



Mood Swings

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## Breaking the Grip Of Mood Swings Taking Major Steps In the Face of Mixed Emotions

This brief includes a worksheet section for those of you who enjoy doing homework type assignments.

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Gifted souls who never doubt do exist, and are able to resolve the most far-reaching decisions and never doubt their own judgment. They seem to have a surrealistic capacity to move forward and not look back.

Most people cannot move forward easily. They doubt their judgment on major and minor decisions alike. They know the pain of mood swings; they accept a job with confidence and several weeks later wonder if they did the right thing.

The capacity for certainty is so unusual I'm quite certain it's a divine endowment. Most of us experience swings one way or the other or at one time or another.

We can take heart knowing the experience is normal. It's not unusual to change our mind on matters both big and small like what toothpaste to buy or whom we should marry. Not to have second thoughts once these decisions are resolved is unusual. Most of us experience at least some opinion and emotion shift on the decisions we make.

Fortunately, most of us are able to come to terms with the our mood or opinion. While we might wish our feelings were more consistent, we usually find it possible to move beyond our fluctuating emotions, make a decision and stick to it. For some, though, the problem is more serious. To say they are tortured by mood swings is not stating too strongly. These folks, feel they are going crazy when making a decision.

I've counseled some who have rethought their decision to marry so often I lost track. One woman described it as "hell."

During a twenty-five year relationship she was completely sure about marrying her boyfriend, then next despaired of her choice. Others waver similarly over decisions about a their career, church groups or personal ministry. The buyer feels remorse not just as an occasional moment of regret, but for some, it can be a chronic tendency.

Mood swings contribute significantly to commitment fears and may even be its primary source. Moods hinder the ability to make good decisions, keep commitments, and realize ones full potential. At this point acknowledging the problem does not help. Effort is needed to break the cycle.

### **WHAT TRIGGERS MOOD SWINGS?**

Once a decision has been carefully thought out and made, five major factors influence the outcome. Any or all of these may affect the mood change experienced.

1. **FAMILY BACKGROUND.** The influence of family background on ones emotional tendency and judgment is considerable. We generally copy the attitudes and behavior of our parents. Even when we realize our parent's pattern is self-defeating, we may absorb them anyway. For instance, I vowed never to be like my mother, yet in similar circumstances, I followed in her footsteps, abandoning relationships that didn't meet with my expectations, or were boring or seemed deadend.

When parents are prone to chronic mood swings, often their children absorb the tendency. If either of our parents felt insecure about their spouse, their calling in life or something else, we may respond similarly. How we were treated by our parents also matters. A child whose parents were critical and belittling, as an adult may not trust their own judgment, often wavering between certainty and doubt.

Yet Scripture says, ". . . the one who doubts is like the surf of tge sea driven and tossed by the wind." (James 1:6)

Yet, all doubt is not bad. One must understand the purpose doubt serves, that it can ultimately strengthen our faith.

We should be *unafraid to doubt*. If by doubting we examine an issue and finally conclude we were justified in doubting, what we believed was clearly not worth believing. However, if one exams the facts and finds what they doubted was true, their faith tends to be strengthened as a result.

An atheist for thirty-five years, I doubted there was a God, at least one who loved and cared about me. Yet, in challenging God to prove himself and having him answer the challenge, strengthened my faith immeasurably. Thus, I came to know God more certainly and now enjoy God more deeply.

While doubts can be both helpful and useless, our background also plays a vital role. To understand our family history and its influence on our emotions and behavior is helpful.

An abusive or unsupportive family background may create for us a tendency to have some mood swings. If I didn't receive the love needed as a child, I may be uncomfortable being loved and affirmed as an adult by God or anyone else. I may earnestly desire a relationship, yet when love arrives, I feel uncomfortable being loved unconditionally. Such affection is foreign to my comfort zone. I don't trust it.

Also, if never affirmed for excelling in activities we enjoyed as a child, we may feel guilty pursuing work or options that attract us. Again our feelings may fluctuate. I'm attracted to the idea of starting my own business, and succeeding in it but also unsettled by the thought. We can work to change, and to understand the source of our discomfort is a first step.

**2. BIOLOGICAL FACTORS.** In addition to our upbringing, a variety of other factors influence mood swings and may affect us even if our family background was healthy and supportive. Biological influences are especially potent.

