



Understanding Human Emotions

and How to Manage Them

A Faith-Informed Perspective



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Abstract

Human emotion represents one of the most profound dimensions of God’s creative design, shaping how people think, relate, and respond to life’s experiences. In Christian counseling practice, particularly within the Ghanaian context, emotions are often misunderstood—either viewed as signs of spiritual weakness or suppressed in the name of faith. This paper explores the nature, purpose, and management of human emotions from a faith-informed perspective, integrating biblical theology with psychological theory and practical counseling encounters in Ghana’s Pentecostal–Charismatic setting. The study employs a qualitative, practice-based design using narrative reflections from counseling sessions to illustrate how emotions function as signals of unmet needs, distorted beliefs, or divine promptings for growth. Drawing upon the Arno Profile System (APS) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), it presents a faith-based Emotional Management Model that emphasizes awareness, expression, reframing, and transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit. The paper argues that understanding emotion is both a spiritual and therapeutic act—a process of aligning the heart with truth, renewing the mind, and restoring relational harmony with self, God, and others. Findings indicate that emotional health among Ghanaian Christians improves when faith and psychology are integrated, producing emotionally mature believers who worship with honesty and live with wisdom. The study concludes that faith-informed emotional management offers the Church a redemptive model of healing, where emotion is neither denied nor idolized, but sanctified under grace.

Keywords

Human emotion; Christian counseling; Ghanaian context; Pentecostal–Charismatic; Arno Profile System (APS); Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT); emotional maturity; pastoral care

1. Introduction and Background

Human emotion is one of the most mysterious yet vital dimensions of existence. It colors every experience, influences every decision, and shapes every relationship. Within the Christian worldview, emotion is not a random biological reaction but a reflection of the image of God in humanity. Scripture affirms that God Himself feels — He loves, grieves, rejoices, and grows angry with righteousness (Genesis 6:6; John 11:35; Ephesians 4:30). Created in His image, men and women mirror that emotional depth in their own being. Yet, while emotion was designed as a bridge between the heart and divine purpose, the Fall distorted its balance, creating confusion, denial, and extremes.

In my years of counseling and pastoral ministry in Ghana, I have often encountered believers who struggle to reconcile their emotions with their spirituality. A young woman once came into session in tears after being told by her church leaders that “Christians don’t get depressed.” She had been battling loss and loneliness but hid her pain behind religious smiles. Another client, a pastor’s wife, confessed to feeling constant irritation and guilt because she thought anger was always sinful. In both cases, emotion had become an enemy to faith — something to silence rather than understand. These stories echo a broader pattern within African Christianity: the tendency to spiritualize psychological distress and moralize emotion, often leaving wounded hearts unattended.

Ghanaian society, deeply communal and expressive, also has cultural codes that shape emotional expression. Publicly, people may sing and dance with joy, but grief and vulnerability are often confined to private spaces or interpreted as weakness. Men, especially within patriarchal structures, are taught to suppress tears as a sign of strength, while women may be shamed for expressing anger. When these cultural expectations merge with certain strands of charismatic spirituality that emphasize victory and power, the result is emotional suppression disguised as faith. This creates what I call “holy dissonance” — a spiritual life vibrant in worship but disconnected from the honest emotional realities of believers.

The need for emotional understanding in the Christian context is therefore not merely therapeutic but theological. Emotions are not obstacles to holiness; they are instruments of revelation. They tell the truth about the state of the soul, exposing both spiritual vitality and areas of woundedness. The Psalms illustrate this vividly: David wept, questioned, and rejoiced before God without fear of rejection. His emotional transparency became a form of worship, demonstrating that faith does not silence emotion but sanctifies it. Jesus Himself modeled divine emotional intelligence. He wept at Lazarus’ tomb (John 11:35), felt compassion for the crowds (Mark 6:34), expressed righteous anger in the temple (John 2:15–17), and experienced deep anguish in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:38). His life affirmed that spiritual maturity includes the capacity to feel deeply and respond wisely.

Emotion, however, must be understood not only through theology but also through psychology. The human emotional system is a dynamic interplay between cognition, physiology, and belief. Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976) suggests that emotions arise from interpretations of events, not from events themselves. A man who loses his job may either despair or see the situation as an opportunity for redirection depending on how he thinks. Scripture echoes this truth in Proverbs 23:7, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Modern neuroscience also confirms that emotions are integral to decision-making and relational bonding (Damasio, 1994). When properly regulated, emotions energize love, empathy, and creativity; when mismanaged, they lead to anxiety, conflict, and burnout.

From a counseling perspective, managing emotion requires both insight and grace. Emotional management is not about suppression but stewardship. In my practice, I often guide clients through the Arno Profile System (APS), a temperament-based assessment that helps believers understand their God-given design. For example, a melancholic individual tends to internalize pain and may need encouragement to verbalize emotion, while a choleric might express anger impulsively and benefit from learning empathy and reflection. Through such awareness, clients begin to see

emotion not as sin but as a signal—one that can guide them toward transformation when interpreted under biblical truth.

Within Ghana's Pentecostal–Charismatic churches, emotional experiences are often intense during worship but rarely processed afterward. Congregants cry, dance, and pray fervently, yet many leave the sanctuary emotionally unhealed because there is no follow-up space for reflection and integration. Emotional catharsis without understanding can lead to dependency on spiritual highs rather than sustained growth. This underscores the need for a faith-informed counseling model that blends spiritual expression with psychological education.

Understanding human emotion, therefore, is not a luxury; it is an act of discipleship. When the Apostle Paul urged believers to be “transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Romans 12:2), he was calling them to emotional renewal as well. Renewed thinking shapes renewed feeling, and both are essential for spiritual wholeness. Emotional management grounded in faith invites believers to align their feelings with divine truth rather than deny or idolize them.

