

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 Christians 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 Christians 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.

–**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-centered 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.

CLOSING SUMMARY

As we close this session, God's invitation can be summed up in 3 points:

1. Begin the Journey of discipleship with Jesus that integrates an emotionally healthy spirituality

Again we will be looking at 8 themes in this course. Today we began with The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality. Remember: This is about discipleship, becoming deeply changed by Jesus so we can deeply change the world.

2. Slow Down for God

That we have enough of a life with Jesus, being with Jesus to sustain our active life for Him. Saul lacked that as we saw in this powerful story.

God says to him –

*Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings
and sacrifices As much as in
obeying the Lord?*

*To obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed is better than the fat of rams. v.22*

Most important is the phrase *To heed* which means *to listen*. Now pull out your EHS DAY BY DAY. (Show book.)

This coming week, we want to invite you to begin to meet with Jesus 2x a day. We want to ask you to start developing a rhythm to be with Jesus through these Offices in the *Day by Day* book.

--Look at the Table of Contents. You'll notice each chapter corresponds with each of our 8 Sessions.

This is the core of the EHS Course - growing in your personal relationship with Jesus.... 2 min of stillness and silence to receive His love, surrender your will to His will and to open yourself to hear God speak. We have found that this will be, for most of you, the most challenging, difficult part of this EHS Course.

Hang in there. Stay with it. God wants to meet you here.

3. Allow Jesus Access to Your Own Iceberg (with the Iceberg Graphic)

- On the surface Saul looks like he is serving God – praying, listening to prophetic words, going to church, doing some of God's will.
- Underneath, he wants/needs approval (so deep even in repenting v.30 he is concerned that he would be honored/like by the other leaders or elders of his people.)
- Also, Saul is unaware of his own fears (v.24 "I was afraid of the people")
- Jealous. Doesn't want others to be more popular than him.
- Ch.18-20 – filled with details of 6 attempts at murdering David.
- Reality is he is shallow and unaware of his interior life, not really paying attention to God

We live one appearance above surface but another whole reality underneath

- You can't be in touch with God if not in touch with yourself.

Let me summarize this session:

The problem of emotionally unhealthy spirituality –something as common today as it was for Saul.

It is easy to be going to church, religiously active, even serving and giving and **not cultivating** our Personal Relationship with God.

We see this in Saul. For example, we never see Saul writing songs/poetry/music like David He is Unaware. He can't see that he IS

NOT LISTENING.

Not asking “How does it apply to me?” “What is God saying to me?” Saul has a HEAD knowledge of God, just not a HEART, INNER knowledge.

Our prayer is you will slow down the next 8 weeks to deepen your firsthand relationship w/ Jesus.

Another major learning from this session on Saul is that it is easy to be growing in Bible knowledge, and learning things about God but not necessarily growing into becoming a more loving, humble, approachable, teachable person.

Saul also did not recognize that emotional maturity and spiritual maturity are inseparable. That growing into humble, teachable, loving, broken people who love well is the heart of Christian life. We learn that clearly from the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 13 where he says it doesn't matter how gifted, smart, knowledgeable or committed you are – if you are not a loving person, you are immature.

God wants to take the Saul out of us – that tendency to pretend, live shallow lives, skim on our relationship with Jesus, go through religious motions, follow God for ourselves or on our own terms.

God wants to make you a David – a man/woman after God's own heart. (This is next week's theme). He knows himself and is comfortable in his own skin

- David was emotionally very self-aware (suicidal, depressed, angry, joyful, dancing, repentant). He is very much alive emotionally, bringing it all to God. He writes 2/3 of the Psalms.
- David was also passionate for God. He hungers and thirsts for God. Spends time in silence and solitude. Seeks him with all his heart.

Our goal here -that you would be emotionally alive before God and passionate for God like David. God had a destiny, a plan for David's life.

So my prayer for you is that, unlike Saul, you will surrender you will to God's will, and that during this EHS Course, you will increasingly open yourself up to the Holy Spirit to anoint and empower you to become the person that God intends you to become and that you will do what God is asking you to do.

So this coming week, you'll want to read chapter 2 of *The Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Book - Know Yourself that You May Know God* – and then dig into this first week of *The EHS Day by Day* daily office devotional

I'm excited for what God will do in and through you week during the Course. Blessings upon you and your group on this journey.

Session 2: KNOW YOURSELF THAT YOU MAY KNOW GOD

We began last week by looking at Saul and the problem of emotional unhealthy spirituality. This week's study looks at David and explores what it means to "Know Yourself That You May Know God."

This is the first of the seven pathways to emotionally healthy spirituality. Why? Because an awareness of yourself and your relationship with God are so closely related.

Pretending to be someone we are not is so big in our culture we rarely think twice about it. Politicians do it to get our votes. Business leaders do it to generate profits and attract investors. Magazine editors airbrush photos to make their models look more perfect and beautiful than they actually are.

It is so easy to pretend to be something on the outside that we are not on the inside. Students wear other people's faces to fit in at school with their friends and teachers. Workers wear masks in the marketplace to get promotions. Young adults do it to impress their friends. Sadly, even in church, we sometimes put on a mask so that people will like us or think of us in a certain way.

All cultures pretend to a greater or lesser extent. But in the church of Jesus Christ, God invites us to be our unique selves before Him, not pretending to be someone on the outside that is not who we are on the inside.

We are actually called to be an alternative community, to be a sign to the world Jesus has made possible a way of life unlike anything the world had seen. We bear witness to the power of God by the way we live authentically, and with integrity, out of true selves.

In fact, the challenge to shed our "old false" self in order to live authentically in our "new true" self strikes at the very core of true spirituality.

In AD 500, Augustine wrote in *Confessions*, "How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?"

John Calvin in 1530 wrote: "Our wisdom . . . consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other."

The vast majority of us go to our graves without knowing who we are. Without being fully aware of it, we live someone else's life, or at least someone else's expectations for us. As a result, we end up doing violence to ourselves, our relationship with God, and ultimately to others.

STORY – Me –focus in early years was on KNOWING GOD out there
Hearing God – outside of myself

I didn't pay attention to what was going on inside me.

I knew – *Jer. 17:9* “*The heart is desperately wicked and deceitful, who can know it*

.” And Roman 7 “that in me dwells no good thing. “

The problem was that I was ignoring other Scriptures and truths and missing a lot of what God was saying and doing inside me.

I didn't do emotions – especially the difficult ones like anger, sadness and fear. And I sure didn't know the implications for my walk with Christ.

Once I begin to be aware of what I am doing, how I am feeling, and how it is impacting others, I began to ask myself the difficult “why” questions like:

- Why I am always in a hurry? Why am I so impatient? Why am I so anxious?
- Am I creating a life that is a gift to others or am I using them, trying to get them to validate me and tell me that I am okay?
- Why do I dread this meeting today at 2 P.M.? Why am I so flooded with fear?
- Why do I avoid confronting difficult people at church?
- Why do I have a need to immediately return all phone calls and emails? Is it because I want to please people?

Once I began to pay attention to God inside me and to how He had uniquely made me, it opened up a whole new world for me. It was like a Copernican Revolution.

--My relationship with God took on more listening, paying attention to Him and giving the Spirit space to search out my heart

--I became a more loving person to others.

--I became a lot more genuine and true to who God had uniquely made me to be. I shed some false layers that I had been wearing. In a healthy way, I realized that I could only be me-(I could learn from others, but trying to be somebody I was not wasn't doing anybody any favors).

