

## **Feelings are Fickle and Provide Poor Guidance!**

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Have you ever felt “on top of the world”? It’s a great sensation, isn’t it? How long does it last for you? A couple of days maybe? Maybe a little longer if the situation is a big deal in your life?

How do you think Michael Phelps is feeling these days? (Phelps won eight gold medals in swimming in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His 14 Olympic gold medals are more than any other individual in history.) The media love him; he’s the focus of their attention. So, how long do you think his euphoria will last?

The excitement always fades, doesn’t it? So, why does it feel so hopeless when you feel “down”? If jubilation passes quickly, won’t your disappointment, discouragement, or feelings of inadequacy also dissipate? You may know intellectually that they will, but when you are in low spirits, it *feels* permanent!

Imagine that you are Milorad Cavic. Never heard of him? He swims for Serbia and last week won his first Olympic medal. That’s cause for celebration, right?

The videotape of the final seconds of the 100 meter butterfly has been shown repeatedly on television. Cavic was ahead and cruising to the wall, when Michael Phelps made a final burst, beating him by .01 second, the smallest increment the timing equipment measures.

Imagine that you train for eight years. At age sixteen, you make it to the 2000 Olympics--but your times aren’t fast enough to qualify for the finals. You keep working and you make it to the 2004 Olympics, but again you find disappointment in the early heats.

Four years later during the preliminaries, you set a new Olympic record, 50.76 seconds! Having prepared your whole life for this moment, your dream is here! Amazingly, you swim 0.17 seconds faster than the record you set just two days ago! Yet a Michael Phelps fingertip grabs your gold medal.

How would you feel? You’ve trained all your life, and the guy who’s already receiving so much glory gets even more attention. How many times might you lament, “If only I had taken one more stroke?”

In an interview, Milorad confessed, “If I had lost by a 10th of a second or two-10ths of a second, then I could probably be a lot cooler about this. But with a 100th of a second, gosh....I think if we did this again, I could win it.”

Ah, but it doesn’t work that way. The results are in the record books. Milorad set a fast pace, but Michael broke his Olympic record. This seventh win tied Phelps with the 1982 record of Mark Spitz for the most gold in any single Olympics.

Have I generated some compassion in you for Milorad Cavic? Does he feel elated because he won an Olympic silver medal? Or does he feel disappointed because he missed a gold medal by less than an inch? With all the attention on “the winner,” does Cavic feel like a “left-out loser”?

Only those closest to Milorad will know. He may not even reveal his deepest feelings to them.

So, what does Milorad do now? Does he redirect his life, focusing on something new? Or does he rededicate himself to swimming, coming back in four years with new commitment and hope?

We all experience disappointments in life. You have them, and so do those who look to you for direction. How do you help them? What counsel do you offer?

Feelings are fickle. They change quickly. Feelings may be good indicators of what’s going on inside us, and we should investigate what they represent. But feelings make poor rudders. Allowing feelings to guide your choices sometimes causes you to expend your limited time and energy in unproductive ways. For making decisions, your values and your vision for the future are far more reliable!

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*[This update was added later.] In the 2012 Olympics in London, Michael Phelps once again won the gold medal for the 100-meter butterfly. Although Milorad Cavic was leading at the final turn, he faded down the stretch and came in fourth. Cavic retired from competitive swimming after the 2012 Olympics.*

*Michael Phelps continued his Olympic victories. In 2018, when he retired, he had won 23 Olympic gold medals and 28 total Olympic medals.*

*This month, I watched Caeleb Dressel, the anticipated successor to Michael Phelps, easily win a 200-meter medley at a national swim meet in Atlanta, at the Georgia Tech swimming facility.*

*Dennis Hooper, June, 2018*

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*[More information added later.] After his retirement in 2018, Michael Phelps revealed that he suffers from depression and ADHD--and has all his life. He kept it quiet so he would not be distracted by questions from the media. As a living example of what can be done despite the demons of mental and emotional duress, Phelps is now dedicating his life to changing the way we humans look at what it means to deal with this very real human condition. Look at this recent USA Today article:*

*<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/olympics/2018/10/25/michaels-phelps-follows-new-career-path-olympics-behind/176301002/>*

*How about Milo Cavic? After the 2008 Olympics, Milo had back surgery. Many doctors told him he would never swim again. Yet he came back, driving himself to a fourth-place finish in the 100-meter butterfly in the 2012 Olympics, an amazing feat. What's he doing these days? What he loves--coaching swimming and providing motivational speeches that capitalize on Simon Sinek's model of Begin with Why. Read about Cavic's life after the 2012 Olympics in this October 2018 issue of "Swimming World Magazine":*

*<https://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/news/the-making-of-milo-cavic-living-without-regret/>*

*Dennis Hooper, June, 2019*