Therefore, God employs many ways of instructing the believer so that he may be brought to the place where he can know himself. Among God's many ways, one of the most important is by granting the believer a happy feeling and later withdrawing it. Through such a dealing, the believer will come to realize his own corruption. In the midst of dryness, he will recall how he misused God's gift, how he highly estimated himself, despising others, and how he did many things that were not of the spirit as a result of being manipulated by the emotion. This realization humbles the believer. If he understands the experience, it causes him to know himself and no longer wholeheartedly pursue it as though it were the noblest of all experiences. God wants the believer to know that he does not glorify God's name any more when he is full of happiness than he does when he is suffering. He is not making any more progress in the light than he does in the dark. In either case, his life is just as corrupt.

God's intention is for the believer to overcome his environment. The believer should not allow a change in the environment to affect his life. Whoever changes his living according to his environment lacks depth in the Lord. We know that the environment can only change our emotion. Our emotion is affected by the environment which, in turn, causes a change in our living. Therefore, to overcome our environment, we must overcome our emotion—our feeling. This is crucial. Whoever wants to overcome the environment must overcome the fluctuating feeling. If we have no way of overcoming our constantly changing feelings, we have no way to overcome our environment, because our feelings cause us to sense the changes in our environment. As soon as the environment changes, our feeling senses it and changes accordingly. If we cannot overcome our feelings, our living will vary according to how we feel. Therefore, to overcome our environment, we must first overcome our feelings.

The Lord causes the believer to have different feelings so that he may learn how to overcome them and, thereby, overcome his environment. If he can overcome strong and contradicting feelings, he can surely overcome any kind of changing environment. In this way, a believer will stand on sure ground, and his living will be stabilized. Otherwise, he will be carried away by the waves. God wants a believer to behave the same way, whether he is full of feeling or has no feeling. He wants the believer to just as faithfully serve Him, fellowship with Him, work, pray, and read the Bible, whether he is full of feeling or has no feeling. God does not want His children to vary their way of living according to the brightness or darkness of their feeling. If faithfulness, work, or supplication is called for, they should do it with the same fervency in happiness as well as in sorrow. They should not be a certain way when they feel refreshed and cease to be so when they feel dry. If the believer cannot overcome different feelings in his life, he will not be able to overcome different environments.

Another purpose of God for this kind of dealing is to train the will of the believer. A genuine spiritual life is not a life of feeling but a life of the will. The will of a spiritual man has been renewed by the Holy Spirit; it waits for the spirit's revelation and proposal and then orders his whole being to follow the revelation from the spirit. However, most believers have a will that is so weak it cannot follow through with what they want. It may

also unexpectedly come under the influence of the emotion and reject what God wants. Therefore, it is very important to train the will to be strong.

A believer advances very easily when he is excited because he is assisted by the effect of the emotion. When he is frustrated, he finds it difficult to advance because he is not being assisted by the emotion, and he has to rely instead on his will for all the decisions. God's intention is for the will to be strong, not for the feeling to be excited. Hence, He often causes the believer to feel dry, dull, and barren so that he can exercise his will through the strength of the spirit to do just what he has done during periods of excitement. When he is excited, the emotion is in effect. But now God wants his will to function in place of his emotion. Without help from the feeling, the will can be gradually strengthened through exercise. Many erroneously believe that their spiritual life is at its peak when they have feeling, and at its lowest level when they are void of feeling. They do not realize that the genuine living is lived by the spirit through the will. When a believer has no feeling, the extent to which he can live by his will is the extent of the reality in his living. How he lives during dry periods constitutes his real living.

Furthermore, God has another purpose in so dealing with the believer. He wants to lead him into the highest life. If we look closely at the experiences of a believer, we can see that each time the Lord leads one to a higher level in his spiritual journey, He first allows him to live in such a feeling. We may say that after each period of living by the feeling, he reaches a further station in his spiritual journey. God grants the believer to first have a taste in his feeling of what He desires him to obtain eventually. He then withdraws this feeling so that the believer will keep, by his spirit and through his will, what he previously obtained through his feeling. If his spirit is able to press on through the will, regardless of how he feels, he will observe real progress in his life. This is confirmed by our experience. As we go through the "now-up, now-down" life, we often conclude that we have made no advancement since the progression and regression cancel each other out. Although we feel that we have been merely going forward and backward during the last few years or months, if we compare our present spiritual condition with our former condition, when we first started to have this kind of an experience, we will see that we have indeed made some real progress. Unknowingly, we have advanced.

