

The background of the entire cover is a dense, overlapping field of yellow smiley face emojis. Some are simple with black dots for eyes and a curved line for a mouth, while others have red hearts for eyes or red blush on their cheeks. The emojis are slightly out of focus, creating a sense of depth.

**DR. KEVIN CHAPMAN**

**MASTERING  
OUR  
EMOTIONS**

**BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES  
FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH**



InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *Mastering Our Emotions* by Dr. Kevin Chapman

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL

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# 1

## IN THE BEGINNING

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

GENESIS 1:1



**M**any believers are familiar with this first verse of the Bible and the story of creation. However, in Genesis 3 something else was “created” that was not part of God’s original plan, nor did he create it. It is one of the many results from the fall, and it forms the basis for this book to managing emotions as a believer.

In Genesis 3 we see the heading for the chapter, titled “The Temptation and Fall of Man.” Again, many believers are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve, the role of the serpent, and the bites that are taken of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rarely, however, do we think about the *emotional consequences* that occurred because of this act of disobedience by Adam and Eve. This one act set the course for millions of people to struggle with managing the emotions that God originally designed for our benefit. I’ve personally encountered thousands of people, including many believers, who struggle with managing anxiety, anger, sadness, fear, shame, and disgust, and who have become comfortable with being uncomfortable. I have studied the family

transmission of anxiety as a clinical psychologist. I have treated thousands of individuals with anxiety disorders (phobias, chronic worry, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and agoraphobia), depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and countless other mental health conditions. I have witnessed people use emotional avoidance in its many forms as a coping mechanism in vain attempts to manage negative emotions. I have seen countless individuals quote 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind,” as well as Philippians 4:6, “Be anxious for nothing,” yet still be dominated by emotional experiences despite what they know to be true from God’s Word. I have observed numerous believers declare that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and that we are strengthened with all might, as noted in Colossians 1:9-14, yet still struggle with negative emotionality. In short, the most knowledgeable believers are often still dominated by their souls (i.e., emotional experiences) due to a lack of practical understanding of what occurred during the temptation and fall of humans.

## THE TEMPTATION AND FALL

Our journey begins in Genesis 3:6-10:

So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where *are* you?”

So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

Though we understand the temptation and fall of humans as a significant event that would change the history of humankind, we often miss a very important aspect of what occurred from an emotional standpoint: the fall gave rise to the temperament trait known as *neuroticism*. As noted in the introduction, individuals who are high in this trait tend to experience intense, negative emotions. Just like many of us are high in extraversion, which refers to a tendency to experience positive emotions and to be warm toward others, those of us who are high in neuroticism tend to view negative emotions as dangerous and intolerable. In essence, high neuroticism is linked to emotional disorder diagnoses such as panic disorder, major depressive disorder, and social anxiety disorder.<sup>1</sup>

In Genesis, we can observe three traits of neuroticism. First, the revelation of nakedness causes shame and embarrassment. This was never intended by God. Although this manual will primarily address negative emotionality due to its impact on our functioning as believers, the fall also negatively contributed to our low expression of positive emotion, which has also created negative consequences. Low expression of positive mood as a result of the fall may affect our expression of the fruit of the Spirit, how we express hopefulness (in contrast to hopelessness), as well as our enjoyment of activities and relationships. God did not intend for us to believe that we must hide. Adam and Eve “knew that they *were* naked,” and experienced shame and embarrassment because of this new knowledge, and therefore, “sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (Genesis 3:7).

Second, we see the first experience of *anxiety* in the Bible. Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of God when “they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden

in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). Notice it says that they “*heard* the sound of the LORD God walking” as opposed to “they *saw* the LORD God walking.” This implies that they experienced distress in anticipation of seeing God in the (near) future because they believed their encounter with him would result in a negative outcome, which is the essence of the emotion of anxiety.