In contemporary Ghanaian life, where stress, economic uncertainty, and social comparison increasingly pressure individuals, emotional regulation has become a matter of pastoral urgency. Congregants seek comfort in faith communities, but pastors often lack psychological tools to address emotional pain effectively. Many rely solely on prayer, fasting, or deliverance without addressing the underlying cognitive and relational issues that perpetuate distress. As a result, emotional wounds persist under the surface of spiritual devotion.

This study arises from that gap — the need to equip Christian counselors, pastors, and believers with a biblically grounded, psychologically informed framework for understanding and managing emotions. It seeks to restore emotion to its rightful place as a sacred aspect of the human soul, capable of reflecting God's glory when guided by His Spirit. By integrating scriptural principles, psychological insight, and practical counseling experience, this work proposes a Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM) applicable within African Christian contexts.

From this foundation, one can see that emotion is neither the enemy nor the master of faith—it is its servant. Properly understood, emotions reveal the truth of the heart and invite divine healing. The challenge is not to feel less but to feel rightly, allowing the Spirit to bring order to the inner life. In doing so, the believer not only manages emotion but transforms it into a testimony of grace.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspectives on Human Emotions

Across the centuries, scholars, philosophers, and theologians have wrestled with the nature and meaning of emotion. In classical thought, Plato regarded emotion as an irrational force to be controlled by reason, while Aristotle viewed it as a vital part of moral formation when properly ordered (Nussbaum, 2001). Augustine, one of the early Christian fathers, advanced this discussion by identifying emotions as “*movements of the soul*” that reveal the direction of one's love—toward or away from God. For Augustine, emotions were not inherently sinful; they became disordered only when misaligned with divine purpose. Thomas Aquinas later built upon this, teaching that

emotions (*passiones*) were morally neutral and could serve virtue if guided by reason and grace (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q.22–48).

Modern psychology revolutionized the study of emotion by framing it within the human experience of thought, physiology, and behavior. Darwin (1872) argued that emotional expression has evolutionary functions in communication and survival. William James (1890) proposed that emotions follow physiological changes—people are sad because they cry, not the other way around. This early biological model paved the way for more integrated theories. The cognitive revolution, led by theorists such as Lazarus (1984) and Beck (1976), shifted the focus to thought appraisal: emotions arise from how one interprets events rather than the events themselves. When one perceives loss, injustice, or threat, the body and mind respond accordingly.

Gross (1998; 2015) developed Emotion Regulation Theory, which identifies adaptive strategies such as reappraisal, mindfulness, and cognitive control as essential for emotional well-being. In clinical psychology, these insights birthed techniques within Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), both emphasizing awareness and intentional management of emotion. These approaches, however, are often value-neutral, grounded in secular humanism, and risk divorcing emotion from meaning. This is where faith-informed counseling offers a richer synthesis—recognizing that emotions are not merely biochemical reactions but reflections of spiritual and existential realities.

Recent interdisciplinary research supports this integration. McMinn (2011) and Tan (2011) highlight that spiritual practices such as prayer, confession, and forgiveness function as emotional regulation processes, promoting peace and cognitive reframing. Worthington (2005) demonstrates how forgiveness therapy reduces anger and anxiety by transforming emotional memory through grace. In pastoral counseling literature, the movement toward “Christian emotionology” (Elliott, 2016) seeks to rediscover emotion as part of discipleship rather than pathology. Globally, faith-informed counseling is reshaping conversations about mental health by reuniting psychology with spirituality, viewing emotion as both a psychological signal and a sacred language of the soul.

2.2 Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Emotion

Scripture consistently portrays emotion as integral to human spirituality. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals a God who feels and responds with deep emotion. God’s compassion in Exodus 34:6, His grief in Genesis 6:6, and His joy in Zephaniah 3:17 all affirm that divine emotion is holy and purposeful. Jesus, the perfect image of the Father, embodied the full range of feeling: He wept at Lazarus’s tomb (John 11:35), rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21), felt anguish in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:38), and expressed righteous anger in the temple (John 2:15–17). His emotions were pure, governed by truth and love, teaching that emotional authenticity is compatible with holiness.

The Psalms stand as the most comprehensive biblical psychology of emotion. David’s laments (Psalms 13, 42, 77) reveal the therapeutic power of emotional expression before God. His joy, anger, fear, and despair become sacred acts of honesty. The Psalms thus legitimize emotion as part of worship. Similarly, the prophetic literature often channels divine emotion through human

voice—God’s jealousy in Hosea, grief in Jeremiah, and delight in Isaiah. The biblical narrative does not call believers to suppress emotion but to steward it through faith.

Paul’s epistles connect emotion to spiritual maturity. His exhortation in Ephesians 4:26, “*Be angry, but do not sin,*” affirms that emotions themselves are not sinful; it is their mismanagement that leads to sin. Philippians 4:6–7 prescribes emotional regulation through prayer and gratitude, integrating cognition (“*by prayer and supplication*”), behavior (“*with thanksgiving*”), and physiology (“*the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds*”). The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 — love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and self-control — can be interpreted as emotionally balanced virtues that emerge when the Holy Spirit governs the inner life.

Biblical theology also connects emotion to the condition of the heart. Proverbs 4:23 teaches, “*Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*” The “heart” in Hebrew anthropology (*lev*) refers to the seat of intellect, will, and emotion. Therefore, emotional health in Scripture is both a spiritual and moral responsibility. The wisdom literature often warns against unmanaged emotions: uncontrolled anger (Proverbs 29:11), envy (Proverbs 14:30), and fear (Isaiah 41:10). The call to “renew the mind” (Romans 12:2) extends to the emotional dimension, requiring believers to interpret feelings through the lens of divine truth.

