

Part 1: THE PROBLEM OF EMOTIONALLY UNHEALTHY SPIRITUALITY

I want to welcome you as you begin this journey, both as individuals and as a group, into what we call the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course, or the EHS Course. I am excited you are here and pray the next several weeks will enable you to walk through a door – a door into a new, very alive, very powerful transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

The church is in deep trouble today. It is like we are sitting on top of an iceberg that is melting, but we reluctant to make the needed changes. Millions of dollars have been spent to analyze the complexity and trends of what is happening in the church today.

Here is what we know:

- The total number of people who identify themselves as evangelical Xians w/ personal relationship with Jesus is declining rapidly.
- The broader culture of the USA is becoming more opposed to the values of Scripture more quickly than most of us realize.
- An estimated 8 out of 10 youth from Christian homes walk away from their faith by age 23.
- In most congregations, ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance. This age group is “missing in action”
- Only one out of four American Christians study the Bible regularly to find direction for their lives (Gallup, 2003).

The list actually goes on, but I think you get the point.

The iceberg of church life as we know it is melting. That is no longer in doubt. As 2 massive studies have shown us – one by the Willow Creek Association and the other by George Barna -“People are not experiencing transformation in our churches.” **PP**

Most Xians have either slipped into a spiritual coma or are stuck at a wall in their walk with Christ. A new program or quick fix is not going to turn around this reality.

I experienced this myself after 17 years of being a Christian.

I had incredible conversion of grace/free love of God/salvation at 19 yrs old.

IVCF – spiritual disciplines, Word, Evangelism,
Passion evangelism – global missions

GCTS – Seminary –
1 yr. Costa Rica, -

I became pastor, planted NLF in Sept 1987

QUEENS – 2/3 born outside USA
Working class – poor, CDC

75 nations – Latin American, Asia, African Am, Jews/Arabs

Church growing – 100, 200, Planted Spanish congregation

Healings, deliverance, prophetic—exciting, NT!!!! Not miss service

The church was growing.

6-7 yrs into it !!

PP – HEAVY YOKE vs. EASY

I realize people were changing but not changing deeply.

PP –Iceberg --- BS, Gift Discovery, serve, giving, share X, small group

Our definition of discipleship too narrow.

Something wasn't right. People not changing deeply

The disconnect – people's fire for God/zeal – yet something deeply wrong.

Unenjoyable to be around. (often judgmental/sometimes strange).

- 1 Word,
- 2 Body Life (Community). Small Groups
- 3 Worship
- 4 Prayer
- 5 Spirit, prophetic, signs and wonders
- 6 Deliverance/Warfare

Then I had my own wall - 17 years in Christ. NLF 8 years of my life. Tired!

---I was unhappy, frustrated, overworked

I had this dream and vision God going to do – Where was the joy??

Mk. 8:36 – “What profit a man...Winning world, losing soul...”

– stressed, hurried, exhausted, dying to wrong things (not sin)

---1994 - Spanish split CHARACTER vs GIFTING

me – cursing, angry, unforgiving, depressed - (before..me!!)

not sure wanted to be Xian (definitely not pastor)

This church thing terrible. – Gifted/anointed and no character

--- Gaps in my spiritual formation almost killed me! Theological Gaps!

---Marriage – Jan. 2, 1996 Finally – Geri got fed up w/ NLF “ I quit. I no longer respect your leadership” --

1996 Emotional Health PP

B. Emotional Health (Character before Gifts)

Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

People's lives dramatically changed, but people still too busy. I knew they needed to slow down for their relationship with Christ.

This culminated in a Sabbatical 2003 - Led to deep, inward journey.

4 months of living rhythms of silence, Daily Offices, waiting God

2003 Third conversion Contemplative Spirituality

= *(Slowing Down to Be with God)*

Our Tradition – Evangelical. Rich, but very active. Incredibly active.

Our lack of rest and time for reflection good at silence, solitude, waiting, stillness

-- colors way we build community.

-- impacts our leadership, evangelism

We speak of things we do not live.

We call this journey– Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. For me the last 18 years have been the best of my life – personally, marriage, follower of X, husband, father, I have loved pastoring.

This EHS Course is the fruit of these 18 years.

The material we will be covering in these sessions is meant to challenge you. In fact, my hope is that the concepts we will be talking about will rock your world – in a good way of course – in terms of what it means to follow Jesus. We will be looking at some significant missing elements of our spiritual formation/discipleship.