I awaken some time after midnight and my thinking keeps me awake. But in my mental ramblings I discover a nugget of truth and resolve a difficult turn of thought. I'm excited to write a new blog tomorrow and share my solution to this perplexing problem with my readers.

The next morning, I awaken and remembering my musings of the night, I think, "That was dumb. How could I have thought that would be of interest? No one cares about those things."

I've been through this pattern so many times that it no longer surprises me, though it frustrates me when it occurs.

I've read about a people who functioned best at night not morning. Their outlook is affected by a daily biological cycle where they are optimistic in late evening, skeptical in early morning. The effect is strong enough that their opinion may change hugely from one period to the next: a brilliant idea at midnight seems misplaced upon awakening.

We each experience a daily flow of energy and fatigue and the pattern varies from person to person. While I'm ready to hibernate at bedtime and full of energy when I first awaken, my son is up nights and hibernates days, like a bear in winter. We all have times when our energy peaks and sags. In winter, I'm in bed by 10pm and am awake and up by 7am but do not feel alive until around 11am.

Fatigue has a dampening effect too, by robbing us of energy needed to be optimistic. Whatever contributes to fatigue – sleep loss, illness, stress, overwork, delayed meals or skipping meals --- can all trigger a mood swing.

While the emotional impact varies among women – some are strongly affected by the hormonal changes associated with the menstrual cycle – men do not have the same process that produces an emotional cycle, instead they experience a greater emotional letdown following sex than do women.

Biology affect everyone's emotional state. Many who suffer chronic mood swings are not subject to stronger biological influences than others but do react to them more adversely. Some are not aware of how their physical cycle affects their emotions and take their mood swings too seriously. Others do not believe a physical influence truly affects a mood swing. They assume a conviction about what to do--especially one that's within God's will--must not be swayed by emotions or biology. They feel obliged to wait for perfect certainty before taking any major step.

Scripture makes clear that a person's physical condition affects emotions and judgment. Examples include the most mature and spiritually enlightened people in the Bible.

In Mark 11:12-14 Jesus himself became irritated when he encountered a fig tree with no fruit. His aggravation arose though the tree was barren for a good reason: "it was not the season for figs." Mark notes a physical factor that influenced Jesus' emotions: "he was hungry."

Following the elation of his incomparable victory over 400 prophets of Baal and the restoration of rain to Israel, Elijah became suicidal upon receiving a veiled threat on his life from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-8).

Elijah had been stressed beyond reason, through an extreme confrontation with these prophets and a twenty-mile jog from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel, physical and emotional stressors.

Peter's denial of Jesus to bystanders in the courtyard prior to Jesus' crucifixion seems incomprehensible (Luke 22:55-62). He had passionately insisted, just a few hours earlier, "Lord, I am ready to go to jail with you. I will even die with you!". Zealously he intervened with a sword when soldiers came for Jesus. Yet after seeing Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, then the soldiers, and finally Jesus being arrested, it was too much, and he was unable to stand firm in his convictions.

No one is above being influenced by the physical. We cannot expect superhuman resistance to influences. We must take them into account in weighing the import of mood swings in making important decisions.

**3. TEMPERAMENT.** Personality and temperament is beyond our scope to look at them in detail here, yet several points about temperament are certain. Each one has a distinct personality from God which is with us for life--the effect of nature and not nurture within us. Each personality has both strong points and vulnerabilities. And certain personality types are more susceptible to mood swings than others.

One of these is the analytical or wintery temperament. Those who are analytical tend to scrutinize all sides of an issue and rehash everything repeatedly. Our conclusions may fluctuate, depending upon which aspect we focus on. However, when our analytical nature clashes with say our physical, we may be subject to strong mood swings and shifts of judgment.

The sanguine or fall temperament is also susceptible to mood swings, but for a different reason. Sanguine personalities are feeling-oriented. They are strongly affected by the outlook of various people around them and their surroundings.

For example, Bea is confident about her intention to marry Bill during the day when she's busy. And her closest friend approves of the relationship and is convinced Bea would be happier if married to Bill and away from her parents. But Bea lives with her parent, so in the evening, her conviction crumbles because they are not supportive of the relationship and their own marriage often is conflicted.