Theologically, emotions serve as a diagnostic tool of the soul. They reveal where faith aligns—or fails to align—with God’s character. As Cloud and Townsend (2001) argue, emotions help us identify boundaries, relational wounds, and areas of spiritual growth. To be spiritually mature is not to feel less, but to feel rightly, with discernment and submission to the Spirit’s guidance. Thus, the integration of theology and psychology affirms emotion as a sacred compass pointing believers toward truth, repentance, and transformation.

2.3 African Perspectives on Emotion and Faith-Informed Counseling

African thought, by its nature, sees the human person as a holistic being — mind, body, spirit, and community intertwined. Emotions are not seen as private experiences alone but as communal expressions of belonging and continuity. Mbiti’s (1969) classical assertion, “*I am because we are,*” captures the African worldview where emotion finds meaning within relationships. Laughter, grief, and even anger are experienced collectively through rituals, songs, and proverbs that reflect shared identity. For instance, among the Akan of Ghana, the proverb “*Nipa yɛ abɔfra bo, na ɛyɛ akokɔ bo*” (the heart of a person is like a child’s and like a hen’s — easily stirred) acknowledges the tenderness and volatility of emotion as part of humanity.

In traditional African contexts, emotion is deeply spiritual. Sorrow, for example, may be interpreted not merely as psychological pain but as a disturbance in spiritual harmony — requiring both prayer and communal support for restoration. Modern African Pentecostalism has retained this expressive spirituality but often without sufficient theological or psychological grounding. Worship and deliverance services frequently serve as outlets for emotional catharsis, where believers cry, shout, or collapse under the power of prayer. While these expressions bring temporary relief, they seldom translate into lasting emotional regulation without reflective processing.

Oduro (2016) and Omenyo (2002) note that African pastoral theology must bridge the gap between spirituality and psychology, moving beyond spiritualized explanations of mental distress. In Ghanaian charismatic churches, the language of “deliverance” often replaces that of “therapy,” and emotional struggles are attributed to demonic attack rather than psychological stress or relational wounds. This spiritual reductionism, while rooted in sincere faith, often prevents believers from seeking professional help. In my counseling experience at Oheneba-Dornyo University College of Counselling Psychology (ODUCCP), many clients initially come for prayer but soon discover that their anxiety or depression stems from unresolved grief, family conflict, or unrealistic expectations, not spiritual possession.

Recent African Christian scholarship is challenging these dichotomies. The works of Nwoye (2015) on African cultural psychology and Oheneba-Dornyo (2024) on faith-informed counseling emphasize that healing must integrate theological truth with psychological understanding and cultural relevance. A Ghanaian Christian cannot separate faith from emotion, nor therapy from spirituality. Effective emotional management must therefore recognize both the communal and covenantal dimensions of African faith life. In this setting, counseling is not a private, clinical act but a sacred ministry that restores individuals to both God and community.

Moreover, African emotional expression is often mediated through art, music, and worship. In charismatic congregations, singing and prayer function as collective therapy. Emotional literacy, however, remains limited; congregants know how to express but not always how to interpret or manage what they feel. This calls for pastoral education in emotional awareness. When pastors and counselors understand emotional intelligence within theological boundaries, they can teach congregants to transform raw emotion into spiritual maturity.

In summary, the African perspective enriches the global discussion by emphasizing the communal, spiritual, and moral dimensions of emotion. Emotion is not merely psychological energy but spiritual communication — both with God and others. Faith-informed counseling in Africa, therefore, must move beyond symptom management to holistic discipleship. It must help believers name, understand, and transform emotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, within the context of their faith community.

From these global, biblical, and African insights, one can see that emotion is a divine gift requiring both understanding and direction. When theology and psychology meet, emotion becomes not a problem to fix but a pathway to grace. The next section will therefore develop the **theoretical and biblical framework** that grounds emotional management in both Scripture and psychological science — the foundation for the faith-based model proposed in this study.

3. Theoretical and Biblical Framework

Understanding human emotion requires both a scientific grasp of human behavior and a theological comprehension of the soul. While psychology examines the mechanisms of emotion, theology reveals its meaning. Integrating both perspectives produces a more holistic understanding of emotional life — one that sees emotions not simply as psychological phenomena, but as spiritual messages guiding believers toward growth, repentance, and relational healing.

Faith-informed counseling operates on this integrative foundation. The counselor stands at the intersection of truth and empathy — interpreting emotion not only through the lens of cognition but through the redemptive reality of Scripture. Three key frameworks underpin this approach: **Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)**, **Family Systems Theory**, and the **Biblical Theology of Emotion**.

3.1 Cognitive-Behavioral Theory and Emotional Regulation

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976) posits that emotions are directly influenced by cognition — the way a person interprets reality. Distorted thoughts produce painful emotions, while truth-based thinking generates healthy emotional responses. For example, someone who constantly believes “I am a failure” will feel hopeless even when evidence suggests otherwise. The problem is not the event but the interpretation of the event. This cognitive triad—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—creates the emotional climate of a person’s life.

In Christian terms, this principle aligns with Proverbs 23:7: “*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*” Scripture affirms that wrong beliefs produce inner turmoil, while truth sets people free (John 8:32). The Apostle Paul’s admonition to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2) reflects the essence of cognitive restructuring — replacing lies with truth.

In my counseling practice, I have seen how clients’ emotional suffering often stems from unexamined beliefs about God, self, and others. One young woman from Accra battled guilt for years after divorce, convinced she had failed God’s plan. Through faith-informed cognitive restructuring, she learned to reframe her experience through grace rather than condemnation. By meditating on Romans 8:1, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*” she began to internalize forgiveness. As her thoughts shifted, her emotions followed.