- Knowing Yourself that You May Know God
- Going Back to Go Forward
- Journeying through the Wall
- Enlarging your Soul through Grief and Loss
- Discovering the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbaths
- Growing into an Emotionally Mature Adult
- Going the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life.

You will be invited to look inside yourself in ways you never dreamed. You will be invited to ponder - honestly – the genuineness and depth of your relationship with Jesus. And you will be invited to take a few practical steps that will help you follow Him.

The main idea that we will be unpacking here is simple yet far-reaching – Emotional health (defined as our ability to be self-aware and love well) and contemplative spirituality (slowing down to cultivate our relationship with Jesus), when brought together, offer nothing short of a spiritual revolution in our lives.

A person can grow emotionally healthy without Christ. I can think of a number of non-Christian people who are more loving, balanced and civil than many church members I know. They go to 12 step groups, done counseling, are reflective. But they don't have a deep walk with Christ.

At the same time a person can be really into prayer, silence, Scripture, and other Christian disciplines and yet are emotionally immature and socially maladjusted. They are unaware, defensive, judgmental, and touchy.

It is the two together – emotional health and contemplative spirituality – that release great power to transform our spiritual lives, our families, our workplaces, our churches, and, ultimately, the world around us.

And it is King David, the one described as a man after God's own heart, who models for us what we call Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. He is emotionally healthy – that is very aware of what is going on inside him. We see him in the psalms outraged, suicidal, depressed, overjoyed, dancing. We observe him engaging the whole gamut of emotions. He is broken and vulnerable before God and others. Who else would commit adultery and murder and put it in a song to be sung in church – Psalm 51!

At the same David has a deep passion for God. He pants for God like a deer pants for water. He writes songs, worships, seeks God's face. He loves Scripture (Ps.119). He is a man after God's heart.

This material may be difficult for you at times. So remember, once we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our standing before God is based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not our own. It is based on His perfect record, not our imperfect one. It is based on His performance not our own. We live and swim and move in His love and grace alone.

So don't be afraid. We simply want to be real. We want to take off our masks of pretending and let Jesus lovingly strip us of all the false layers that don't belong to Him. My prayer this course might be a safe place for you in these coming weeks as you go beyond "tip of the iceberg" spirituality into what is going on deep beneath the surface in your life.

Our goal is not to fix people or change people. And actually we can't fix or change ourselves. That is God's work. We want to open up space in this group to be with God, to interact with biblical truth in a fresh way and then open ourselves up so He can do His work.

And we want to give one another lots of grace and encouragement to take the next steps in the unique journey God has planned for us.

In this first study, we will be looking at the Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality. It will begin to unpack the principle that -- the degree to which we are willing to give Jesus access to what is deeply beneath the surface in our lives is the degree to which we will experience freedom in Him. Let me say that again: the degree to which we are willing to give Jesus access to what is deeply beneath the surface in our lives is the degree to which we will experience freedom in Him.

We will begin by looking at the 10 top symptoms to determine if someone is suffering from a bad case of emotionally unhealthy spirituality.

1. Using God to run from God

Few killer viruses are more difficult to discern than this one. In my case, using God to run from God is when I create a great deal of "God-activity" and ignore difficult areas in my life God wants to change. Some examples might be:

--I use God to run from God when I do God's work to satisfy me, not Him.

--I use God to run from God when I do things in His name He never asked me to do.

---I use God to run from God when my prayers are really about God doing my will, not my surrendering to His.

2. Ignoring the ungodly emotions of anger, sadness and fear

Most Christians believe that anger, sadness, and fear are sins to be avoided , that something is wrong with our spiritual life. Like most Christians, I was taught that feelings were unreliable and not to be trusted. This applies especially to the more "difficult" feelings of fear, sadness, anger, hurt and pain.

The problem with this is it is not biblical and the practical implications of such a view is enormous. We end up as ½ human beings, suppressing our God-given humanity as men and women made in the image of God.

We end up missing the many many ways God is actually speaking and coming to us.

3. Dying to the wrong things

True, Jesus did say: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The question, however, is what does this mean.

Yes, we are to die to the sinful parts of who we are —such as defensiveness, detachment from others, arrogance, stubbornness, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, running our own lives — as well as the more obvious sins described for us in Scripture.

But we are not called by God to die to the "good" parts of who we are. God never asked us to die to the healthy desires and the pleasures of life — to friendships, joy, art, music, beauty, recreation, laughter and nature. God plants desires in our hearts so we will nurture and water them. These desires and passions are, very often, invitations and gifts from Him.