Understanding your personality and its effect on your thinking can help you learn to respond to mood swings more correctly. This is especially true when your personality by its nature makes you susceptible to mood swings.

**4. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES.** While Fall persons are more affected by these factors than some, we all are influenced by people and circumstances in life more than we realize.

Our mood can be swayed by the weather, the attitude of the person we are around, the architecture of the building we are in, or whether our home bright and sunny.

Scripture abounds with examples of those whose mood and outlook were affected by their setting.

Saul, king of Israel, could become extremely depressed by the burdens of his office, yet often was incited to faith and optimism by the influence of music (1 Sam 16:23).

David could be inspired to great reverence by the influence of godly people such as Nathan, but was thrown into a moral tailspin when he caught sight of Bathsheba bathing from his vantage point on the palace roof (2 Sam 7, 11:2-4).

Peter broke sharply with his bias toward Gentiles following his rooftop vision and missionary experiences, yet was drawn back into the same prejudice through the influence of less enlightened Christians (Acts 10; Gal 2:11-13).

External influences often affect our feelings and perceptions. Respecting them and making allowance for them is necessary to break the unhealthy grip of mood swings.

**5. GOD'S PEACE IS PERFECT--but the feeling isn't.** A popular misconception contributes to mood swings and makes it very difficult for some Christians to put them in right perspective. Some believe if God is leading you to do something, you will experience perfect peace. This is usually thought to mean no fears or doubts will intrude.

If you have misgivings about taking a step, God warns you not to go ahead. This assumption leaves many Christians stuck in the inertia of mood swings, unable to move forward.

Scripture teaches Christ gives peace to those who follow him, yet never guarantees peace before we take that step.

God doesn't overrule common sense. The peace he gives, rather, enables us to transcend our fears--to move ahead in spite of many hesitations. Thus, we may feel a mixture of peace and uncertainty at the same time, especially in the early stages of a major change. Many are so influenced psychologically that we just cannot feel peace prior to a major step forward only afterward. However, taking that step of faith is essential to experiencing Christ's peace and opening ourselves to the full blessings of God.

When I first began counseling, I had a lot of clients because I worked for an agency. However, when I started my own practice and the number of clients coming were few and far between, I would take that to indicate God did not want me counseling. I vacillated off and on for years wondering if I should counsel or do something else. In between I worked for agencies, went to school, and wrote books. The last time I thought about counseling others, the same thing happened. I couldn't figure out which way to go, or what to do. Still, what "cured" me was a series of circumstances.

First, in order to counsel by the law as God does say, I had to pay an exorbitant fee close to \$300 to renew my license, plus pay for liability insurance, and sign up with several insurance companies and pay for advertising so I could get more clients. That took a lot of time, money and effort. Going through all that made me determined to stick with the program and see where it would take me. Determination, not perfect peace is what kept me going. But keeping on the move forward and trusting God to supply everything else, gave me peace.

Recognizing perfect peace is not required to make a decision is huge. This insight can bring a greater experience of faith as well. My biblical understanding is, *faith is the courage to move forward in spite of less than perfect certainty.*

## CHANGING THE PATTERN

Changing the way we think about Christ's peace, and other steps help reduce the intensity and affect of mood swings. These include:

**1. GAIN SELF-UNDERSTANDING.** Take a careful look at your life, and identify the factors which obviously prompt mood swings. Make a special effort to understand your personality. Take a standard personality test, or seek counsel from someone who can help you identify your personality features. Pinpoint your physical cycles also. Are there predictable times when your energy surges or lags? Do your moods change at those times? Do your convictions about decisions change then?

Consider your family background. Did your parents' behavior in some way render you susceptible to mood swings?

Consider which external factors most influence your outlook. Are you affected by weather changes, another's attitude? Features in your surroundings - the colors in a room?

An understanding of why we experience mood swings helps us in two important ways. This insight alone is therapeutic, for our confusion over why mood swings occur is part of what makes the experience so upsetting. Also, this understanding enables us to better control our mood swings and reactions. We can identify which influences we are able to change and which we have to simply accept.

We are also able to weigh the significance of mood swings more clearly in working through decisions and are less likely to be thrown off guard by them.