Third, we see the first experience of the emotion known as *fear* in the Bible. When God was speaking directly to Adam and Eve, they experienced distress in response to what they viewed as present danger, which is the essence of fear. Ironically, we were never intended to experience these negative emotions in the presence of our Creator, yet Adam and Eve’s emotional responses to God revealed the magnitude of an extremely negative consequence from the temptation and fall of man: the birth of high levels of neuroticism. Though research on emotional disorders indicates that heightened levels of neuroticism is a primary risk factor for developing an emotional disorder, it is also something that can be changed through the application of kingdom principles and the science of psychology.

## THE BIRTH OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

The emotional effects of the fall have had a persisting impact on all of humankind. Despite whether you personally struggle with negative emotionality, the consequences of Adam and Eve partaking of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are easily observable: wars, rumors of wars, difficulties within parent-child relationships, and the staggering statistics on emotional disorders. The shame, fear, and anxiety that were initially manifested in the Garden of Eden are among the primary negative emotional experiences that so many believers struggle with today.

Along these lines, consider for a moment the following questions: Do you struggle with worry about minor matters or perhaps worry about things that might happen in the future?

Have you ever experienced a panic attack? Do you “clam up” when you are in social situations and become extremely uncomfortable when you must be in front of others? Do you dislike tight spaces? Do you often worry about your health and become uncomfortable when you experience unknown bodily sensations? Do you check Google when you feel a “twinge” in your body, hoping to find answers? Maybe you feel down and depressed while finding it difficult to enjoy activities that you used to enjoy. Do you experience “scary” thoughts that come into your mind, that then lead you to seek reassurance from others or attempt to block thoughts that may seem contrary to the Word of God? Do you “fly off the handle” over what other people would consider small things? Do you have a difficult time tolerating the unknown? Or maybe you avoid situations because they seem to trigger uncomfortable feelings in your body. Do you lie awake at night because of your thoughts? Do you have a difficult time praying or hearing from God due to your mind wandering to either the future or the past?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, do these symptoms cause you personal distress or impairment in everyday functioning (e.g., work, school, relationships, church, or social activities)? Some examples of distress and impairment in functioning include not being able to speak up in group settings out of fear of negative evaluation, not being assertive, missing out on leisure activities due to anxiety or depression, frequent panic attacks, your sleep being disrupted on a regular basis due to not being able to turn off your thoughts, or avoiding places and situations altogether due to feeling uncomfortable.

If you struggle in any capacity with what I just mentioned, then perhaps the tendency toward negative emotionality that initially occurred in the Garden of Eden is the culprit. Even if you are not high in this tendency to experience “big feelings” but some of these situations are difficult to manage, then you will benefit from this manual.



## UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

As we noted earlier in this chapter, some individuals struggle with the tendency to experience negative emotions coupled with the perception that the world around them is dangerous and that they are ill-equipped to deal with it. This tendency toward experiencing intense emotions was first evidenced in the Garden of Eden and explains why many of us struggle with the questions mentioned earlier. There is an abundance of research literature that suggests that neuroticism emotionality is among one of the most important risk factors for developing an emotional disorder, particularly for anxiety disorders and depression. Most importantly, this tendency can be reprogrammed. To understand how to reprogram symptoms of emotional distress that are both created and maintained by high levels of neuroticism, we must first understand the role that emotions play in our lives and what they are made of. Doing so will allow us to practice the skills taught in later chapters that have proven to change lives.

### REFLECTION: IN THE BEGINNING

**Read** Genesis 3:1-21.

1. In verse 7 of Genesis 3, what happened emotionally when Adam and Eve “knew that they were naked”? Describe it in your own words.
2. How did Adam and Eve’s perception of God change in Genesis 3:8 when “they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day”?

3. Has the fall and the resulting sin that entered the world impacted your experience with emotions? What are some specific examples in your life?

## HOMEWORK

1. **Read** Colossians 1:9-14 and pray the prayer found in that passage once per day for the next week during your time with the Lord. Make note of anything that stands out to you or that God reveals to you during your prayer time.
2. **Pray:** Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and revelation about how the fall has affected how you've experienced emotions over time. Ask him during your prayer time to reveal to you how to pray for your family if they have struggled with mastering emotions.
3. **Read** Genesis 3 and ask God to reveal to you the areas of your life where negative emotions have been viewed as dangerous. Record those areas below.

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