Many believers make a great many mistakes through ignorance of this teaching. When one consecrates himself wholly to the Lord and seeks after new spiritual experience (such as sanctification, victory, etc.), he evidently enters into a kind of new life where he feels that he has progressed. He is full of joy, light, and lightness, and he thinks he has possession of the perfect life he desired and sought after. But shortly thereafter, his new experience suddenly becomes obscure; the happiness and excitement he once felt disappear. Therefore, many believers become discouraged. They think that they can never be wholly sanctified or have a more abundant life like others because they are not able to retain the experience which they have desired for a long time. They do not realize that this is a spiritual law. Whatever is obtained through the feeling must be kept by the will; and only what is kept by the will becomes truly a part of the believer's life. God only withdraws the feeling. In the absence of feelings, He wants the believer to use his will to do the same thing he did when he had the feeling. When the believer does this, he will eventually discover that what he lost in feeling has subconsciously become a part of his life. This is a spiritual law. If a believer remembers this all the time, he will not be discouraged.

Therefore, the problem is altogether related to our will. Does our will remain surrendered to the Lord? Is it willing to be led by the spirit? If this is so, it does not matter how our feelings change. We must be concerned with whether or not our will is obedient to the spirit and ignore our feelings. For example, after a believer has just been born again, he is usually full of happiness. However, after a while (over a year for some) this kind of happy feeling disappears. Can we say that he has perished? Of course not. There is life in his spirit; how he feels makes no difference.

THE DANGER OF THIS KIND OF LIVING

If we understand the significance of this experience which God gives us and walk according to His will, there is no danger at all. However, when the believer fails to understand God's goal and lives by this kind of feeling—intently pursuing in the presence of feeling while refusing to move in its absence—there is inevitably a spiritual danger. He is exposed to many dangers because he makes feeling his principle of life.

If a believer lives by this happy feeling, his will remains weak and is of no use to the spirit. The sense of the spirit also has no way of developing, since intuition in the spirit is being replaced by feeling. The person walks according to his emotion. As a result, the intuition in the spirit is suppressed by the emotion on the one hand, and on the other hand, his idled and unused intuition is hardly able to grow. We can know the intuition only when the emotion is quiet. The intuition is strengthened only when it is constantly in use. When a believer continues to live by his emotion, the will never has the ability to make decisions, and the intuition never gives a clear voice. Because the will is paralyzed, the believer needs feelings all the more to push the will into action. Consequently, the will turns according to feeling, proceeding when a feeling is present and halting when it is not. It is not able to function without the feeling. It constantly requires the feeling's encouragement. Hence, the believer's spiritual life declines day after day. In fact, from then on, it seems that there can be no spiritual life without the effect of the emotion. The emotion carries the same effect as a shot of morphine to the believer. What a pity that he remains unaware and still considers it as the peak of spiritual life and something that should be pursued!

Many believers are erratic because when this feeling comes, they not only feel the Lord's love but also feel their own fervent love toward the Lord. Must we deny even the feeling which generates a love for the Lord in us? Can the feeling which causes us to fervently love the Lord be harmful? These types of questions only indicate the believer's foolishness.

Let us ask some more questions. When the believer is filled with happiness, does he truly love the Lord or does he love the feeling of happiness? No doubt this kind of happiness is given to us by God, but is it not also God who withdraws it? If we genuinely love God, we will still fervently love Him no matter what circumstance He puts us in. If we only love when the feeling is present but not when it is absent, perhaps we only love our feeling, not God.

The believer, however, interprets such a feeling as being God Himself. He does not realize that God and God's joy are not the same. The Holy Spirit must instruct a believer before he realizes that he has been desperately seeking God's happiness and not God Himself when he feels dry. He does not love God; he loves the feeling which causes him to be happy. Although this feeling brings him the sense of God's love and presence, he does not love God directly. This feeling, which causes him to sense God's love and

presence, refreshes him, enlightens him, and uplifts him. When he loses these sensations, he will pursue this feeling again. His heart's delight is God's happiness, not God. If he genuinely loves God, he should still love Him even when he is suffering through "many waters and floods."

