

Faith & Feelings



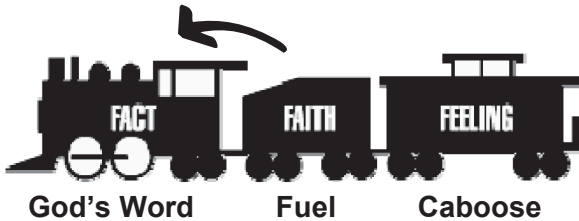
by Jason Peebles

I want to share a very basic concept that will help your life in every way. In short, the principle is this: *Walk by faith and not by feelings.* Understanding this principle will help you live a more stable life mentally, emotionally, and in your relationships. It will help you succeed in all that you do. Now don't misunderstand me. Feelings can be wonderful at times and are certainly something to be enjoyed. But the problem with feelings (especially if you try to govern your life by them) is that at times they are like the waves of the ocean – up one minute and down the next. **The Bible teaches that the only way to truly live a successful life is to learn to live by faith and make feelings secondary.** And, there may be times that you need to totally ignore your feelings. Why? Because your feelings can lead you to make rash decisions that you may regret later. 2 Corinthians 5: 7 says, *“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”*

The Train Illustration

I'm very thankful that early in my Christian walk someone took the time to share with me what I've come to call *“the train illustration.”* Whenever I adhere to this principle I seem to enjoy life more and accomplish more. But every time I forget this wonderful principle my life suffers.

In the old days, trains had a minimum of three cars. There may have been additional cars for passengers or cargo, but there were always three cars: an ENGINE, a COAL CAR, and a CABOOSE. Modern trains are very different, but for our study, let's consider this train illustration. It shows the proper relationship between FACT, FAITH, and FEELINGS.



The Engine – represents the FACTS of God's Word -- His love, promises, provision, etc. God's Word should be the "engine" that pulls your Christian life forward.

The Coal Car – represents your FAITH. Your faith, like coal, is the fuel that the engine must have in order to generate power. Without the fuel, the engine cannot operate.

The Caboose – represents your FEELINGS. Many Christians try to put faith in their feelings, only to end up frustrated. Feelings should be last. In fact, the train can run with or without the caboose. You must learn to put your faith in the facts of God's Word and not your feelings.

As you can see, the train is designed to move forward as the fuel is fed to the engine. When the engine has fuel, it can generate power. Of course, if the engine is deprived of fuel then it cannot operate and do its job.

Common Mistakes

I want you to take a moment and meditate on the train diagram. Look at the relationship between FACT, FAITH, and FEELINGS. Notice the proper order. Now, let's consider various problems when you get these principles out of order. For example, what would happen if you tried to "pull" the train with the caboose instead of the engine?

How far would you get? Or, what would happen if you put the "fuel" (your faith) into your feelings? Do you see the potential problems?

Let's take a moment to consider the various mistakes that we have all made regarding FACT, FAITH, and FEELINGS. All of us have had them out of order at times and we've suffered for it --

1. The mistake of trying to make feelings the "engine" of your life. I think the most common mistake that we all make at times is to put our feelings first. As I said earlier, feelings can be great – but the reality is that feelings can also change from moment to moment. There can also be a dark side to feelings when you are depressed. If you try to live your life based on feelings, your entire life will be "up and down" just like your feelings. Your mental state will suffer as your relationships will be on a roller-coaster. If you "feel good" you'll probably assume that everything is great. But when you "feel bad" you may think that life is not worth living. If you base your decisions on your mood swings, then your life will "swing" back and forth just like your moods do. To further complicate the issue, if you're taking medications (or abuse alcohol or drugs) – your mood swings can become extremely amplified. In other words, your "bad" days will seem really bad – and your "good" days will seem really good. On the bad days, some people even feel suicidal. People who live by their feelings will eventually make choices that they later regret. **You absolutely cannot make feelings the engine of your life. Like the caboose, feelings should be the last car on your train. Enjoy them when you feel good, but do not try to live your life based on feelings.** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 gives us some insight into how the apostle Paul lived and operated: *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* Paul did not allow the tests and trials that he experienced to move him. He was obviously

motivated by a different “engine” than feelings. He was living by faith in God and His Word.