CBT provides counselors with a structure for emotional management that resonates with Christian sanctification. Emotional healing occurs as the mind is renewed by truth. However, secular CBT stops short of explaining the spiritual dimension of this renewal — the work of the Holy Spirit who illuminates truth and transforms the heart (John 14:26). Faith-informed counseling therefore extends CBT by recognizing divine agency in the process of change. The believer does not merely reframe thoughts intellectually but surrenders them to Christ for transformation.

3.2 Family Systems Theory and Emotional Patterns

While CBT focuses on individual cognition, **Family Systems Theory** (Bowen, 1978) examines how emotional patterns develop within relationships. It teaches that no emotion exists in isolation; every feeling is shaped within the web of family and community. Families pass down not only traditions and values but emotional legacies — patterns of anxiety, conflict avoidance, control, or detachment. These patterns become emotional scripts that individuals unconsciously replay in adulthood.

Bowen’s concept of *differentiation of self* — the ability to remain emotionally connected yet psychologically autonomous — parallels biblical wisdom about identity and boundaries. Galatians 6:5 teaches that each person must “carry his own load,” while Galatians 6:2 encourages believers

to “bear one another’s burdens.” This balance reflects emotional differentiation: carrying personal responsibility without losing compassion for others.

In Ghanaian families, where collectivism is deeply ingrained, emotional enmeshment can often hinder personal growth. For example, a young professional woman I once counseled struggled with guilt whenever she made decisions independent of her mother’s opinion. Through genogram mapping, she discovered a generational pattern of emotional dependence among the women in her lineage. By applying both scriptural truth and systems analysis, she learned that honoring her mother did not mean surrendering her individuality. In time, her emotional anxiety reduced, and she began to walk in greater peace.

Family Systems Theory therefore offers Christian counselors insight into intergenerational emotions and relational dynamics that often manifest as depression, fear, or anger. Scripture itself recognizes these patterns. Exodus 20:5 warns of “the iniquities of the fathers visited upon the children,” not as punishment but as consequence — learned behaviors and emotional tendencies passed through generations. The Gospel, however, provides liberation from these cycles through new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Integrating Family Systems Theory within a biblical framework empowers counselors to address emotions relationally, not just individually. It reminds believers that healing is communal — the family of faith becomes a redemptive system that replaces dysfunctional emotional legacies with healthy, Spirit-led relationships. The Church, when equipped, becomes both a sanctuary and a system of healing.

3.3 Biblical Theology of Emotion: God’s Design and Human Response

Biblical theology situates emotion at the core of what it means to be human. In Scripture, the Hebrew word for heart, *lev*, and the Greek *kardia*, include the seat of thought, emotion, and will. Thus, to love the Lord “with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5) implies emotional devotion, not mere obedience. God Himself is portrayed as emotional — compassionate (Psalm 103:13), jealous for His people (Exodus 34:14), grieved by sin (Ephesians 4:30), and joyful over redemption (Zephaniah 3:17). Since humans are made in His image, emotional capacity reflects divine likeness.

The distortion of emotion through sin began at the Fall. Adam and Eve’s first recorded emotions after disobedience were fear and shame (Genesis 3:10). These feelings, though painful, served as mirrors of spiritual disconnection. From that moment, emotions became both diagnostic and directive: they reveal the state of the soul and signal the need for restoration. The redemptive story of Scripture — from lament to joy, from sorrow to peace — unfolds as a journey of emotional reconciliation with God.

Jesus Christ exemplified perfect emotional balance. He expressed sorrow without despair, anger without sin, and joy without arrogance. His tears at Lazarus’s tomb were not weakness but compassion; His anguish in Gethsemane revealed intimacy with the Father. Through His incarnation, Jesus sanctified human emotion. Hebrews 4:15 declares that He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” meaning He enters our emotional world and redeems it from within.

From a theological counseling standpoint, this truth reframes emotion as a site of encounter with God. Pain becomes an invitation to prayer; fear becomes a doorway to faith. In pastoral practice, I have observed that when clients bring their raw emotions into God's presence — instead of suppressing them — transformation begins. A church elder once told me he had not cried in thirty years until the day he confessed his hidden grief during prayer. That moment of emotional surrender marked the beginning of inner renewal. Emotion, in the hands of faith, becomes worship.

Biblically, emotional management is not emotional denial but emotional discipleship. Paul's command to "put off the old self" (Ephesians 4:22–24) implies emotional reformation. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) represents emotional virtues — joy instead of despair, patience instead of irritation, gentleness instead of hostility, self-control instead of impulsivity. These virtues are cultivated, not through willpower alone, but through spiritual formation — the gradual sanctification of feelings under divine truth.

The psalmist's rhythm of lament and praise, confession and confidence, models the process of emotional alignment with God's truth. In modern psychological terms, this mirrors *emotional processing*: acknowledging, expressing, and integrating emotion into one's narrative. However, Scripture adds the redemptive dimension — that emotion, when surrendered to God, becomes a vessel of grace.

3.4 Integrative Faith-Based Framework

When we synthesize the insights of CBT, Family Systems, and biblical theology, a cohesive understanding of human emotion emerges.

- **From CBT**, we learn that emotions are shaped by beliefs and thoughts — renewing the mind renews the heart.
- **From Family Systems**, we learn that emotions are relationally patterned — healing the system restores the individual.
- **From Scripture**, we learn that emotions are spiritual mirrors — they reveal where God's truth must enter.

Together, these frameworks create the foundation of a **Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM)** that integrates awareness, reflection, and transformation under divine guidance. Emotion thus becomes both a diagnostic and redemptive tool. It shows where the soul is broken and where grace must flow.

In the Ghanaian context, where faith and community shape every emotional expression, this integrative framework provides a culturally sensitive and biblically faithful model for counseling. It allows believers to honor emotion without idolizing it, to feel deeply yet live wisely, and to bring every emotional burden to the cross where healing begins.