This Session - KNOWING MYSELF THAT I MIGHT KNOW GOD is rooted in our Lord Jesus Christ who models this beautifully.

In living faithful to His true self, Jesus disappointed a lot of people. Yet He was secure in his Father's love and in himself. Thus Jesus was able to withstand enormous pressure. He disappointed his family's expectations for his life. At one point, his mother and siblings wondered if he was out of his mind (see Mark 3:21).

He disappointed the people he grew up with in Nazareth. When Jesus

declared who he really was as the Messiah, they tried to push him off a cliff (see Luke 4:28-29). He remained self-assured in his beliefs, regardless of the outrage of the crowds in his hometown.

He disappointed his closest friends -- the twelve disciples. They projected onto Jesus their own picture of the kind of Messiah Jesus was to be. This sure did not include a crucifixion. They quit on him. Judas, one of His closest friends, "stabbed him in the back" for being true to himself.

Jesus crowds wanted an earthly Messiah who would feed them, fix all their problems, overthrow the Roman oppressors, work miracles, and give inspiring sermons. They wanted to make him king. He disappointed them.

He disappointed the religious leaders. They did not appreciate the disruption his presence brought to their day-to-day lives or to their theology. They had to get rid of Jesus.

Jesus had a deep sense of *self* before the Father. He knew what the Father had given him to do. Who he was. At the same time Jesus was not *selfish*. He did not live as if nobody else counted. He gave his life out of love for others. From a place of loving union with his Father, Jesus had a mature, healthy "true self" out of which He offered his life as a gift to the world.

The pressure on us to live a life that is not our own is great. Powerful generational forces and spiritual warfare work against us. Yet living faithfully to our true self in Christ represents one of the great tasks of discipleship.

In this session, you will be looking at the story of David's confrontation with Goliath as we see powerful forces coming against him to smother the unique, true life God had given to him.

In this famous story, the army of Israel faces the great army of the Philistines. For forty days, Goliath, described as nine feet tall and dressed in powerful weaponry, challenges any Israelite soldier to come out and fight him. When the Israelites saw him, however, "they all ran from him in great fear" (1 Samuel 17:24 NIV).

Yet David He knows who he. He is as a shepherd and expert with his slingshot as a young man. He is not a trained soldier like the rest of the army of Israel. He is not Saul who has lead armies to victory. He can't wear his armor. His older brothers put him down. Goliath curses him. Yet David knows himself and he knows the living God who has made the heavens and the earth. With that alone, David is able to break through the barriers of his family's negative views of who he is, the discouragement of Saul, an entire army living in fear, and the curses of Goliath.

This knowledge of himself and of God frees not only him from all the pressures around him. It frees everyone around him!

In the same way, powerful forces come against us to bury our true selves in Christ. Discipleship is yes "knowing God." But it is also knowing yourself.

When we bring these two elements together, great power is released.

As Rabbi Susya said “At the end of your life, God will not ask you why were you not Moses? He will ask, Why were you not you!? Why did you try to live out someone else’s life that was not your own!”

Part of your time in the group will be an exercise to pour out your heart before God and to feel. This is based on Genesis 1:27 and the reality that God has made us as whole people in His image. That image includes physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social dimensions.

Allowing yourself to feel is an essential part of our humanity and unique personhood as men and women made in God’s image. It is an essential component to genuine transformation in Christ.

Scripture reveals God as an emotional being who feels—a Person. Having been created in his image, we also were created with the gift to feel and experience emotions.

* God beams with delight and joy in Genesis when he creates the world - “God saw that it was good . . . very good” (Genesis 1:25, 31). In other words, God delighted, relished, beamed with delight over us.

* “God was *grieved* that He had made humanity on the earth, and his heart was *filled with pain*” in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:6).

* “God refers to himself as crying out, gasping and panting in Isaiah 42. (Isaiah 42:14).

* * We observe Jesus *sorrowful and troubled., overwhelmed with sorrow* to the point of death” (Matthew 26:37-38).

* At that time we see Jesus, *full of joy* through the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10: 21).

Take a few minutes and reflect on the implications of our God feeling. You are made in his image. God thinks. You think. God feels. You feel. You are a human being made in God’s likeness. Part of that likeness is to feel.

If we are going to do God’s will, it requires a complete commitment to do His will, follow Scripture, and seek wise counsel. Yet, in addition, spiritual formation includes experiencing our feelings, reflecting on them, and then thoughtfully responding to our feelings under the lordship of Jesus. We acknowledge them as a part of the way God communicates to us.

Getting to know yourself that you may know God is the discipleship work of a lifetime. Now let’s begin and take the first steps on this pathway to an emotionally healthy spirituality.

And let’s pray the great words of Augustine who prayed, “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee.”

CLOSING SUMMARY

As one of your final questions in this week's study noted, 'Many of us are so unaccustomed to distinguishing our true self from our false self that it may seem difficult to know where to begin.' For this reason, the life of David is such a gift to us.

- David had to cut through 3 obstacles to be his authentic self in God in this study. So must we.
 1. His Family (vs. 28-31)
 - a. He is the youngest of 8 boys. Eliab oldest, probably 10-15 yrs. older. So great deal of authority with him. 3 oldest brothers in army.
 - b. No support from father, 7 older brothers (mother absent), unsupportive family. Judges him – conceited, wicked – receiving very intense anger!!! Misunderstood, slandered. He was ignored, disregarded, put down
 - c. The message: “You’re a nobody. Evil. Useless. Go home.” Our families, even the best of them, often add to these layers of false self that smother our true selves.
 - d. We grow up in families and cultures where certain true parts of ourselves are not “acceptable.” They are cut off, surrendered and hidden.
 - e. Some of you were born and nobody noticed. GOD did.
 2. Significant Others w/ Authority and Experience (Saul) vs. 32-33
 - a. Saul had led an army of 330,000 men (1 Sam. 11:6-8). Famous. Experienced. He says: “You are not able to do it... you are only a boy.”
 - b. I would be overwhelmed. I would say: “*You are right. I can’t. What should we do?*”
 - c. Whole army is frightened, in the trenches, not living by faith
 - d. He was expected to wear Saul’s armor. That is the way everyone fights war – lives life. Saul tried to give him his armor and weapons (who wouldn’t want them). He tries walking around in it. David realizes “*I cannot go in these*”
 - e. Summary - Everyone giving him advice.
 3. Goliath (vv.41-43):
 - a. Curses of Goliath – “You will die.” Despised. Threatened with consequences!
 - b. If you try to change –come out, be your authentic self— YOU WILL DIE. DISASTER!!!
 - c. Goliath is utterly sure of himself. God is irrelevant to him

David – as young man!! Knows Himself and God – POWERFUL COMBINATION

- He cuts through the obstacles and is his authentic self in the Living God.

Read vv.39-40 as he takes off Saul's armor, goes out with his 5 stones/slingshot. His guidance comes from inside (not external authority). God's Holy Spirit is inside of our unique person as well.

- The time between taking off Saul's armor – he is pondering. “God didn't make me this way. How am I going to do this that fits me???”
Note: God gave us the gift of common sense. It is common sense not to fight Goliath if David had to use a sword. To go up vs. physical strength would have been fatal! It is an even match because he has sling shot skills. v.45
- David gets counsel – goes against it. They do not see what David sees – THE LIVING GOD!
- This was not only a SIZE war but a differentiation issue.
- David has strengths that he is bringing to the battle. He knows what they are.
- He is looking at GOD **and** looking at Himself.