2. The mistake of putting faith in your feelings.

Here again, the mistake that we often make is to focus our faith on the wrong object. Faith has to have a proper “object.” Many people put their faith in a church, a belief system, another person, or as we are discussing here, their feelings. But what should be the proper “object” of your faith? Ephesians 2:8 gives us the answer: *“For by GRACE are you saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”* Look closely at this passage. **It’s NOT “faith” that saves you. No, it says that your faith must be in the GRACE OF GOD – that is the proper “object” of your faith. Your faith should rest in what God has done in Christ, what God is doing, and what God has promised in His Word. In other words, the proper “object” of our faith is God Himself and what God has provided for us.**

Look at the train diagram again. Notice that your faith must be in the FACT of what God has done, is doing, and will do based on His Word. We all get into trouble when we put faith in our feelings. If you find that you lose focus (as we all do at times) then simply whisper a prayer of repentance and refocus again on God and His Word. *“Lord forgive me for putting my feelings first; Lord forgive me for putting this person first; Lord forgive me for putting my work first; I NOW REFOCUS AND PUT YOU AND YOUR WORD FIRST.”*

3. The mistake of assuming that the engine does not need fuel in order to generate power.

Look again at the verse quoted from Ephesians 2:8 above. God’s GRACE (His provision, ability, and enabling power) are readily available to all – but it takes FAITH to activate it. Notice the verse says, *“For by GRACE you are saved THROUGH FAITH.”* Grace and faith must work together. Grace is “the God side” of the equation. Faith is “the man side” of the equation. The same principle that applies to your initial salvation applies to your whole Christian life. If God’s Word says that you can overcome all (1 Jn 5:4,5) then you must have faith in it. If God’s Word says that you are forgiven (1 Jn 1:9) then you must have faith in it. If God’s Word says that you can forgive the person who hurt you (Mt

18:21,22) then you must have faith that God will help you do it. Just like the ENGINE of a train requires fuel, so God’s Word must have the FUEL of faith in order to be effectual. Just having a Bible in your possession will not guarantee results. You must read the promises, meditate on them, apply them to your life, and then put your faith in them. Learn to lay hold of God’s provision by faith.

4. The mistake of thinking you have to have good feelings in order to move forward in life.

People who live by their feelings tend to think that they cannot make progress in life unless they “feel good.” Yes, feelings can be a blessing – but they can also be a huge hindrance if you put them first. I’ve seen people drop out of school all because they “felt bad” about their classes. I’ve seen people divorce their spouse because they claimed their “feelings were gone.” I’ve seen people quit jobs because they “felt bad” about how they were treated. The truth is that feelings can be influenced by the foods we eat, chemical and hormone levels in our bodies, events in life, money, and even the weather! If you choose to live like that, then you won’t make much progress at all in life.

It’s much better for you to be “goal-oriented” in your life. Spend time in prayer and ask God for His goals for your life. He will show you His path for your business, your family, and your ministry. **Once you know what you are to do, then stick to it regardless of how you “feel.” If you’re in a place right now where you don’t know what God wants, then just start living for God and moving forward by faith. Try to do what’s right each day and ask God to lead you.** Don’t allow “bad feelings” to rob you of God’s best or make you jump from one thing to the next. The apostle Paul was shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and rejected many times – but he did not allow those things to move him. Obviously, he certainly wasn’t living by “good feelings!” Notice what he said in Acts 26:19 – *“I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”* Here was a man that moved forward in his life by faith in God’s Word – not by feelings. I’m sure there were times that he “felt great” when he saw positive results. But he would have never seen those positive results if he had not lived by faith during the hard times. No, you don’t have to have good feelings all the time to make progress in life. **In fact, you can count on**

the fact that you WON'T have good feelings all the time. Thus, determine to make the guiding principle of your life faith in God's Word.