4. Denying the past's impact on the present

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, whether as a child, teenager or adult, we are, in the dramatic language of the Bible, born again (see John 3:3). The

apostle Paul describes this way: "The old has gone, the new has come!" That is our new status in Christ.

Yet the work of growing or maturing in Christ (what theologians call sanctification) actually demands we go back in order to break free from unhealthy and destructive patterns that prevent us from going forward to what God has for us! The goal is to go forward, but we must get rid of the baggage we carry first.

5. Dividing our lives into "secular" and "sacred" compartments

It is so easy to compartmentalize God to "Christian activities" around church, praying, reading the Bible, attending a small group. Yet it so easy to not think about God when we are spending money, working, studying for exams, playing sports.

According to Gallup polls and sociologists, one of the greatest scandals of our day is that "many Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centred and sexually immoral as the world in general." Ron Sider summarizes it well: "Whether the issue is marriage and sexuality or money and care for the poor, evangelicals today are living scandalously unbiblical lives. . . .The data suggest that in many crucial areas evangelicals are not living any differently from their unbelieving neighbors."

6. Doing for God instead of being with God

Being productive and getting things done are high priorities in our Western culture. Within minutes of being introduced to someone, we will ask, "What do you do?" Our identity is in our DOING.

The problem is that our identity as Christians is in His love for us, not our doing. Our activity for God can only properly flow from a life with God. We cannot give what we do not possess. When our doing, our work for God is not nourished by a deep interior life with God, we end up off center. Our sense of worth and validation gradually shifts from God's unconditional love for us in Christ to our works and performance. The joy of Christ gradually disappears. And we become "human doings" not "human beings."

7. Spiritualizing away conflict

Nobody likes conflict. Yet conflict is everywhere — from law courts to workplaces to classrooms to neighborhoods to marriages to parenting, to close friendships.

We smooth them over, "we sweep them under the rug," we pray they go away. Yet Jesus was in regular conflict with the religious leaders, the crowds, the disciples — even His own family. Out of a desire to bring true peace, Jesus disrupted the false peace all around Him. He refused to "spiritualize away" conflict. Instead He actually engaged it a way that brought life and His kingdom.

8. Covering over brokenness, weakness and failure

The pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and spiritually "together" hovers over most of us. We feel guilty for not measuring up, for not making the grade.

Yet the Bible does not spin the flaws and weaknesses of its heroes. Abraham lied. Hosea's wife was a prostitute. Peter rebuked God! Noah got drunk. Jonah was a racist. Jacob lied. John Mark deserted Paul. Elijah burned out. Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. Thomas doubted.

And all these people send the same message: that every human being on earth, regardless of their gifts and strengths, is weak, vulnerable and dependent on God and others.

9. Living without limits

A core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We are not God. We cannot serve everyone in need. We are human beings. When we cross over limits given to us by God, we end up in trouble. Just look at Adam and Eve once they crossed a limit set by God in the Garden of Eden!

Jesus modeled limits for us as a human being — fully God yet fully human. He did not heal every sick person in Palestine. He did not raise every dead person. He did not feed all the hungry beggars.

A life without limits forgets that God is God. We are not.

10. Judging other people's spiritual journey

I was taught it was my responsibility to correct people in error or in sin and to always counsel people who were mixed up spiritually or weren't in a place with God that I thought they should be in. I felt guilty if I saw something questionable and did nothing to point it out. Most of us have no trouble at all dispensing advice or pointing out wrongdoing.

Like Jesus said, unless I first take the log out of my own eye, knowing that I have huge blind spots, I am dangerous. I must see the extensive damage sin has done to every part of who I am — emotion, intellect, body, will and spirit — before I can attempt to remove the speck from my brother's eye.

In this session, you will look at Saul in 1 Samuel 15. He is probably one of the greatest examples in Scripture of someone who is both emotionally unhealthy and who lacks any contemplative life with God.

He is not reflective. He is unaware of his fears and need for approval, his tendency towards self-deception. Unlike David in the Psalms, He makes little connection between his emotional world and his spirituality. And Unlike David, we never see him passionately nurturing, developing his personal relationship with God. He is sloppy on both counts. And over time it destroys both his relationship with God and other people.

I've lived the destructive effects of emotionally unhealthy spirituality. There is another way.

Let me invite you now to your workbook into what I pray will enable you to walk through a door in your relationship with God that will change you forever.