PP 1 Sam17:45-47 *David says to Goliath, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head....and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands.”*

David is true to himself
and to God. T

he Result – Whole nation is richly blessed, victorious. GOD IS GLORIFIED

- Be yourself “that the world might know!!”
- YET HAS A MASSIVE RESOURCE BEYOND HIS OWN POWER THAT OPERATES FOR HIM – the powerful living God of Israel
- SO DO WE! YOU! God's invitation for you today! Because when we are not true to ourselves, we are not true to God.

You are unrepeatable!!! We have only one you. Gift to the world. (David 17-18, Moses 80, Abraham 75, Daniel teenager, Disciples 20's)

So this coming Week – before your next meeting – Read the next chapter – Chapter 3 in the *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* book called *Going Back to go Forward*. You will see how this builds on what we have done in this Session.

And I want to encourage you to meet with God each day – Daily Office – through the *EHS Day by Day*

– Week 2 – that will reinforce this week's theme.

PART 3: GOING BACK IN ORDER TO GO FORWARD

This second pathway in this journey into Emotionally Healthy Spirituality flows naturally from the first. A foundational issue in getting to know ourselves has to do with going back, understanding how our families and cultures that have shaped us into who we are today. That is why this 2nd pathway is called “GOING BACK TO GO FORWARD”

It is like one of the many paradoxes of the Christian life. A paradox is a statement that apparently contradicts itself. We see this throughout Scripture. For example, if you want to be strong, embrace weakness. If you want to be first in God’s kingdom be last.. If you want to be great, be a humble servant of all. In the same way, to go forward, you also need, at times, to go backwards.

This principle of Going Back to Go Forward is based on 2 Biblical Truths

1. The blessings and sins of our families going back three to four generations profoundly impact who we are today. PP

When the Bible uses the word FAMILY, it refers to our entire extended family over three to four generations – that means your family, in the biblical sense, includes all your family going back to the mid-late 1800’s. We are affected by many events and circumstances during our earthly lives, yet our families are the most powerful group to which we will ever belong.

What happens 1 generation often repeats itself in next. The consequences of actions and decisions from one generation affect those that follow.

Consider the following for example about God’s nature

PP 15 Exodus 34:6-8 Moses asks to see God’s glory “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. *Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.*

Ex. 20:4-6 -- 10 commandments – You shall not make for yourself an idol... for I am a jealous God, *punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me*, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

As one scholar noted to me, the Hebrew word “*punish*” is best translated “*consequences.*” In other words, the children tend to experience the consequences of the sins of the fathers to 3-4 generations.

Think about it. It is common to see certain patterns repeating from one generation to the next – addictive behavior, alcoholism, sexual abuse, poor marriages, pregnancy out of wedlock, divorces, affairs, one child running off.

We see this powerfully in the family of Abraham, Issac and Jacob-in Gen. 12-50. There is a powerful blessing passed on from generation to generation. At

the same time, we see negative legacies passed on.

We see a pattern of lying in each generation,

favoritism in each generation,

brothers fighting in each generation and

poor intimacy in marriages in each generation.

The second principle takes us to the heart of the gospel: Discipleship requires putting off the sinful patterns of our family of origin and relearning how to do life God's way in Jesus' new family.

The great news of Christianity is that your biological family of origin does not determine your future. God does! What has gone before you is not your destiny!

The most significant language in the New Testament for becoming a Christian is "adoption into the family of God." It is a radical new beginning. When we place our faith in Christ, we are spiritually reborn by the Holy Spirit into the family of Jesus. God becomes our Father. Our debts (sins) are cancelled. We are given a new name (Christian), a new inheritance (freedom, hope, glory, the resources of heaven), and new brothers and sisters (other Christians)

For example in Mk 3, Jesus' mother and brothers arrive at a house where he is teaching. They look for him to come outside. Jesus replies to the crowd inside the

house sitting at his feet: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" . . . Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother".

Jesus declares that the church for the believer is now the "first family."² In the ancient world of Jesus, it was extremely important to honor one's

mother and father. Yet Jesus was direct and clear in calling people to a first loyalty to himself over their biological families, saying, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37a).

Discipleship, then, is the putting off of the sinful patterns and habits of our biological families and being transformed to live as members of Christ's family. This is the Christian life. We honor our parents, culture, and histories but obey God.

I used to say to Geri in the early years of our marriage when she would ask questions about my family. "Why talk about it? I am a new creation in X." She would reply, "No you're not. I live with you."

Every one of us, then, has to look at the brokenness and sin of his or her family and culture. The problem is that few of us have reflected honestly on the impact of our family of origin and other major "earthquake" events in our histories. And we can't change what we are unaware of.

That was sure the case with me.

In many ways, the longer we walk with God, more levels of how our past has impacted us become clearer. The following are a few unhealthy things "baggage" I unconsciously carried into my Christian life for years

prior to this EHS journey..

I Overfunctioned

Along with my brothers, our role was to “make Mama happy” since my dad was absent for her. Even though we were the children, it was expected we would take care of her.

When I became a Christian I naturally began to take care of others.

Within one year of coming to Christ, I was leading our college Christian group, taking care of the sheep. I simply transferred being overly responsible

in my family of origin to being overly responsible for others’ salvation and growth in the church. Is it any wonder I became a pastor to care for others? Is it any wonder delight, fun, taking care of myself, playing were difficult for me? **My Identity was in my Doing – (preached grace but lived law)**

My family was a hard-working family. It was expected that you would work. My family were Italian-American immigrants struggling to make it in the United States left an expectation on us: “You will make your parents proud; they have suffered so much for you to be able to succeed.” The performance- based approval that ran strongly in the veins of our family now drove me to “work hard for Jesus.” “Prove yourself,” was the message.

I preached grace but lived work!! Resting was very difficult for me.

I Had Cultural, Not Biblical, Expectations for Marriage and Family

Third, my beliefs regarding marriage and gender roles were shaped much more strongly by my family than Scripture. Of course Geri complained. But all the women in our extended family complained about their husbands. Wasn’t that normal? Our marriage sure seemed better than most. I was “helping” with the kids, wasn’t I?

I never observed a joyful, intimate couple investing in the quality of their relationship before their children. I preached Ephesians 5 on marriage and family but lived Scazzero

I Resolved Conflict Poorly

Fourth, even though I taught workshops on conflict resolution and communication, the basic way I handled conflict and anger resembled my family of origin, not Christ’s family. My mother raged and attacked. My dad was an appeaser who gave in to whatever my mom wanted to avoid conflict. I took on my father’s basic style, taking the blame whenever something was wrong in order to end the tension. I justified it as being like Christ, a sheep going to the slaughter.

Perfectionism

It is not okay to make mistakes. You drop a dish- get a beating or a

scream. In my bones. Christians make mistakes, sin. Again- grace.
I could go on, but I think you get the point.

Success

Our family, like many families, defined success by making a certain amount of money, getting a certain level of education, becoming a professional, having people look up to you, getting married and having children. In God's family, however, success is becoming the person God has called you to become and doing what God has called you to do. That is a very different definition!

But when I look back now and think about how I lived the first seventeen years of my Christian life, I am stunned . . . shocked . . . embarrassed . . . There was so much needless pain!

Philosopher George Santanya said it well: "Those who cannot learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."

___ Sadly, when we look deeply beneath the surface of our lives, many of us are not fundamentally doing that many things differently from how our families did them.

We have a saying we like to use: "Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones."

Remember, all families are broken – some more so than others. This may be very painful as some of us who have buried much of our past. I was one of them. Others of us are very reluctant to look seriously at our families of origin because it feels like we are betraying them. Remember in 99% of families' parents did the best they could. In fact, they brought the ball down the soccer or football field further than their parents. One benefit of going back and doing this kind of work is we end up more compassionate and understanding of our parents/caregivers as we consider where they come from.