Managing Your Emotions

The Bible teaches that there are three “parts” to your makeup – spirit, soul (mind, will, emotions), and body. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, *“I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Dear friend, this isn't rocket science – we can understand this. You are an eternal spirit being, created in God's image (who is a Spirit). At salvation, your human spirit was forever joined to the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13 & 1 Cor 6:17). You also have a mental and emotional dimension (what the Bible calls your soul) – which needs to be renewed to God's Word (Rom 12:1-3). And, you live in a physical body.

Now it's up to you to determine which “part” is going to be the dominant leader in your life. Are you going to live by every impulse that your flesh has? If it “feels good” then do it? Will that be the “engine” of your life? Will your emotions dominate you? God's wants all of us to learn how to walk in the Spirit, becoming more and more like Christ (Eph 4:13). **In order to do this, you have to allow God's Word and the Holy Spirit to take charge of your thought life and your emotional realm.** For example, if someone says or does something that is hurtful to you, how will you respond? If you don't allow the Word and the Spirit to “manage” your emotions, then you might “strike back” in anger against them. That's the natural tendency. But God calls us to live by faith in His Word and His Spirit. It takes faith to respond in

Word and His Spirit. It takes faith to resist love and kindness when the natural “feeling” is to strike back.

A big part of the Christian life is learning how to manage your emotions with the power of God's Word and Spirit. Ephesians 4:24-32 says in part – *“put on the New Man, which after God has been created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore, put away lying – and speak truth. Let all bitterness, anger, and evil speaking be put away.”* **Wow! The only way that this kind of lifestyle is possible is if God Himself helps you do it! And He absolutely will. Philippians 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”** Start asking God to help you manage your thought life and emotions by His Word and Spirit. Learn to walk in the Spirit. You are not on your own – the Comforter is right there to help you in every way (Jn 14:26).

Following close behind managing your emotions is the huge area of managing your RELATIONSHIPS. You see, if you try to manage your relationships based on how you “feel” all the time, then your relationships probably won't last very long. Some couples base their entire dating and marriage on FEELINGS – only to be disappointed when those feelings seem to disappear like the morning dew. What happened? Actually, probably nothing happened. They need to realize that ALL relationships require FAITH to be the “engine” of the relationship. For example, if parents based their love on feelings, then there wouldn't be too many children raised by parents! Two-year-olds throw fits in the middle of stores and stress everyone out; teenagers go through rebellious stages at times; and, dear friend, such are the challenges of life! Yet good parents love their children anyway. **All of us must learn (like good parents do) to base our love for others on faith and not feelings. We must believe the best in them and give them grace when they need it.** Ask God to teach you how to manage your emotions AND your relationships by FAITH.

Dear friend, I encourage you to live by faith. Don't allow “feelings” to cause you to give up on your goals or your relationships. Memorize the train diagram and live by it.

■ -- Jason Peebles

Key Memory Verse:

“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”

2 Corinthians 5:7

Prayer for Devotions

“Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. I accept His sacrifice and commit my life to Him. Teach me to live by faith and not by feelings. Help me renew my mind to your Word. I ask you to heal any hurts and wounds that I have in my heart. Strengthen me by your Holy Spirit. Thank you for your great love. In Jesus Name – Amen.”

We hope this Study Guide helps you. Sign up online to receive our FREE studies each month. *World Outreach Ministries* is the home office for interdenominational missionaries around the world. It was founded in 1979 by Jason Peebles. Our missionaries are from all types of church backgrounds and are involved in a variety of outreaches – evangelism, schools, medical clinics, children’s shelters, aviation, church planting, translation work, broadcasting, leadership training, and support roles. God’s kingdom has all kinds of workers!

We are a faith ministry – that is, we look to God to impress friends like you to partner with us. If this Study Guide encourages you, then please consider making a “one-time” or “monthly” donation for this worldwide mission. *Your gifts will directly help our Missionary Agency . . .*

Missionary Agency Info:

www.WorldOutreach.org

1-800-832-WORD

Online Support:

www.WorldOutreach.org/00

Mail Support to:

World Outreach Ministries

P.O. Box B

Marietta, GA 30061

(designate for Home office)