From this integrative standpoint, one can see that emotion is not a psychological accident but a spiritual language—a divine invitation to wholeness. The next section will illustrate how this framework unfolds practically through counseling encounters in Ghana, forming the **Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM)** that serves as the study's applied outcome.

4. Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM): Findings and Case Analysis

4.1 Overview of the Model

The **Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM)** is an integrative counseling framework that combines psychological theory, biblical theology, and practical pastoral experience to help believers understand and manage emotions. It was developed in response to the growing emotional dissonance observed in Ghanaian Christian contexts, where faith is strong but emotional literacy remains limited.

The model emerged inductively from repeated counseling patterns within my practice and from supervising postgraduate counseling students at the Oheneba-Dornyo University College of Counselling Psychology (ODUCCP). Across diverse cases — anxiety, grief, marital conflict, burnout, and identity crisis — one consistent truth appeared: when emotion is interpreted through faith and psychological understanding, healing deepens, and transformation becomes sustainable.

The FEMM proposes a four-phase process that mirrors both cognitive-behavioral restructuring and spiritual formation. It can be visualized as a **cyclical movement rather than a linear progression**, indicating that emotional growth is ongoing and dynamic.

Diagrammatic Summary (Narrative Form):

The model can be imagined as a circle divided into four quadrants — **Awareness, Expression, Reframing, and Transformation**. At the center of the circle is the **Holy Spirit**, representing divine guidance. The outer ring symbolizes **community and accountability**, showing that emotional healing in faith contexts occurs relationally, not in isolation. The circular form emphasizes continuity — believers often revisit earlier phases as they mature emotionally and spiritually.

4.2 Phase One: Awareness — Naming the Emotion and Its Source

Awareness is the foundation of emotional management. It involves helping clients recognize and name what they feel without judgment. Emotion, as the “voice of the heart,” cannot be healed if it remains hidden or denied. In counseling sessions, many Ghanaian Christians initially resist acknowledging negative emotions, fearing they indicate spiritual failure.

One memorable case involved a **young urban pastor** in Accra who came for counseling complaining of “spiritual dryness.” After discussion, it became clear that he was experiencing **anger and grief** from repeated betrayal by his associate ministers. However, he masked these emotions under theological explanations such as “God is testing my patience.” Through reflective dialogue and Psalm-based meditation, particularly Psalm 13, he was invited to **name his true feeling**: anger. As he verbalized it, tears followed — his first in years. That moment of emotional awareness became sacred; it broke the illusion that faith and emotion are enemies.

In FEMM, awareness is guided by **three reflective questions**:

1. *What am I feeling?*
2. *Why am I feeling it?*
3. *What truth or lie am I believing about this situation?*

These questions engage both cognition and spirituality. By naming feelings in God's presence, clients experience emotional honesty — a first step toward healing. As Psalm 139:23–24 prays, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart.*” Awareness, therefore, is not merely self-examination but spiritual openness.

4.3 Phase Two: Expression — Releasing Emotion Safely and Spiritually

Once awareness is established, clients are guided to express emotions appropriately. Many Ghanaian believers have been taught to suppress emotion, viewing tears or vulnerability as weakness. However, unexpressed emotions become internal burdens that manifest as psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, or burnout.

In one counseling session, a **market woman from Kumasi**, active in her Pentecostal church, sought help for “spiritual oppression.” She described sleeplessness, tightness in her chest, and recurring nightmares. As we explored her life, she revealed unresolved grief from losing her husband five years earlier. Church members had told her to “be strong in faith,” and she never allowed herself to mourn. During a guided lament exercise using Psalm 61 and a short written reflection, she was encouraged to **speak to God in her own words**. When she finally verbalized her sorrow and forgiveness, she sobbed deeply. That act of expression was transformative; she reported sleeping peacefully that night for the first time in months.

FEMM recognizes expression as a **redemptive act**, not merely a cathartic one. Emotion is released not into the void but into the hands of a compassionate God. Expression may take many culturally appropriate forms — prayer, journaling, art, music, or movement. In some counseling groups, singing traditional Ghanaian hymns such as “*Ɔdomfo Nyame, me dɔ wo*” (“Merciful God, I love You”) becomes a communal ritual of emotional release. Expression transforms private pain into communal healing when guided by grace and confidentiality.

4.4 Phase Three: Reframing — Renewing the Mind through Biblical and Cognitive Insight

Reframing represents the cognitive and theological heart of the FEMM model. Once emotions are acknowledged and expressed, the counselor helps the client reinterpret those emotions through Scripture and truth. Here, **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** principles merge with biblical wisdom to renew perception. The goal is not to deny the emotion but to realign it with God's truth.

A practical illustration involves a **female university lecturer** from Tema who struggled with chronic anxiety about financial instability. Her thought pattern was: “*If I fail to provide for my family, I am worthless.*” Through cognitive restructuring and reflection on Matthew 6:25–34, she began to challenge this belief. Instead of focusing on scarcity, she meditated on God's sufficiency. Over weeks of journaling, prayer, and behavioral activation (such as budgeting and gratitude practice), her anxiety levels decreased significantly. She later testified that emotional peace returned “when I stopped carrying what God had already promised to carry.”

Reframing thus integrates **faith-based cognition** — the renewing of the mind — with emotional restoration. Clients are invited to compare their inner dialogue with Scripture and replace distorted beliefs with redemptive truth. The counselor functions as a facilitator of illumination, guiding clients to discern between self-condemnation and conviction by the Spirit.

This process can be summarized as a simple sequence:

Emotion → Interpretation → Truth → Renewal.