In this session, we want to invite you to embrace God's choice to birth us into a particular family, in a particular place, at a particular moment in history.

That reality gave each of us certain opportunities and gifts. It also gave us each a certain amount of what I will call "emotional baggage" in our journey through life. For some of us this load is minimal; for others, it is a heavy burden to carry.

True spirituality frees us to live joyfully in the present. Living joyfully, however, requires going back in order to go forward. This process takes us to the very heart of spirituality and discipleship in the family of God—breaking free from the destructive sinful patterns of our pasts so that we live the life God intends -- so we can be free to become a gift from Jesus Christ to the world.

This is the session that helps many people begin to open up and look deeply beneath the iceberg of their lives. Remember "a broken and contrite heart I will not despise," says the Lord (Ps. 51). Paul boasted in his weaknesses that Christ's power might rest on him.

I made a decision, almost twenty years ago, as I entered into this journey we call emotionally healthy spirituality today that I would no longer put on a face and pretend. I would live and lead first out of my own brokenness and vulnerability. For this reason, I included my family genogram in the book. I want to assure you it is okay to be open and honest, that it is safe in the arms of the grace and love of God.

And as we shall see, in the story of Joseph in Gen. 37-50, he beautifully embraced his past by grieving and forgiving. He also allowed God to work in him thru it. He recognized the invisible hands of God moving in and through all the events in his life- even the tragic ones – to provide a means for him to be a gift to the world. And his willingness to go back enabled him to go forward and become a blessing to nations!

And that is my prayer for you as you enter into this study.

CLOSING SUMMARY

There are at least 3 primary practical applications from this study:

1. PP Recognize the Iceberg in You from Your Family

- a. Easy for us to hate or ignore our past as we get older.
- b. The effect on you from your family is much deeper/more profound than you realize. You/I are coming out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery. Again, as we like to say: Jesus is in our hearts but Grandpa is in our bones.
- c. God gives them The 10 Commandments to learn. They needed the desert for 40 years as it took great deal to get past out of them.
- d. Look at patterns in Joseph's family. Your family has patterns too.
- e. This is not about digging up dirt/trashing our parents (In 99% of the cases they did the best could with what they had) but raising our awareness of negative patterns of our family so we live freely the way God intends. WE CHOOSE.

2. PP Discern the good God intends "in, through and, in spite of," your family and past How does Joseph get to 50:20-- *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.?*

How does he go forward? The answer very simple is that He sees God—that God intended (planned) it for good.

This is the entire lesson of this story and the book of Genesis.

- a. At one level is the struggle of an individual and family with great problems. But the purposes of God are at work – in hidden and mysterious ways. God is working out His purpose THROUGH and IN SPITE OF Joseph's brothers and the traumas he experiences.
- b. The brothers are unaware and can't see the ways of God. They are in fear and anxiety about their family story. They could not see another plan was hidden and working – God's.

- c. Joseph is a realist – laments, yet He is certain of God! He knows:
PP *“You planned it for evil. God planned it for good.”*
PP *Jer. 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”*
PP *Rom. 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* God’s plan works through everything!!
PP *Prov. 19:21 “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.”*
- d. The evil plans of humans do not defeat God’s story. Instead they unwittingly become ways God’s plan is furthered. E.g. Satanic evil at cross is our crucified God – our salvation!
- e. Out of suffering/death – comes life - In so many ways the story of Joseph is the gospel!
- f. God is about bringing good to you!!
- g. God’s sovereignty and blessings can be found in what appears to be the most horrific crimes and disastrous circumstances.
(Doesn’t mean God approves of it. It is simply testimony of His ability to bring good of evil. God did not approve what Joseph’s brothers did. They are responsible.)
- h. God did not need their betrayal to get His plan done and get Joseph/Jacob’s family to Egypt, but in some way God was going get Joseph to a place where he would be a blessing! We can trust God is doing the same thing with you and me.

3. **PP Make the Decision to do the Hard Work of Discipleship**

- a. This is not easy. Quick. Many, large elements to it.
- b. Joseph is faithful to God as a slave, prisoner, #2 employee – regardless circumstances. Joseph engages his family when God opens door. He did not deny harm done thru them.
- c. He grieves the loss involved and the other themes we will touch in our series (not sweeping it under rug – not denial, suppressing, medicating.
- d. You can choose to not go this route! But God has placed you here for a purpose – to bless you and that you be blessing to others.
- e. I love the phrase: “The invisibility of God in human affairs.” This is your whole life to this point!!
- f. God can create a real newness – a GENESIS. He is for life!!! We are to wonder/awe at this! Can’t analyze it!
- g. Joseph (like David) has such an experience of God. Joseph becomes a blessing to the nations. Breaks free!!! Incredible. So can you.

There are treasures in darkness. As Philip Brooks, a 19th century American preacher said: “God will waste nothing.” When we join God, when we abide/stick with/remain with Him, we find that some of our best material is

found in the failures, yes, even the sins, of our past.

So let me invite you again this week to dig into the Daily Office.- EHS Day By Day.

You'll be in week 3 that will have devotional readings around the Scripture/silence that correspond to this week's study.

And you will want to read the next chapter in the *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Book* – Journey through the Wall.

If you have time this week you may want to take

PP THE EHS PERSONAL ASSESSMENT: Are You an Emotional Infant, Child, Teen, or Adult www.emotionallyhealthy.org

And my prayer for you is that you may be like Joseph – staying with Jesus through the good time and the bad – allowing Him to take all the broken parts of your history that your life might be a gift for all those around you.

Session 4: JOURNEY THROUGH THE WALL

The image of the Christian life as a journey captures our experience of following Christ like few others. Journeys involve movement, action, stops and starts, detours, delays, and trips into the unknown. It also gives us the long view of the Christian life. Think about it:

- God called Abraham to leave his past life in Ur at the age of 75 to go on a journey.
- God called Moses out of a burning bush to begin a new phase of his journey at the age of 80!
- God called the Israelites to leave Egypt and embark on a 40-year journey of personal transformation in the desert.
- God called David to leave the comforts of his job as a shepherd as a teenager to fight Goliath and take a journey that would lead him to serve as king of Israel.
- Jesus called the 12 disciples to a journey that would change their lives forever.

You are on a journey. So am I.

But it is a truth about the Christian life that at one point or another, you will hit a Wall. By a Wall, I am referring to a season in your faith when you will feel stuck.

Consider the story of a woman named Agnes:

From the time she was a young girl, Agnes believed. Not just believed: she was on fire. She wanted to do great things for God. She said things such as she wanted to "love Jesus as He has never been loved before." Agnes had an undeniable calling. She wrote in her journal that "my soul at present is in perfect peace and joy." She experienced a union with God that was so deep and so continual that it was to her a rapture, ecstasy. She left her home. She became a missionary. She gave him everything.

After a while, however, it seemed as if God abandoned her.

At least that's how it felt to her. She started writing different words in her journal. Words like, "Where is my faith?" She asked. "Deep down there is nothing but emptiness and darkness My God, how painful is this unknown pain ... I have no faith." She struggled to pray. She still worked, still served, still smiled. But she struggled at this Wall that didn't seem to move. This inner darkness continued on, virtually year after year, for nearly 50 years. God seemed absent.

