



A Woman and Her Emotions

By Gayle Roper

Excerpt provided courtesy of www.gayleroper.com

Part 1

Identifying Emotional Chaos

We experience emotional chaos for a variety of reasons—reasons that are not always clear to us in the midst of daily dilemmas. The first step toward consistency under stress is to identify the causes of our emotional ups and downs.

In chapters 1-7 we'll talk about health and its potential effects on our emotions. We'll discuss the influence of self-esteem as well as our dreams and goals on all we are and do. We'll analyze the confusion when our feelings lead us around by the nose or when we have no patterns on which to build a balanced life. And we'll discover the difference between real guilt and assumed guilt so that we can break free of the emotional ropes that bind us.

Chapter 1

Junior high school and emotional chaos go together like

Spring and baseball. Thankfully we age.

-Gayle Roper

Remember junior high school? Ah, yes, I saw that shudder. For most of us, those years are a time we'd just as soon forget.

I remember one specific day in eighth grade. I stayed after school for some long forgotten reason. When it came time to go home, all the friends I usually walked with had left. I had to walk a mile and a quarter alone.

What if someone important saw me walking alone?

What if someone unimportant saw me walking alone?

What if the people who lived in the houses I had to pass saw me walking alone?

My stomach churned with tension, and my eyes blurred with tears of embarrassment. The world was about to discover my ghastly secret, one I tried to deny even to myself: I was unpopular.

Staring miserably at the sidewalk, I began my journey. I didn't dare look up because I might see the curtains twitching as I passed the houses. If I didn't see the faces staring out the windows, then I wouldn't hear the whispers: "That poor girl. She's walking by herself. Obviously no one likes her."

I had gone a block and a half when out of the corner of my eye I saw movement on the other side of the street. Cautiously I looked over.

It was Sylvia!

A situation I had thought the ultimate in self-conscious agony suddenly escalated right off the mortification charts. Sylvia was an upperclassman, and to my young eyes, she was all that I wasn't: beautiful with glorious red hair, popular, a cheerleader. She even had a figure, something I was still sadly lacking. Worst of all, she lived on my street. That meant she would see me walking all alone my whole way home. I had never known such humiliation and shame.

It wasn't until years later that it finally dawned on me that Sylvia was alone too – and who cared?

From my present vantage point as a Titus 2 “older woman”, it’s hard to admit that I was foolish enough to feel such emotional pain over such a trivial situation, but I did. It seemed perfectly logical to me that people had nothing better to do than look out their windows and comment on a girl walking home by herself. It also seemed utterly reasonable that Sylvia’s thoughts should focus on me and my shame.

Now I can only shake my head in amazement, and thank the Lord that I will never be thirteen again. I imagine that most of us do not want to face the emotional chaos of hormones kicking in, self-esteem taking a hike, and popularity becoming the Holy Grail ever again. A return to that time would be the equivalent of experiencing anew the worst tooth ache we ever had, or going through the agony of natural childbirth again, only this time the pain lasts for three or so years.

But even now there are times when my emotions rise up and surprise me. I’m not speaking about times when I could expect to feel emotional – weddings, funerals, graduations, births. I’m speaking of the unexpected, unforeseen explosions of emotion that can turn a day upside down.

A few years ago I was taking graduate work in counseling. Halfway through one semester I was placed under the oversight of a new professor. He observed me with two clients I had been seeing for several weeks. It was the responsibility of the new professor to meet with me after the sessions and critique my work, just as the former instructor had done.

This new teacher found fault with my work like no one ever has before or since. He very kindly tore everything I had done to shreds. I remember no positive comments whatsoever.

I responded to his comments in my usual way when things get too emotional – I said nothing because I knew if I opened my mouth, I’d cry. I was afraid that tears might destroy whatever remained of my academic hopes.

I left his office and drove home, talking to myself the whole time. “You go to graduate school, kid, you’re playing in the big leagues. If you can’t take the heat, the kitchen door is in the rear.”

In spite of my mixed metaphors, I managed to get myself under control. When I got home, I told my husband Chuck about my victimization.

“He never took into consideration that I’d already established a relationship with these folks. He tore into me unfairly.”

I basked in Chuck’s sympathy and managed not to cry. I went to bed and prayed myself to sleep, allowing a few tears in the Lord’s presence. After all, He’s been there and heard the whole thing.

Something woke me in the middle of the night, and I got up to check on the kids and the cats. Not wanting to waken Chuck, I didn’t turn on the light. As a result I walked full tilt into our partially opened bedroom door, cracking my head just over my right eye.

Then I cried. And cried. Poor Chuck wakened from a deep sleep to find me wailing my heart out in the dark in the doorway.

My emotions had crept up and grabbed me when I wasn't expecting them. Certainly I hurt my head but not enough to merit the reaction I had. It was retroactive pain I was memorializing.

