

## Know Yourself That You May Know God

An interview with Peter and Geri Scazzero  
Co-founders of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (EHS)

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**For those who are not familiar with EHS, can you tell us about the ministry and the theological principles behind it?**

**Peter:** The theological foundation for EHS is that we are in the new family of Jesus. We all leave our families of origin, our cultures, and we are journeying with Christ into an unknown. We recognize that every culture is sinful, that every family is sinful and broken, so we want to break that which does not belong in the family of Jesus and learn how to live life. We see EHS not as a counseling school at all—we are about local church pastors and teachers doing serious, deep, beneath-the-surface discipleship that transforms people, then transforms the world.

**Geri:** St. Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” A lot of our spiritual formation is geared toward that—we begin with the dignity of the human being. Every human being

on earth has dignity. Anytime I am in the presence of people, I am in the presence of the divine image of God. Spiritual formation is getting at your own sense of dignity and living out of that, knowing God’s love for you—that we were created in His image. Life is all about positioning ourselves in a way in which we are aware of His love, receiving that love, and becoming that love for others. The evangelical church tradition in which we became committed followers of Christ really emphasized loving others, but



Peter and Geri Scazzero are co-founders of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (EHS), a ministry that equips churches and leaders with a spiritual formation paradigm that integrates emotional health and contemplative spirituality. Peter is the founder of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York, and currently serves there as Teaching Pastor/Pastor at Large. He is the author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, and most recently *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*. Geri is a popular conference speaker and has served on staff at New Life Fellowship Church for the last twenty-seven years. She is also the author of *The Emotionally Healthy Woman*. We had a chance to meet with Peter and Geri when they visited Seoul earlier this year for a conference. They spoke to us about how EHS can help us to grow in emotional and spiritual maturity and nurture a healthy marriage relationship.

it didn't always capture loving self. And I never realized that, actually, I can't even love my neighbor if I don't love myself well. EHS has really helped me know myself—who God created me to be—which has actually helped me know Him better and also know my neighbor better. So it is very integrated and holistic, but the bottom line is that my greatest call is to love the Lord my God and to love my neighbor as myself.

The reason we bring the Gospel to the world is that we are bringing God's love to the world. God is love, but I, the messenger, am the biggest vehicle through which that love comes. Our experience in traditional evangelicalism was that we didn't always encounter others as loving. You could be doing bible study, evangelism, prayer, worship—but you're defensive, you're not approachable or vulnerable, you're not a good listener. Most pastors are great at speaking, but they are terrible at listening. Yet for most people, feeling loved is synonymous with being listened to. So there is a whole area of spiritual formation in which we need to grow in order to really bring the Gospel to others.

**How can Christians grow in emotional maturity?**

Gerri: I think sometimes people look for a formula, but it is really about simple practices. You have to know what is going on inside of you. In Christianity, motive is everything. So how are you examining your heart throughout the day? It is stopping to be aware of what is going on inside of you and why you are doing what you are doing. So you are continually being introduced to

yourself on a whole new level, and you are bringing that self to God. It is just growth in self-awareness—that is how you get at the heart.

**What are some practices that you feel are important for the development of emotionally healthy spirituality?**

Peter: Along with our classic practices that we all are committed to like Scripture, fellowship, having spiritual companions, and worship, some practices that are less focused on and that we really emphasize in our training are silence and solitude. I think of Elijah and how God came to him not in an earthquake, wind, or fire but—in the Hebrew, it literally says—the sound of sheer silence. God speaks in silence.

I would also say that the concept of daily offices is important—to rhythmically be with God throughout the day, a life of communion with Him. And to have a sacramental view of life—that all of life is holy, that all of life is God, and seeing God through everything.

**In EHS, you emphasize that leaders in the church should nurture their marriages. Can you tell us a little more about how you do this in your own marriage?**

Peter: My union with my wife is related to my union with Christ. We don't separate union and communion with Jesus from our own union and communion. Very often people separate the two. You are building the church, spending alone time with God, and your wife is at home feeling neglecting and alone because you don't have time for

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her. That is a theological compartmentalization that is not biblical—you are separating what God has put together. So we would encourage a leader, if they are married, to have the same intentionality that they have in their relationship with Jesus, with their spouse.

Gerri: My relationship with Jesus is about attraction and discipline. When Christ wooed me, loved me, and I loved him back—that was the attraction. But then there is the discipline of me nurturing that relationship, and it is the same way for marriage. There is attraction when you fall in love, but then you have to nurture that “in love-ness.” We realize now that God did not intend for the passion to expire, but it has to be nurtured. So we have very intentional times of connecting. He is the most intimate person in my life! He is the one I experience God's love through the most. We are God's greatest experience of love for one another. Marriage is meant to be the closest experience of His love on earth.

Peter: We have been married for thirty-one years and we are more in love today than when we got married. There is a joy here, so I don't want to overwork anymore. I don't want to give my best energy to others before I give it to her. What's interesting is that, theologically, we tend to emphasize the Ephesians hierarchy. Man is head, woman is under. But other traditions emphasize that the point of Ephesians 5 is that you are one. You are organically united, you cannot separate man and wife. It is the organic nature of oneness that is the focus, not that the man gets to rule and call all the shots—which is a legalistic interpretation. That is not the thrust of the passage. Husbands die for your wives, wives submit to your husbands—there is an organic oneness there. We, as pastors and leaders, are leading the way in that. So we invest in our marriage as a gift to the church. It is with the overflow of our love that we bless the church.

For more information on Peter and Gerri's ministry, visit [www.emotionallyhealthy.org](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org).