Such was the secret pain of Agnes, who is better known as Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa wrote letters (intended only for her spiritual directors) on the torment of her soul. After her death, they were published to much surprise. These letters stunned people. Some prominent atheists said that Mother Teresa lost faith. Many said she struggled with clinical depression. But spiritually, she

hit “a Wall.” And as we know today, God was doing a mighty work in and through her.

But I meet many believers today who also are a Wall. Some have even dropped out. They often fail to see the larger picture of the transforming work of what God is seeking to do in them, that this “Wall” is essential to their maturing in Christ and becoming the person God intends. The disorientation and pain of their present circumstances blinds them.

Throughout church history great men and women have written about the phases of this journey to help us understand the larger picture, or map, of what God is doing in our lives. In *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich developed a model that includes the essential place of the Wall in our journeys.¹

The following is my adaptation of their work. **PP 18**

Note that each Stage builds naturally upon the other. In the physical world, babies must grow into young children and then into teenagers who become adult men and women. In a similar way, spiritually, each stage builds on the ones that go before it.

An important difference, however, is that we can stagnate very easily at a certain stage and choose not to move forward in our journeys with Christ. We refuse to trust God into this unknown, mysterious place.

Let’s take a look at the stages:

Stage 1: Life-Changing Awareness of God—This stage, whether in childhood or adulthood, is the beginning of our journey with Christ as we become aware of his reality. We realize our need for mercy and begin our relationship with him.

Stage 2: Discipleship— This stage is characterized by learning about God and what it means to be a follower of Christ. We become part of a Christian community and begin to get rooted in the disciplines of the faith.

Stage 3: The Active Life— This is described as the “doing” stage. We get involved, actively working for God, serving him and his people. We take responsibility by bringing our unique talents and gifts to serve Christ and others.

Stage 4: The Wall and the Journey Inward— Notice that the Wall and the Inward Journey are closely related. The Wall drives us into an Inward Journey. In some cases people feel compelled to move into an Inward Journey that eventually leads them to the Wall. It has rightly been said that the perhaps 85% of evangelicals do not get thru the Wall. Often our image of God doesn’t allow for such a difficult experience.

Stage 5: The Journey Outward— Having passed through the crisis of faith and the intense inner journeywork necessary to go through the Wall, we begin once again to move outward to “do” for God. We may do some of the same active external things we did before (e.g., give leadership, serve, and initiate acts of mercy towards others). The difference is that now we give out of a new, grounded center of ourselves in God.

Stage 6: Transformed by Love— God’s goal, in the language of John Wesley, is that we be made perfect in love, that Christ’s love becomes our love both toward God and others. We realize love truly is the beginning and the end. By this stage, the perfect love of God has driven out all fear (see 1 John 4:18). And the whole of our spiritual lives is finally about surrender and obedience to God’s perfect will.

For most of us the Wall appears through a crisis that turns our world upside down. It comes, perhaps, through a divorce, a job loss, the death of a close friend or

family member, a cancer diagnosis, a disillusioning church experience, a betrayal, a shattered dream, a wayward child, a car accident, an inability to get pregnant, a deep desire to marry that remains unfulfilled, a dryness or loss of joy in our relationship with God. We question ourselves, God, the church.

We discover for the first time that our faith does not appear to “work.” We have more questions than answers as the very foundation of our faith feels like it is on the line. We don’t know where God is, what he is doing, where he is going, how he is getting us there, or when this will be over.

I have experienced at 5-6 major Walls in my life – each of which changed me forever. Let me share just two:

The first was in 1994 when we had a split in one of our congregations. I felt betrayed, outraged. My faith was shaken. Everything in me wanted to quit Christianity. That was the beginning of this whole expanded view of God and Scripture called EHS Today

The second was in 1996 when my marriage with Geri hit a Wall. Our marriage was in deep trouble. God met both of us out of that deep season of pain. Out of the help we went after – we have a marriage today that is so far beyond my dreams. We made a decision to live out of the joy and overflow of our marriage. And equipping and training people to have marriages that point and taste to heaven is the greatest joy of our lives.

On a certain level it is correct to say that Walls come to us in various ways throughout our lifetimes. It is not simply a one-time event that we pass through and get beyond. It appears to be something we return to as part of our on-going relationship with God. We see this, for example, in Abraham waiting at the Wall for 25 years for his first child with his wife, Sarah, to be born. He hits another wall when he has to let go of his eldest child –Ishmael. 10-13 years later God led him again to another Wall—the sacrificing of that long-awaited son he loved, Isaac, on an altar.

Regardless of how we get there, every follower of Jesus at some point will confront the Wall.

The best way to understand the dynamics of the Wall is to examine the classic work of St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, written over 500 years ago.⁵ He described the journey in three phases: beginners, progressives, and perfect. To move out of the beginning stage, he argued, required the receiving of

God's gift of the dark night, or the Wall. This is the "ordinary way" we grow in Christ. A failure to understand this is one of the major reasons many start out well in their journeys but do not finish.

How do we know we are in "the dark night"? Our good feelings of God's presence evaporate. We feel the door of heaven has been shut as we pray. Darkness, helplessness, weariness, a sense of failure or defeat, barrenness, emptiness, dryness descends upon us. The Christian disciplines that have served us up to this time "no longer work." We can't see what God is doing and see little visible fruit in our lives.

This is God's way of rewiring and "purging our affections and passions". He does this so we might delight in his love and enter into a richer, fuller communion with him. God wants to communicate to us his true sweetness and love. He longs that we might know His true peace and rest. To get there, however, false layers and our unhealthy attachments inside us must be burned away. Only then will we be able to actually taste and see that the Lord is good. Only then will we actually surrender to His will and not our own.

At the Wall we learn what true faith is- trusting God even when we don't feel Him.

We may hate Walls, but they are God's gifts to us.

Let me close with 2 thoughts here:

First, there is a difference between Wall and trials. The trials we encounter each day are not the Wall or "the dark night of the soul." Trials are the traffic jams, annoying bosses, delayed airplane departures, car breakdowns, fevers, and barking dogs in the middle of the night.

James refers to this: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops

perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

Walls are David fleeing a jealous king for thirteen years in the desert. Walls are 11 disciples at the crucifixion – confused, disoriented, when all their dreams are shattered. Walls are Job losing his ten children, health, and possessions in a day!

Secondly, it can be difficult to discern precisely when we began the journey through the Wall and when we might actually be on the other side.

Ultimately, God is the One who moves us through the Wall. And with that comes mystery. There is a lot we do not understand about the ways of God. His ways are not ours. Yet there are rich treasures at the Wall. Our image and understanding of

God is dramatically transformed. We often have God in a small box. The Wall blows open that box and we begin to see God for the sovereign, mighty, loving, good God that He is.

Our work is to stay with God, to persevere, to faithfully wait on Him, to stick with God--even when everything in us wants to quit and run.

Why? For He is good and His love endures forever.

Failure to understand and surrender to God's working in us at the Wall often results in great long-term pain and confusion. I know many people who have been through great sufferings and hit massive Walls. Yet the Walls did not change them. They only bounced off them. They returned to a similar, but different Wall later.

Again they bounced off it, often becoming more bitter and angry than before.

Yet receiving the gift of God at the Walls that come to each of us, transforms our lives forever in ways that we never dreamed. Enjoy.

CLOSING SUMMARY

I would like to begin my closing summary by reading 2 paragraphs from this chapter in *The EHS book* under the final section called "Characteristics of Life on the Other Side".