This is a very difficult lesson. We must have happiness, and the Lord delights in giving us His happiness. If we enjoy His happiness according to His will (i.e., we do not seek it for ourselves but are thankful when God causes us to feel happy and just as thankful when He causes us to feel dry, not forcing the issue), this enjoyment will be profitable rather than harmful. However, if we find so much pleasure in this experience that after enjoying God's happiness, we seek it every day, we have departed from God in pursuit of the happiness which He gives. God's happiness cannot be separated from God Himself. If we enjoy the happiness which He gives apart from Him, our spiritual life is in danger. This means that our joy is not God but instead the happiness He gives, and we will not advance spiritually. How often we love God not for His sake but for our own sakes! As we love Him, our heart feels happy, and so we continue to love Him. This clearly shows that we do not truly love God; we love happiness, even though the happiness is of God.

This is esteeming God's gift higher than God, the Giver of the gift. This shows that we are still living by the soul and do not understand what a true spiritual life is. We make the feeling of happiness our god and erroneously take pleasure in it. Because of our mistake, God withdraws this happiness according to His will. He changes it to suffering to make us realize that He Himself is desirable, not His happiness. When a believer joys in God, he still exalts Him and loves Him even in suffering. Otherwise, he will sink into darkness. God withdraws this happiness not to destroy the believer's spiritual life but to destroy all the idols he is worshipping in place of God Himself. He destroys everything that is harmful to our spiritual life. He wants us to live in Him, not in His feeling.

When a believer lives by feeling and not by the spirit through the will, there is another danger that he will be deceived by Satan. We have briefly mentioned this earlier, but let us explain again.

We must know one thing. Satan can give the believer feelings which are counterfeits of those that are from God. When the believer seeks to walk completely according to the spirit, Satan confuses him with different kinds of feeling. How much more opportunity does he have to apply his tricks to the believer who walks according to his feeling! If the believer persistently goes after feeling, he will fall right into Satan's scheme. Satan will give him different kinds of feeling, leading him to believe that they are from God.

Evil spirits can excite people or depress them. Once the believer is deceived into accepting Satan's feeling, Satan gains ground in the soul. Thereafter, he can further deceive the believer until he fully takes over his feeling. Occasionally, he gives the believer supernatural sensations that cause his whole being to shake, be touched, feel hot or cold, sense a kind of leading, be filled, feel a lightness as though floating in the air, feel as if one is burned by fire from head to toe, or feel that one is dealt with and cleansed in his whole being. When a believer is cheated by the evil spirits to such an extent, he continues to exist by these feelings. His will becomes totally numb, and his intuition is fully surrounded. He lives altogether in the outer man, and his inner man is bound. At this point, his every move is according to Satan's will. When the enemy wants him to do something, he only has to give him a certain feeling. The believer, however, is not aware of this. On the contrary, he thinks that he has been granted some marvelous experiences which definitely make him more spiritual than others.

Supernatural experiences are the most damaging things to a believer's spiritual life today. Countless numbers of God's best children have fallen into the snare of thinking that these miraculous experiences must be from the Holy Spirit because they make their body feel the activity of the Spirit's power. They make them feel sad, happy, hot, or cold; they make them laugh or cry; and they offer them visions, dreams, voices, flames, and indescribable, wonderful sensations. To them, this must be the highest point to which believers can attain. They have never realized that these are works of the evil spirits. It never occurs to them that, apart from the Spirit, evil spirits can move the same way. They are ignorant of the fact that the work of the Holy Spirit is always within man's spirit. What one feels in his body is mostly from evil spirits. Why have so many believers fallen into this condition? They are in this condition because they do not live in the spirit, preferring instead to live in their feeling! Therefore, they afford evil spirits the opportunity to exercise their tricks. Hence, a believer must reject a life of feeling; otherwise, he leaves ground for evil spirits to deceive him.

We must seriously warn all of God's children to take note of their physical sensations. We should never allow any spirit to produce any feeling in our body against our will. We must reject all the feelings of the body. Do not believe in any physical feeling or act according to it. Rather, we should forbid it because this is the beginning of Satan's deception. We must follow our intuition which is in the depths of our being.

After we have carefully considered a believer's life of feeling, we can find an underlying principle in this kind of experience. The principle is none other than "for the self." Why are we after the feeling of happiness? It is for the self. Why do we dread dryness? It is because of the self. Why do we seek different kinds of physical sensations? It is for the self. Why do we want supernatural experiences? It is for the self. Oh, may the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see that there is still so much selfishness in what we consider as a very spiritual life—a life of feeling! May the Lord show us that when we are full of feelings of happiness, our life is still centered on the self and still craves amusement for the self. We can test whether or not our spirituality is genuine by the way we treat the self.