Without a doubt, our emotions are a gift from God to give our lives richness and meaning. We laugh and cry and love and hurt and yearn. Little arms loop around our necks, and we go squooshy inside. Someone makes a particularly nasty remark, and we simmer or withdraw. A friend suffers a major or minor loss, and we grieve with her. Another friend gets a much deserved promotion, and we rejoice. All these feelings can deepen us, enrich us, and make us more thankful to God and/or more dependent on Him.

Or they can confuse us, warp us, and make us forever thirteen.

Recently a young woman told me that she didn't think that women today struggled with their emotions. Her implication was that we are now so sophisticated that we always have everything under control. We never struggle with negative feelings and always embrace positive, God-honoring attitudes.

I blinked, trying to imagine the women she knew. They certainly were different from me and my friends. Did they never get lonely or hurt? Did they no longer yearn for meaning, for fulfillment, for love? No longer struggle with how to handle a cutting remark, or search for the best way to overcome an unforgiving heart, or fight their feelings of defeat and failure in an unhappy life situation?

I'm convinced that we all struggle at times over things both little and big. We get out of bed on the wrong side and spend the day fighting our nasty sarcastic or critical or accusatory alter ego. The family is grumpy at breakfast, and before we know it, their negativity has us yelling or complaining or walking off in a huff. Novelist Gail Gaymer Martin notes that even the weather can play a strong role in our emotions. "A week of gloomy skies and rainy days can affect a woman's decisions and attitudes more than the issue she's struggling with itself."

Perhaps we're among the many who live with big issues and constant stress, and the tension makes us emotionally vulnerable to melancholy or resentment or bitterness. These negative emotions subtly seep into our conversation, our relationships, and our hearts, often without our even noticing. Novelist Nancy Moser tells of a spring when she was extremely stressed.

"My youngest was graduating, I had heavy deadlines, there were normal family crises and upheavals. I had a list of thirty-four things to do—NOW. During all this I was writing a manuscript and managed to turn it in on time on June 1. When I received the editor's initial review of the book, she commented on the anger and bitterness of the wife-character, the total unlikeability of the husband-character, and the general in-your-face negativity of the book. I was

shocked that the emotions of the spring were so blatantly revealed in the work. It was a wake-up call to me as a writer. I had to completely rewrite the book.”

Most of us aren't writing novels, but our pessimism or anger or hopelessness will find a way to color our worlds too. Sharp tongues, critical attitudes and spite seep out, painting everything we touch in shades of peeve green, foul-tempered black, or I-give-up gray. We say and do things that can not be unsaid or undone.

So what can we do when we want emotional peace but all we create or experience is inner chaos?

The purpose of this book is to look at seven things that give many of us women problems emotionally and examine them in the light of Scripture. We'll study the effects of poor health, the inevitable disappointment of wrong goals and expectations, the anxiety of an improper view of self, the turmoil caused by emotional anarchy, the damage from a lack of life patterns, the burden of assumed guilt, and the weight of real guilt. Then we'll study six things that may well give us a handle on living in that peace that passes understanding that Jeremiah wrote about. We'll talk about the freedom of confession, the release in the old self/new self principle, the efficacy of practice, the challenge of contentment, and the blessing of daily commitment.

Our goal is to find emotional balance, giving ourselves the ability to enjoy the good things in our lives and the means to control the negative feelings.

Novelist Jane Kirkpatrick writes of the burden basket used by many of the native peoples of the West. “These were largely nomadic people and only put essentials in their burden basket as they had to carry everything with them. A tumpline of leather around their foreheads kept the baskets, shaped like whirlwinds, in the center of their backs. But it was also important that the contents of the basket be balanced so unnatural pressure wasn't placed on one side of the neck and head.”

Jane continues, “It's been my experience that women often put more than the essentials in the things they carry around with them. Old hurts, disappointments, anxiety, guilt, all get carried, leaving little room for the real essentials like love of God, family, and friends. In addition, they stuff their worries into the bottom of the basket where they are hard to reach and consequently hard to deal with.”

If you find yourself feeling defeated, guilty, inordinately worried, anxious, or inadequate, there is help. By the grace of God, emotional constancy can become yours.

What Do You Think?

1. What are the main benefits of living with an emotionally consistent individual?
 2. Are you such an individual? What are your emotional strengths? What are your emotional weaknesses?
 3. Can you think of anyone in your life who has modeled emotional constancy for you? What was the greatest benefit of knowing that person?
 4. How about someone who was emotionally inconsistent? What influence did this individual have on you?
 5. Read Col.3:12-17. What does this passage say to you about emotional consistency? Which of these positive qualities is hardest for you to practice? Why?
-

Read additional sample chapters, and get information on Gayle's latest releases at www.GayleRoper.com!