"It can be difficult to discern precisely when we began the journey through the Wall and when we might be on the other side. I know many people who have been through great sufferings and hit formidable Walls. Yet the Walls did not change them. They only bounced off them. They returned to a similar, but different Wall later. Again they bounced off it, often more bitter and angry than before. Ultimately, God is the One who moves us through the Wall. And with that comes mystery. How and when God takes us through is up to him. We make choices to trust God, to wait on God, to obey God, to stick with God, to remain faithful when everything in us wants to quit and run. But it is his slow, deep work of transformation in us, not ours."

Abraham journeys well at his Wall. And in doing so, he is a great model for us.

This is not his first wall ---

His first wall -In Gen. 12, we see him at his first wall, leaving all he has known-country, his people, and his father's household to an unknown place.

His second wall - Gen. 13. Tension with Lot, his nephew, as their herdsman are fighting and there is not room for both of them, having to split from him.

His third wall – the infertility of Sarah, his wife (unable to have children) - after God promised He would be a father of nations. This wall goes on for 25

years!

His fourth wall - Marital tension with child born out of wedlock (Gen. 18) and having to send Ishmael away – the son he loves.

Gen. 22 is at least his 5th wall - with the sacrifice of Isaac!

He has been promised by God The Promised Land and children/descendants like stars and to be a universal blessing to the world. Yet Abraham has only 1 son and lives in tent. He is perhaps 110-113 yrs. old!! God seems to be asking him to do something that would cause God's will not to happen! It doesn't make sense. I would ask: "HAVEN'T I BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH?"

PP Primary Issue of the Wall – My Will vs. God's Will

- ****Abraham does not argue, delay, or resist! He is not angry, bitter, disappointed, or not shrink back.**
- He is asked to let go of something he is clinging to – holding him back from greater intimacy with God – “your son, your only son.”
- God loves you enough to strip you of that which keeps you from Him – Some not bad in themselves. They only they keep us from God!
- What we think is best for us is really the worst. What we think is really the worst is actually the best!
- This chapter introduces us to a powerful biblical truth that was written about so beautifully in a 16th century classic called: *The Dark Night of the Soul* - John of Cross. The main point – Dark Nights (or Walls as I am calling it here in this Session) are the ordinary way we grow in Christ and our wires/affections/DNA reworked
- Preparing you for a higher degree of love for Him, to be able to commune with God more abundantly, so you can walk on your own 2 feet.
- Purging your palate, your taste buds so it may feel/taste love of God
- Stripping making us into new men and women we are really meant to be! e.g. Consider: David, Abraham, Joseph.
- God is not simply correcting/restraining your flesh, but purging you of what is deeply rooted and keeping him from you.

This is not about us only externally changing through sheer force of our wills. This is God pulling out of us deep self-will, need for control and replacing it with the life of Jesus. For this reason it is often called the dark night of loving/purifying fire.

Actually to be tested by God is a compliment and a privilege. Abraham is called the father of us all in Romans 4. In other words, his journey of faith is similar to what we will all go thru in following Jesus. There are times we don't know where God is, what He is doing, where He is going and how we are going to get there!

everything inside us wants to quit. Keep still, be quiet and listen for His voice. GOD IS INVADING YOU! EMPTYING YOU TO FILL YOU. Persevere in spiritual exercises when there is no pleasure.

Why? There are rich treasures in the WALL. You will not recognize yourself on the other side. You become the extraordinary human being God intends.

We end up in places we never dreamed of --with people, that we never imagined! God has an incredible future for you – that you too would be a blessing like Abraham... the way He is going to get you there is transform you through Walls He will send/allow.

There is also revelation of God that can only come through Walls and sufferings. Abraham learns out of this wall that God is *Jehovah Jirah*. v. 14 “*The Lord who provides.*” Maybe he knew it before but now he **really** knows it knows. So there are truths about God’s love, faithfulness, goodness that can only be known deeply through dark nights.

Note: John of the Cross notes there are a few people, very few actually, that are entrusted with great suffering, almost violent that if not for the grace of God, they would not survive. He calls it “the dark night of senses.” But to those whom He has entrusted such suffering, he makes the point that God has profound revelation of Himself and a tremendous calling on their lives. I have seen that to be true over the years as well.

So this session is about letting go and trusting God – even when we can’t see how it will work out. Hebrews 11 tells us “Abraham by faith, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice... because he reasoned God could even raise the dead” (v.17). It seemed impossible. It was unheard of at that time. But He knew God was good and God would fulfill His promises for him. So he let go of control of trying to run the future and trusted God. May you and I – by the Holy Spirit’s power --do the same

So let me invite you again this week to Stay with Jesus – At least during this course we are asking you to use *EHS Day by Day* (God is forming/shaping you for a life with Him) And read the next chapter that will prepare you for next week – Enlarge your Soul Thru Grief and Loss.

Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus that we too might know say like David: “*I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life... Ps. 63*”

Session 5: Enlarging Your Soul through Grief and Loss

As we begin our fifth session together, let's get a sense of where we have come and how this session – Enlarging your Soul through Grief and Loss – fits in. We began in the first week by looking at Saul and the problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality. Then we began the 7 pathways to an Emotionally Healthy Spirituality:

- Know Yourself that you May Know God. We looked at David as a model of someone who knew both God and Himself well. This led us then to pathway two.
- Going Back in Order to Go Forward. – to know ourselves requires we understand and embrace where we have come from in our cultures and families of origin and its impact on us today. Often this leads us to a Wall, our third pathway.
- Journey through the Wall. Walls, or as the ancients called it “the dark night of the soul” are times in our spiritual journey God stops us through crisis or circumstances beyond our control. These are times when God deeply transforms us and our understanding of Him.
- The Wall closely relates to our theme for today – Grief and Loss.

Our culture routinely interprets losses as alien invasions that interrupt our “normal” lives. Jonathan Edwards, in a famous sermon on the book of Job, noted that the story of Job is the story of us all. Job lost everything in one day—his 10 children die suddenly in a natural disaster. He loses all his wealth – even though he is one of the richest people in the world, and he loses his health to such an extent that he is physically unrecognizable. That happens to some of us.

But most of us experience our losses more slowly, over the span of a lifetime, until we find ourselves on the door of death, leaving *everything* behind – all our relationships, all our possessions, all our health.

We lose our youthfulness. No amount of plastic surgery, cosmetics, good diet or exercise routine can stop the process of growing older.

We lose our dreams. Who has not lost dreams, dreams of a career or marriage or children for which we hoped?

We experience loss in transitions of life. Each time we change jobs, or move is a loss. Our children grow more independent as they move through their life transitions. Our influence and power decreases as we grow older.

Most of us, in one or more moments of our lives, experience catastrophic loss.

Unexpectedly, a family member dies. A friend or son commits suicide. A spouse has an affair. We find ourselves single again after a painful divorce or breakup. We are diagnosed with cancer. Our company suddenly downsizes and we find ourselves unemployed after 25 years. Our child is born severely handicapped. A loyal friend betrays us. We experience infertility, miscarriages, broken friendships, mental illness, abuse in our childhoods. They are all losses.

We grieve the many things we can't do, our limits. Some people, like me, "lost a leg in that war" in their family of origin growing up and now walk with a limp.

We even lose our wrong ideas of God and the church. We find out that certain ideas we had about Jesus and what it meant to follow Him are inadequate, foolish— maybe even wrong. We feel betrayed by a church tradition, a leader, or even God himself.

We lose our illusions about the church. We discover it is not the perfect family with perfect people as we expected. In fact, people disappoint us. At times, we are bewildered and shocked. Every person who lives in community with other believers, sooner or later, experiences this disillusionment and the grief that accompanies it.