**2. ACCEPT OUR PERSONALITY AND PHYSICAL SELF.** Mood swings can be demoralizing. We imagine something is wrong with us: we're psychologically unstable or mentally ill, and despise our personality and what make us prone to mood shifts.

Self-disdain reduces motivation toward needed to change, and we imagine we're cursed and can do nothing about it. In reality, our personality and energy cycle were given us by Christ for extremely good purposes. They are exactly what we need to carry out his intentions for us. This doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to recognize our vulnerable side and do what we can to counteract it. Stewardship requires we manage our life wisely, yet begins when we accept our personality and energy pattern as Gods gifts.

Appreciate them as a gift to strengthen your faith in Christ, sometimes radically, as your confidence in Him caring for the details of your life is boosted. This leads to greater trust that he will enable us to confront the mood problem successfully. We then are more inclined to do what we can to reduce their impact--and to take steps of faith in spite of them.

**3. MANAGE INFLUENCES YOU CAN CONTROL.** We cannot change our personality. We cannot alter features of our biological cycle either. We can reduce our tendency to mood swings.

Watching "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" caused me to desire something other than home and neighborhood I loved, so I stopped viewing that program. If watching pornography causes me to act against my marriage vows, or the biblical mandate against sex for singles, I would stop viewing it. If bad weather dampens my spirit, improving my environment indoors may help. One man had broken a spell of depression simply by increasing the light in his home.

If certain people have a knack for belittling my judgment or deflating my optimism, I should look honestly at whether it is possible to avoid them altogether or at least to reduce my contact with them. When David – before he became king over Israel – went to Saul's army and found the soldiers runnign from the giant goliath, he asked what would be his reward for defeating the giant. His brothers dismissed him and told him to go home and tend the sheep!

However, David turned to another soldier for a respectful answer (1Sa 17:27). Thus, we too should not listen to those who do not offer wise counsel – but turn to godly people.

The influences we expose ourselves to can enhance good judgment or discourage it. This is the lesson of Psalm 73:22. The psalmist grew bitter seeing successful but unscrupulous men who seemed to have an easy ride in life. He became despondent and "was a brute beast before" God.

Saul's jealousy subsided upon entering the the sanctuary and he took time to think things through from God's point of view. He was able to appreciate the plight of the people he envied and to see his own position in life more optimistically.

The psalm is a reminder of the benefit worship and positive church experiences can have in helping us maintain a faith-centered outlook.

Any steps we take to reduce fatigue also have a stabilizing effect on our emotions. Basic improvements, like getting enough sleep, eating properly, exercising and keeping stress within reasonable limits can make a considerable difference.

**4. YOUR PATTERN OF FEELINGS OVER TIME.** We who are subject to mood swings face our greatest challenge when it comes to resolving important decisions. It's here we also take our most courageous steps.

Our inclination to mood swings can derail our cherished goals and cause us to pass over opportunities. The point comes for each of us--even in decisions as monumental as marriage and long-range career plans--where we need to move forward though our conviction wavers. Our best understanding of God's will then comes from considering our feeling patterns.

Bill has dated Bea for several years and felt confident they should marry. Yet each time he became convicted, within days he became ambivalent. Bill repeated this many times.

When Bill looks honestly at factors influencing his thinking, he finds he has usually become confident about marrying Bea on weekends or holidays. These are times when he is rested, away from work pressures and able to think clearly about his future. Doubts arise when he is back at work and drawn into hard assignments. Attractive women flirt with Bill at work, leaving him wondering if he's really ready to give up an active dating life for the commitment to a marriage.

Bill's conviction about marrying Bea came during times when he was capable of good judgment. If he waits for the perfect feelings, he'll not likely marry Bea (or anyone else).

He would be wise to follow his conviction and marry. Stable emotions will likely follow the step of marriage rather than precede it in this case.

We need to take a similar step of courage at major decision points if we're to break the bind of mood swings and realize our potential. Our step is justified when our conviction about what to do resurfaces frequently (like Bill) and comes during our periods of best judgment.

**5. PRAY EARNESTLY FOR GOD'S HELP.** We who regard mood swings as a serious problem should be just as serious about praying for God's help. Christ expects us to bring our daunting challenges before him frequently in earnest prayer.