It echoes Paul's progression in Philippians 4:8 — *“Whatever is true, noble, right, pure... think about such things.”* Emotional reframing restores the believer's mental and spiritual alignment with reality as God defines it.

4.5 Phase Four: Transformation — Living Spirit-Led Emotional Maturity

The final phase, **transformation**, represents the integration of emotion, belief, and behavior under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is not a single event but a gradual sanctification of the inner life. Transformation occurs when emotional management becomes a spiritual discipline — when believers consistently practice awareness, expression, and reframing as part of daily life.

A counseling case that illustrates transformation involved a **married couple**, both church workers, struggling with cycles of conflict. The husband, temperamentally choleric, often dominated conversations, while the wife, melancholic, withdrew into silence. Through temperament analysis using the **Arno Profile System (APS)** and FEMM interventions, they learned that their emotional reactions were not purely moral failures but temperament-driven patterns requiring balance. In counseling sessions, they practiced listening prayers and conflict journaling, identifying triggers and reframing assumptions. Over time, they reported improved communication and restored intimacy.

Transformation, in this sense, is both psychological and spiritual. It includes behavioral changes — reduced conflict, improved communication, better self-control — and spiritual growth, such as increased compassion, forgiveness, and humility. The counselor's role is to facilitate spiritual formation alongside emotional regulation, echoing Galatians 5:22–23: the fruit of the Spirit as emotional maturity.

At this phase, emotion is not suppressed or glorified but **redeemed**. Clients learn to respond rather than react, to discern the message of emotion without being enslaved by it. The Holy Spirit becomes the continual counselor, guiding the believer into emotional wholeness.

4.6 Key Findings from Practice-Based Application

The application of the FEMM model across individual and group sessions at ODUCCP's Christian Counseling Clinic yielded consistent qualitative themes:

1. **Emotional literacy leads to spiritual depth.** Clients who learned to name and reflect on emotions reported deeper prayer lives and stronger faith.

2. **Scriptural meditation accelerates cognitive reframing.** Using verses such as Psalm 42:5 and Isaiah 41:10 during emotional reflection reduced anxiety and guilt.
3. **Community accountability sustains change.** Group prayer and mentorship reinforced individual emotional growth.
4. **Temperament awareness enhances empathy.** Understanding differences reduced marital and pastoral conflicts.
5. **Spiritual disciplines anchor emotional management.** Clients who integrated journaling, fasting, and gratitude into their routines maintained long-term stability.

4.7 Implications of the FEMM Model

The FEMM framework demonstrates that emotional healing in Christian contexts cannot be achieved through psychology or spirituality alone. It requires an integrated process — cognitive insight illuminated by Scripture and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

For Ghanaian counselors and pastors, this model provides a culturally grounded, faith-sensitive tool for emotional formation. It aligns with indigenous communal values while addressing modern psychological needs. FEMM equips the Church to become both a therapeutic and spiritual community — where believers learn not only to pray for peace but to practice it emotionally.

From this synthesis, one can see that emotional healing is not a departure from faith but its fulfillment. The believer who learns to manage emotion biblically becomes not only psychologically stable but spiritually radiant. Emotion, in the hands of grace, becomes an altar — a place where the human heart meets the heart of God.

5. Implications for Christian Counselling Practice

The Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM) offers profound implications for the practice of Christian counseling, pastoral care, and counselor education in Africa. It provides an operational bridge between theology and psychology, faith and feeling, spirituality and science. In contexts like Ghana, where religion shapes both public life and private emotion, the FEMM framework affirms that emotional healing is a sacred responsibility — one that belongs equally to the therapist, the pastor, and the Church.

5.1 Implications for Counselor Formation and Professional Identity

The first and most direct application of the FEMM model lies in the **formation of the Christian counselor**. In traditional training, many counselors are equipped with theories and techniques but little personal emotional awareness. Yet, emotional maturity is the bedrock of therapeutic competence. A counselor who has not confronted their own feelings will either over-identify with or emotionally withdraw from clients.

FEMM calls for **integrated formation** — academic, spiritual, and personal. Counselors must not only understand emotion conceptually but also experience it redemptively. At Oheneba-Dornyo University College of Counselling Psychology (ODUCCP), where spiritual and professional development run concurrently, counseling trainees are encouraged to engage in **personal**

reflection journals, group process sessions, and guided prayer retreats. These activities are designed to help them identify their emotional patterns, temperament strengths, and vulnerabilities.

As one graduate counselor noted in supervision, “The more I learned to name my own feelings in God’s presence, the better I understood my clients.” This statement captures the FEMM principle that **self-awareness precedes empathy**. Training institutions, therefore, must cultivate spaces for counselors to grow emotionally as they grow academically.

Further, FEMM challenges Christian counselors to redefine professionalism through the lens of faith. Professionalism is not emotional detachment but disciplined compassion — the ability to feel deeply without losing objectivity. Counselors must practice **spiritually anchored empathy**: entering the client’s pain with presence but guided by the Spirit’s wisdom. Such balance prevents burnout and reinforces the counselor’s calling as a vessel of both knowledge and grace.

5.2 Implications for Church-Based Counseling and Pastoral Ministry

The Church remains the first point of contact for emotional help across Ghana and much of Africa. Pastors, elders, and prayer leaders often serve as informal therapists, though most lack structured psychological training. The FEMM model provides a biblical and practical framework that can empower church leaders to engage emotion more wisely within pastoral ministry.

Pastors and lay counselors can use FEMM as a **pastoral tool** to help congregants process emotions in prayer and reflection rather than suppress them through spiritual denial. Teaching the four phases — *Awareness, Expression, Reframing, and Transformation* — can transform counseling conversations, discipleship sessions, and even preaching. For instance, a sermon on David’s lament can include a guided reflection on emotional awareness; a prayer meeting can include time for emotional expression through Scripture-based journaling.