We all face many deaths within our lives.

The choice is whether these deaths will be terminal (crushing our spirit and life) or open us up to new possibilities and depths of transformation in Christ.

Every culture and family deals with grieving differently. Some of us come from families/cultures where sadness was a sign of weakness. You weren't allowed to be depressed. The expectation was that you would stuff it and move on. Others, like mine, did a lot of screaming and wailing, but there was very little hope in God. People generally froze in time.

In our culture, addiction has become the most common way to deal with pain. We watch television for hours to not feel. We keep busy, running from one activity to another. We work 70 hours a week, indulge in pornography, overeat, drink, take pills— anything to help us avoid the pain. Some of us demand that someone or something (a marriage, sexual partner, an ideal family, children, an achievement, a career, or a church) take our pain away.

On top of this, in the church, we have little theology for anger, sadness, waiting, and depression.

"How are you?" we are asked after a loss or disappointment in our lives. "Couldn't be better! God's working all things for good. I just can't see it all yet. " We feel guilty for not obeying Scripture's commands to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4a).

We so often in the church today associate anger, sadness, grieving with being unspiritual, as if something is wrong with our walk with Christ. We're convinced that we are failing and going backwards.

That was my view. For me life –including my spirituality –was bigger, better, faster, moving forward. My job was to be a model of a sold Christian. I prided myself on my stability. If there were setbacks, disappointments, crisis – I was solid. I'd quote Rom.8:28.....

e.g. When I met a depressed person who couldn't seem to come out of it, I would say to myself, "Where is their faith?"

e.g. When I did feel sadness or grief – I would just quote Scriptures to myself like

"With his help I can scale a wall! And "I can do all things thru X who strengthens me."

Needless to say if you were hurting or in pain, I was not going to be very helpful in being compassion and present with you.

Biblically, the very opposite is true. This is a central discipleship issue for all of us. It is meant to be one of the main ways God "enlarges" our soul and transforms us into lovers of Him and others.

I have been thinking about biblical grieving for many years. A theology for grieving can be broken down into three phases. First I pay attention to it. **PP**

We see this in the prayers of David in the Psalms, of Job, of Jeremiah. Job, for example, screams out in his pain, holding nothing back. He cursed the day of his birth: "May the day of my birth perish... If only my anguish could be weighed and all the misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas. . . .The arrows of the Almighty are in me... (Job3:3-4 and 6:2-3, 4).

We forget that 2/3rds of the psalms, most written by David, are laments, complaints to God. He shouts at God. He rages at God. He prays wild prayers. He tells God exactly what he was feeling. And this is the one prayer book/worship manual in all Scripture!

David wrote poetry after the death of Saul and his best friend, Jonathan, commanding his army to sing a lament to God (see 2 Samuel 1:17-27).

We have an entire Old Testament book called Lamentations.

Ezekiel lamented. Daniel grieved. Jesus wept over Lazarus and cried out in grief over Jerusalem (see John 11:35 and Luke 13: 34).

Biblical grieving calls us to pour out our feelings and losses to God.

When I became a Christian, I was taught that anger was a sin. Thinking I was being be Jesus, I stuffed all feelings of irritation, annoyance, resentment, and hatred. In doing so I missed the God in so many ways.

e,g I would let people cross my boundaries, say and do hurtful or disrespectful things to me. I would stuff my anger – rather than seeing it as an oil lite from God to respectfully say something.

e.g. I would be angry at limits that I couldn't get something done that I wanted. Didn't take time to process that before God – really impatience. That I am not in control. God is.

When we do not process before God the very feelings that make us human, such as fear or sadness or anger, we leak.⁶

Our churches are filled with “leaking” Christians who have not treated their emotions as a discipleship issue.

Grieving is not possible without paying attention to our anger and sadness. Most

people who fill churches are “nice” and “respectable. Few explode in anger—at least

in public. The majority, like me, stuff these “difficult feeling,” trusting that God will honor our noble efforts. The result is that we leak through in soft ways such as passive-aggressive behavior (e.g., showing up late), sarcastic remarks, a nasty tone of voice, and the giving of the “silent treatment.”

The 2nd phase of Biblical Grieving is -- Waiting in the Confusing In-Between I hate waiting for subways, buses, airplanes, and people. Like most New Yorkers, I struggle not to finish other people's sentences. I talk too fast.

David in the Psalms waits on God as he flees Saul or hides in the desert from his enemies. He knows God is good and His love endures forever. The problem is that circumstances don't look that way. We experience the same struggle. When we experience losses and setbacks, God invites us to wait.

I hate waiting. I prefer control. I understand why Abraham, after waiting eleven years for God's promise of a son to come true, took matters in his own hands and had a baby outside of his marriage with Hagar. In doing so he birthed a baby called Ishmael. Birthing Ishmaels is common in both our churches and personal lives. “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7) remains one of the most radical commands of our day. It requires enormous humility.

The confusing in-between resists all earthly categories and quick solutions. It runs contrary to our entire culture.

God is not in a rush.

Waiting on Him is life – not just for what He can do for us.

The third phase of biblical grieving is to let the old birth the new. **PP** Good grieving is not just letting go, but also letting it bless us.

The central message of Jesus and the Bible is that suffering and death brings resurrection and transformation. Jesus himself said, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24).

But remember, resurrection only comes out of death—real death. Our losses are real, very real. But as we pay attention and wait on God in our losses and griefs, no matter how long it takes, God, over time, births resurrection.

Our God is alive. If we will follow the biblical process of grief ---always there is a resurrection of some sort over time.

There are many rich fruits that blossom in our lives as a result of embracing our losses. The greatest, however, concerns our relationship to God. When we grieve God's way, we are changed forever. It is one of the major ways God grows us into spiritual maturity.

Loss marks the place where self-knowledge and powerful transformation happen— if we have the courage to participate fully in the process.

We all face many “deaths” within our lives. That is God's path for all of us.

Do

n't

be discouraged.

The choice is whether these deaths will be terminal (crushing our spirit and life) or will open us up to new possibilities and depths of transformation in Christ.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Let me begin by reading the first few paragraphs of this chapter on Grief and Loss:

“There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality. In fact the true spiritual life is not an escape from reality but an absolute commitment to it. Loss marks the place where self- knowledge and powerful transformation happen—if we have the courage to participate fully in the process. Loss and grief, however, cannot be separated from the issue of our limits as human beings.

Limits are behind all loss. We cannot do or be anything we want. God has placed enormous limits around even the most gifted of us. Why? To keep us grounded, to keep us humble. In fact, the very meaning of the word *humility* has its root in the Latin *humus*, meaning “of the earth.”

Our culture routinely interprets losses as alien invasions that interrupt our “normal” lives. We numb our pain through denial, blaming, rationalizations, addictions, and avoidance. We search for spiritual shortcuts around our wounds. We demand others take away our pain.

Yet we all face many deaths within our lives. The choice is whether these deaths will be terminal (crushing our spirit and life) or open us up to new possibilities and depths of transformation in Christ.”

Losses/grief comes into all our lives – deaths, divorces, breakups, illnesses, crushing disappointments, abuse, dreams dashed, relationships broken never to be restored, failures, our children, our parents, doors/opportunities close, painful memories of decisions we've made and people we have hurt.

This is a foundational, critical discipleship.

Issue to grow into spiritual maturity. It leads to a wholeness, a richness, a depth way we never dreamed. In fact, as Henri Nouwen has written -- the degree to which we grieve our losses well is the degree to which we are compassionate people.