Matthew 14:23 [Jesus] went into the hills by himself to pray. It was late, and he was there alone.

Matthew 26:41 Stay awake and pray for strength against temptation. Your spirit is willing, but your body is weak."

Mark 1:35 The next morning Jesus woke up very early. He left the house while it was still dark and went to a place where he could be alone and pray.

The fact that God is willing to respond to our prayer is one of the most clear and persistent themes of Scripture.

In the case of mood swings he helps us by strengthening our resolve, giving us success in our efforts to deal with them, bringing gifted people into our life to encourage and support us, and numerous pleasant surprises as well.

Even Jesus needed to pray fervently for God's strength as he faced his ambivalence about going to the cross.

Matthew 26:42 Jesus went away ... and prayed, "My Father, if I must do this and it is not possible for me to escape it, then I pray that what you want will be done."

We should make it a practice during our daily devotions to pray for God's help in responding to mood swings. We should ask both for greater consistency in our convictions and for grace to make wise decisions in spite of mood swings.

And we should always ask for the courage to move beyond our confusion and take steps of faith. Following Jesus' example, we also do well to occasionally set aside extended time for praying for God's help. We should not regard such attention to prayer as merely catharsis but as a most critical step we take toward healing.

**6. DON'T BE AFRAID TO SEEK HELP.** In confronting a struggle the Bible warns us from whom not to seek counsel.

Psalm 1:1 Blessed are those who do not heed the counsel of the *ungodly, the sinners, or the scorners*

Still the Bible also says *we should seek counsel*.

Pro 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fail; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Pro 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but she or he who heeds counsel is wise.

Pro 19:20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction that you may be wise in your latter days.

Pro 19:21 We might make many plans, but what the Lord says is what will happen.

### **Gather Together**

We are to gather fellowship for support and encouragement for it is only in the company of like-minded people we find the help we need.

If my inclination to mood swings is rooted in a difficult family background, it may be triggered by repressed anger and deep feelings of inferiority/insecurity. In this case the help of a qualified counselor may help come to terms with our past and work through our conflicts.

Are my mood swings from a physical cycle? Then I need to better understand and manage my physical self, or if they are part of my personality or the result of outside influences I can better control, I may be able to handle the problem on my own with the support of a good friend. Or you may need the help of a counselor to determine the causes and your best route toward healing. Either way, the decision is yours.

The next few pages are questions to get you to think about your mood swings and what influences them. When you can answer those, you'll be a step closer to solving the problem and better managing your mood swings.

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For more information, check my website:

[www.dotcross.org](http://www.dotcross.org)

## MOOD SWINGS HOMEWORK

Your personality?    Fall      Winter    Spring    Summer

You can find personality and temperament online at this website: [www.keirsey.com/sorter/register.aspx](http://www.keirsey.com/sorter/register.aspx)

What are your physical cycles?

Are there times when your energy surges or lags?

Keep a record of your day for about a week and take note of how you feel upon awakening, during the day, and in the evening or night time.

Do your moods change at those times?    Yes      No

What's your mood when your energy surges?

What's your mood when your energy lags?

Do your convictions about decisions change then?

Consider your family background.

Did your parents' behavior in some way render you liable to mood swings? Did mom or dad mood swing?

Mom's typical mood?

Dad's typical mood?

Which external factors most influence your outlook.

Are you affected by weather changes?

In what way?

Are you affected by another person's attitude?

In what way?

Are you affected by features in your surroundings?

In what way?

Does being tired, hungry, overworked, affect you?

In what way:

Which experiences do you find demoralize you?

Do you imagine something is wrong with you: you're unstable or mentally ill?

Do you despise your personality and what make you prone to emotional shifts?

Do you believe you're cursed with a condition you can do nothing to improve?

What television programs affect you negatively, cause you to despise your home, spouse, other . . . ?

What movies or shows do you watch tempt you to act against your marriage vows, if married?

What movies or shows tempt you to act against your nature, male or female, draw you toward homosexual acts?

In what way does the weather affect your spirit, your mood?

Are there certain people in your life who belittle your judgment or optimism?

Who are those people?

How do they belittle you?

Is it possible for you to look honestly at whether you can avoid them altogether or at least reduce how much time you have contact with them?

If not, why not?

If so, what are you willing to do?