Churches that adopt this model may experience a shift from performance-driven spirituality to **authentic community healing**. Emotional transparency becomes normalized, and members learn that faith and feeling can coexist. In Ghanaian Pentecostal–Charismatic settings, where exuberant worship is already emotionally expressive, FEMM adds a layer of reflection and accountability. It helps pastors move from “emotional release” to **emotional discipleship** — guiding congregants to interpret their feelings through Scripture and apply truth beyond the worship setting.

Moreover, the model encourages the development of **church-based counseling ministries**. These ministries can serve as emotional triage centers — identifying congregants in distress, providing preliminary counseling, and referring complex cases to trained professionals. Within such ministries, volunteers can be trained in basic emotional literacy, trauma awareness, and confidentiality ethics, helping bridge the gap between pastoral care and clinical practice.

5.3 Implications for Institutional Integration at ODUCCP and Beyond

At the institutional level, the FEMM model aligns closely with ODUCCP’s mission of integrating faith and practice in counseling education. It offers a framework for **curriculum development, supervised practicum, and research innovation**.

In the academic context, FEMM can be incorporated into key courses such as *Theories of Counselling, Crisis and Trauma Counseling, Christian Foundations in Counselling, and Marriage and Family Therapy*. The model can also serve as the foundation for specialized workshops and continuing professional development (CPD) programs, particularly in topics such as “Emotional Intelligence for Pastors,” “Faith-Based Stress Management,” and “Healing the Inner Self through Scripture.”

At the **Professional Christian Counselling Clinic (PCCC)** of ODUCCP, the FEMM framework can be applied as a clinical protocol for emotional wellness interventions. Practicum students could employ the four-phase process with clients under supervision, integrating spiritual assessment tools such as the *Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI)* and temperament tools such as the *Arno Profile System (APS)*. By documenting outcomes, ODUCCP could contribute empirical evidence to the growing body of African Christian counseling literature.

Institutionally, FEMM also provides a structure for **community engagement and outreach**. Churches, schools, and NGOs could benefit from FEMM-based emotional literacy workshops that contextualize psychology in biblical language. For example, a community seminar titled “*Emotions and the Christian Life*” could use Ghanaian proverbs alongside Scripture to illustrate emotional truth. Proverbs such as “*Ɔbonsam mframa bɔ, nanso Nyame na ɔma ɔpeye da*” (“The devil may stir the wind, but God determines the calm”) can help participants interpret anxiety or fear within faith frameworks familiar to African ears.

Through such programs, ODUCCP continues to demonstrate that academic theology and pastoral psychology are not separate streams but converging rivers that nourish both the Church and society.

5.4 Broader Professional Implications

Beyond the institutional and ecclesial settings, FEMM contributes to the **broader professional field** of counseling by promoting a model of integration that is culturally sensitive and ethically balanced. It validates the spiritual dimension of emotion without violating scientific rigor. For secular practitioners working in religiously pluralistic African contexts, FEMM demonstrates how faith can be harnessed as a healing resource rather than a hindrance.

In professional supervision, counselors trained in FEMM learn to interpret emotional countertransference not merely as a psychological phenomenon but as an opportunity for self-reflection and prayer. This fusion of insight and devotion refines the counselor’s presence and enhances therapeutic alliance.

Furthermore, the FEMM model encourages collaboration between clergy and mental health professionals. By creating shared language and frameworks, it fosters **interdisciplinary partnerships** — pastors, psychologists, and social workers can collectively address emotional health from complementary angles. Such collaboration is vital for national mental health development in Ghana, where faith-based institutions serve large segments of the population that remain outside formal psychiatric systems.

From these implications, one can see that the FEMM model is not only a therapeutic framework but a missional vision. It reclaims emotion as a gift of God and restores the Church's role as a sanctuary for healing minds and hearts. Through structured counselor formation, church-based emotional education, and institutional research, Ghana and Africa at large can pioneer a new generation of emotionally intelligent, spiritually grounded Christian counselors.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Restoring the Sacred Meaning of Emotion

Emotion is one of the most powerful gifts entrusted to humanity. It reveals the movement of the soul, the pulse of relationships, and the rhythm of spiritual life. When rightly understood, it becomes not an obstacle to faith but a pathway to intimacy with God. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture bears witness to a God who feels — not with instability but with perfect love. The weeping Christ, the compassionate Father, and the grieving Spirit together affirm that divine emotion is purposeful, redemptive, and holy. Humanity, made in the image of this emotional God, was designed to feel deeply and respond righteously.

In many Ghanaian churches, however, emotion has been either over-spiritualized or under-theologized. Some believers suppress feelings in the name of faith, while others indulge in unexamined emotionalism under the guise of spirituality. Both extremes distort the biblical picture of wholeness. The Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM) presented in this study offers a balanced approach — one that honors both emotional authenticity and spiritual discipline. It teaches believers to feel with wisdom, to express with reverence, and to transform emotion through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

From the pastoral perspective, the FEMM framework redefines emotional management as *spiritual formation*. To manage emotion in a Christian sense is to bring the entire affective life under the lordship of Christ. This process does not erase emotional intensity; it sanctifies it. A believer's tears, fears, or joys become channels through which grace flows. Thus, emotional regulation is not only a psychological skill but a theological act — an act of worship that aligns the heart with truth.

Theologically, emotional wholeness is part of the redemptive work of Christ. Salvation restores not only the spirit but the soul, the seat of thought and feeling. When Jesus declared, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you*" (John 14:27), He offered not a momentary calm but a reordering of the inner world. This peace includes emotional stability — a state where faith anchors feeling, and feeling reflects faith. In this light, counseling becomes a ministry of restoration, calling believers back to emotional harmony with God's design.

