

FEELINGS

LEADING OUR OWN HEARTS

Self-control is primarily mind-control.
—JOHN STOTT

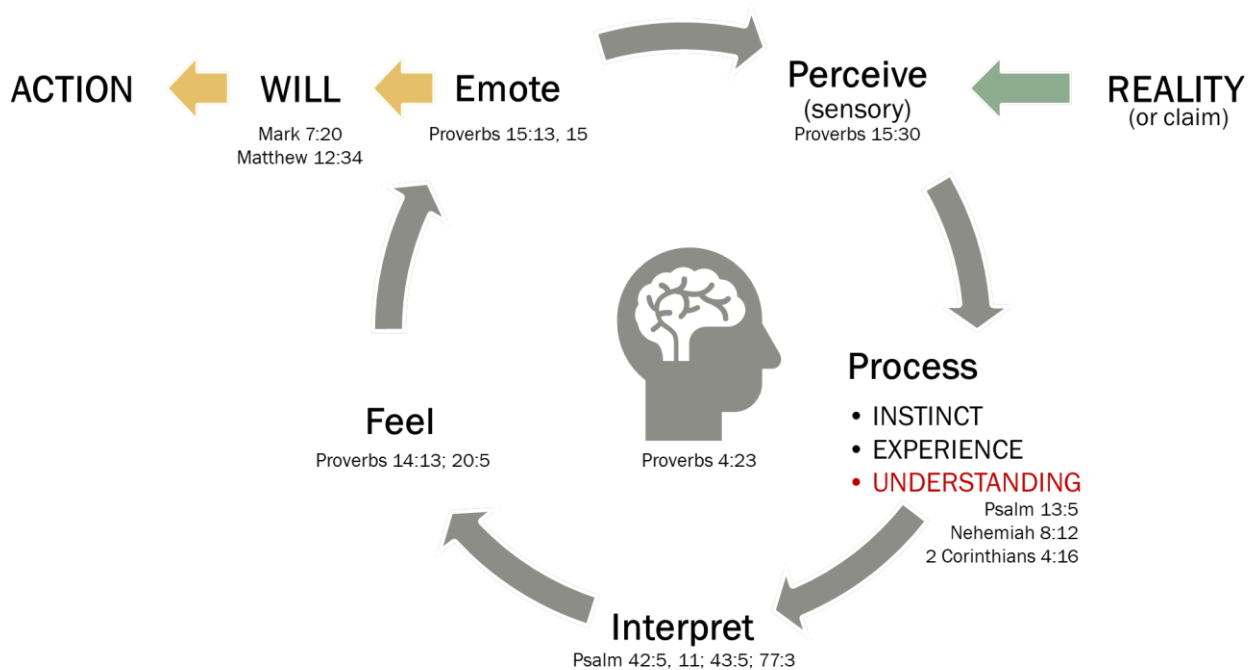
One of the great lies popular in our culture today is the idea that *feelings are right*. We ascribe to them an irrational authority. As a result, our thoughts and actions often follow our feelings slavishly. After all, it is thought, to be true to yourself you must be obedient to your feelings.

Ours is an age of experience. Whenever absolute truth is diminished and even dismissed, experience becomes the most convincing authority in our interpretation of reality. Consequently, truth is subject to experience rather than experience to truth. But truth should interpret our experiences, not the other way around. This is plainly the principle of living by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Yet even professing Christians allow experiences to take the upper hand in the interpretation of reality. Truth itself is then subjected to reinterpretation under the authority of human experience—as though one's experience is a greater revealer of reality and more authoritative than divine revelation. In the end, self becomes the great arbiter of truth and the interpreter of reality. But relative truth cannot rationally explain reality. Self is subject to reality; reality is not subject to self.

In an effort to avoid this self-defeating trajectory and guard from losing a firm grip on absolute truth, many have sought to neglect and reject their feelings as altogether unimportant and unnecessary. Despite the fact that many Christians have adopted this approach, it is pagan dualism and not biblical. It was championed by Plato and the Stoics, not God. In this way of thinking, feelings and emotions are enemies to rational thought and truth. According to their system, emotions were fleshly (innately evil), unruly, and contrary to virtue. To them, a disciplined mind meant the elimination of emotions. But this is a counterfeit solution altogether devoid of love to God. Denial of God-given feelings does not produce authentic love to God.

Neither of the above positions honor God in both His manifest design in nature and purposes revealed in Scripture. While experience and feelings make great servants, they are terrible masters. This is the thesis of this chapter. Our feelings are important, but they must be read and led by a deliberate discipline of mind for the sake of growing in our love to God. We must lead and not follow our hearts, to love God and find true satisfaction in Him.

INTELLECTUAL-EMOTIONAL-VOLITIONAL COMPLEX



Bernie Siegel, a retired pediatric surgeon and professor at Yale University writes, “the state of the mind changes the state of the body by working through the central nervous system, the endocrine system, and the immune system. Peace of mind sends the body a 'live' message, while depression, fear, and unresolved conflict give it a 'die' message.”¹ Neuroscience research suggests that emotion and thought interact, “making important contributions to the guidance and organization of the other.” Richard Bondi goes further and says, “Emotions and feelings are epistemological; they are sensors relating us to the world, needing interpretation to find significance.”²

¹ Cited by Robert Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 76.

² Richard Bondi, “The Elements of Character,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 204, cited by Saucy, 140.