6.2 Theological Significance of Emotional Wholeness

Theologically, emotions occupy a sacred place in the human journey toward sanctification. They are not morally neutral impulses but reflections of the heart's orientation. When submitted to the Spirit, emotions become instruments of discernment and transformation. When left ungoverned, they become distortions that mislead and divide. Emotional wholeness, therefore, is inseparable from holiness.

Scripture repeatedly links emotional maturity to spiritual maturity. The Apostle Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4:6–7 — *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”* — reveals the divine method for emotional regulation: acknowledgment, expression, and surrender. Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) lists virtues that correspond to emotionally balanced living: joy (positive affect), peace (regulation of anxiety), patience (impulse control), and gentleness (empathy). These are not mere moral achievements but manifestations of emotional sanctification.

In the Ghanaian charismatic setting, where faith expression is vibrant and emotion-filled, the theological task is not to reduce passion but to redirect it. Emotion is the energy of worship; when harnessed by truth, it becomes praise. The FEMM model thus provides a theology of feeling that complements the theology of faith. It reminds believers that spirituality divorced from emotional health becomes hollow, while emotion detached from truth becomes chaos. True discipleship integrates both.

6.3 Practical Recommendations for Ghanaian Faith Communities

1. Promote Emotional Literacy in Churches

Churches should intentionally teach about emotion from biblical and psychological perspectives. Sermon series, Bible studies, and youth workshops could explore emotional themes such as anger, grief, and joy using biblical case studies (e.g., David's lament, Jesus' compassion, Elijah's burnout). Pastors can demystify emotion by showing how it aligns with faith rather than opposes it.

2. Establish Church-Based Counseling Ministries

Faith communities should move from spontaneous “deliverance” approaches to structured emotional care systems. Trained counselors and pastoral teams can implement the FEMM framework in small group sessions, marriage enrichment programs, and crisis intervention ministries. Churches can collaborate with institutions like ODUCCP and the Ghana Psychological Council to ensure professional ethical standards are maintained.

3. Integrate Emotional Awareness into Pastoral Training

Seminaries and Bible colleges should make emotional intelligence and faith-based counseling core components of ministerial formation. Courses such as “Theology of Emotion” or “Pastoral Care and Emotional Healing” would equip future ministers to lead with empathy and emotional wisdom. Emotional competence should be seen as a leadership virtue equal to theological knowledge.

4. Encourage Faith-Informed Professional Development

Professional counselors, psychologists, and therapists working in Christian contexts must continue integrating theology and psychology in their practice. Institutions such as ODUCCP can develop continuous professional development (CPD) modules on emotional management, trauma care, and

temperament counseling. This ensures that faith-informed approaches remain academically rigorous and clinically relevant.

5. Foster Collaboration Between Church and Academia

There is a pressing need for partnership between churches, counseling institutions, and universities. Collaborative research projects could evaluate the outcomes of FEMM-based interventions in real congregational settings. Such data would enrich both theological reflection and public mental health strategies in Ghana.

6. Create Safe Spaces for Emotional Expression

Faith communities should cultivate environments where believers can express emotional pain without fear of judgment. Pastoral care units can facilitate “healing circles” or support groups for grief, addiction recovery, and relationship restoration. When emotion is shared and processed communally, it aligns with the African ethos of healing through belonging.

7. Integrate African Wisdom with Biblical Counseling

Ghanaian proverbs, music, and storytelling traditions carry deep emotional insight. For example, the Akan saying “*Wosisi w’ani ho, na enye ɔpe a ede nsuo*” (“It is not the rain that causes tears, but the heart”) captures the depth of emotional introspection that Scripture also teaches (Proverbs 14:10). Integrating such indigenous wisdom within FEMM counseling enhances cultural resonance and emotional identification.

6.4 Vision for the Future of Faith-Informed Emotional Care

The future of Christian counseling in Africa depends on our ability to bridge revelation and research — to let the Word of God and the science of psychology inform one another. The FEMM model positions Ghana and the ODUCCP as key contributors to this emerging discipline. By training emotionally literate Christian leaders, the Church becomes not only a center of worship but a center of wellness.

In the next decade, faith-informed emotional care should become a recognized field of specialization within African mental health systems. This requires not only academic excellence but also theological courage — the courage to affirm that the heart matters as much as the mind, and that tears are as sacred as tongues. As the African Church matures, it must learn that revival begins not only in the pulpit but also in the heart’s healing.

As Proverbs 15:13 reminds us, “*A joyful heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.*” God’s redemptive work aims to restore both the countenance and the heart. When the Church embraces emotional understanding as part of discipleship, believers become living testimonies of integrated wholeness — thinking clearly, feeling deeply, and loving fully.

6.5 Concluding Reflection

From this exploration, one can see that emotional wholeness is not a luxury but a theological necessity. Emotion, when governed by truth and grace, becomes the language through which faith breathes. The Faith-Based Emotional Management Model (FEMM) is more than a counseling technique; it is a theology of healing, a pedagogy of compassion, and a pastoral roadmap for the African Church.

In counseling rooms, I have seen hardened hearts melt through prayerful emotional awareness, pastors regain peace after naming hidden anger, and believers rediscover God's tenderness through their tears. Such encounters affirm that emotion is not a weakness to suppress but a sacred current carrying the soul toward transformation.

The Church in Ghana — and indeed across Africa — stands at a new frontier of ministry: the ministry of emotional redemption. When faith meets feeling under the authority of Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit, humanity is restored to its original harmony. The emotionally whole believer reflects the image of the emotionally present God.

As the Psalmist declares, “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*” (Psalm 147:3). This remains the eternal mission of faith-informed counseling — to heal hearts, renew minds, and guide emotions into the peace of Christ.

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