- Every family, culture, race has their way of dealing with loss and grief. The challenge – to do so biblically.
- For this reason, two thirds of Psalms are Laments- feelings/expressions of sorrow.
- The 2nd Beatitude is “Blessed are those who mourn,” most of book Job a struggle with grief. And we have a whole book in the Bible called LAMENTATIONS.

We learn a great deal from Jesus as he deals with

His grief and loss. Jesus wanted out.

- The deep horror - Can I fulfill your plan by some other way?
“If it is possible” – so much for healthily, wealthy, prosperity, victory, that it is always possible to have bad things removed!

In a very real sense, Jesus does not get His miracle. The Father says ‘no’ (if means getting what we want or look way we think). We don’t always get our miracles either! We are not God.

To enlarge our souls thru loss, we must listen to interruptions that God sends our way, or allows in our lives. In fact, once we begin to look for God in our losses, we actually stop calling them *interruptions*. They become gifts. We begin to see gems, hidden treasures in the trash, the unlovely, in that which sometimes smells bad!

Here are few gifts, or treasures, found in the pain of grief and loss – if we will hang with God and do grief and loss God’s way and not our cultures.

1. Grief and Loss Breaks our Self- Will

PP *Although He was a son, he learned obedience from what He suffered Heb. 5:7*

- Jesus – fully God and fully human. God in the flesh. His flesh was not imaginary. Jesus submitted to the will of God by conforming His human will to God’s will.
- He struggles in this passage and would like out. Jesus told the Father about his present want/desire. He did not pretend! But He is able to say “But the main thing I want is NOT what I want, but what you want!
- SEE HIM STRUGGLING -- 3x prays the same thing
- He did not just automatically DO obedience. He learned it. We learn from Jesus a very important lesson that -- *A struggled, learned, prayed for obedience is the true obedience.*

2. PP Grief and loss teach us to let go.

THERE IS A LINE WE DO NOT CROSS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THAT BELONGS TO

GOD ALONE. IT IS MYSTERY. **We** bow before the mystery of suffering, death and loss. GOD IS GOOD AND HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER. WE DON'T UNDERSTAND IT ALL.

You can't fix or save anyone else. Be present (going thru your Walls/losses will help you be quiet!)

3. PP Grief and loss empty our hearts, creating space for God to fill.

- In emptying, we create a holy vacancy for God, allowing Him to fill our lives in new ways.
- Loss creates space for the love of God to come in. That is why I like the phrase "enlarging our soul". If we pay attention to God in our losses, something profound happens internally. Junk gets removed that creates space for God to fill with His presence, His treasures, truths, etc.

We are not the same people when it is over.

4. PP Grief and loss teach us about prayer - the very core of the Christian life.

- Jesus shows us- a prayer life is indispensable to grieving well, that life really is about dependence and limits.
- ***JESUS PRAYS -- if He needed to....so much more you! how much more do I need a life of prayer.
- You see Prayer is about abiding, being with God,

communion, relationship. This is the path to the new- to resurrection – to many seeds. MYSTERY

***Remember: There is always resurrection through death.

PP *It is true – I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Jn. 12:24*

God's invitation – We are invited to persevere-- like Job, David, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus

- Let your stony heart be broken so the love of Jesus can enter.
- Let God use your pain to teach you so you will become a gift to others.
- Let transformation comes – surrendering to God's unique way of bringing that to you and me.

So this week, you will want to stick with the Daily Office- regardless of how you are feeling- opening up your will to God's will, receiving His love, listening to His voice. Again, the devotions will correspond to the theme of this session. And you will want to read the next chapter in the *EHS Book- Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath.*

Session 6: DISCOVER THE RHYTHM OF THE DAILY OFFICE & SABBATH

The present day spirituality of most people in our churches is marked, I believe, by a number of sad realities.

- We are busy, very busy.
- We live our lives “on the run”, squeezing God in where we can.
- We live off other people’s spirituality -- because we don’t have the time.
- We’re overloaded and exhausted.
- Words that describe our culture include: scattered, fragmented, un-centered, and distracted.
- We multi-task, so much so that we are unaware we are doing three things at once.
- We are always on the way to something or someplace else.

As a result, few people have the time to develop their own direct experience of God. We have a lot of head knowledge about God but much of it has not penetrated our hearts. We sing and study about the love and goodness of God, but experientially, when things fall apart around us, we panic and act as if God doesn’t exist.

In fact, most people don’t really pray that much on their own. Studies have shown that even the average pastor prays only about 7 minutes a day. What does that say for the rest of our people? Is it any wonder that most people are not very intentional about pursuing Jesus? We live off whatever books, sermons, CD’s, or spiritual crumbs that comes our way.

We listen to sermons and read books about slowing down and creating margin in our lives.² We attend seminars. We talk about spiritual disciplines. But it is not enough.

We can’t stop.

Remember it is the combination of emotional health and a slowed down, or contemplative spirituality, that releases a revolution of transformation in our lives.

We need emotional health. But we also need some of the riches of the contemplative tradition, found in Scripture and history, to slow us down to be with Jesus.

This session introduces you to two ancient disciplines going back thousands of years—the Daily Office and Sabbath. Both of these are groundbreaking and counter-cultural. These two powerful disciplines provide a means for us to begin reorienting our entire lives toward a new center— God.

The first ancient practice is called the *Daily Office*. Most of us were taught to have quiet times or devotions.

I would spend time with God in the morning, for example, reading the Bible and praying. I did it to get charged up for the day and hopefully remain attentive to God throughout the day.

The problem, however, is that it was not enough. By midday was so wrapped up in the demands of the day that I wasn't even thinking about God, let alone having a conversation with Him or listening to Him. . It underestimated how many distractions that come our way, as well as the power of evil in the world, and my own stubborn self-will.

I purposely have changed the name from quiet time and devotions to the Daily Office for the sake of communicating something powerful and unique.

The focus of the Daily Office is to be with God, not to get something from Him.

It is about communion, abiding, remaining in Jesus.

Moreover, the Daily Office is about meeting with God not once a day but pausing to be with him 2-3-4 times a day.

It means literally "the work of God". It means that, like David in Ps. 27, my first work in life, regardless of my vocation or job, is to seek God and to be with Him (Ps. 27:4).**PP**

We know David practiced set times of prayer seven times a day (see Psalm 119:164). Daniel prayed three times a day (see Daniel 6:10). Devout Jews in Jesus' time prayed two to three times a day. We know that Jesus prayed early in the mornings, sometimes all night – yet most scholars believe that Jesus followed the Jewish custom of his day of praying at set times during the day.

So why pause not 1x a day to be with God, but two or three. times? The answer - So that when I am active the other parts of the day, I am attentive to God and His voice.

This pausing to be with God can last anywhere from two minutes to twenty minutes to forty-five minutes. It is up to you. But the actual stopping is what makes the "practice of the presence of God," to use Brother Lawrence's phrase, a real possibility.

For me it has been life changing. Being with God in the morning and before I go to bed- easy. Midday prayer, however, has really changed me. To pull out to be with God sometime between 11 am and 2 pm . Whether I just read a psalm, pray the Lord's prayer, or am silent for 3 minutes before the Lord, it readjusts my heart, gets my will more with His—

- "Why am I pushing so hard to get through that agenda? This is not that important.
- I may be anxious about one of our children. Just the pause reminds me He is on the throne and I am able to release them to Him.

There are endless possibilities, and tools, for what you can do with your time God during these prayer times. God has built us each differently. What works for one person will not for another.

Yet four elements, I believe, need to be found in any Office, regardless of what approach you ultimately choose.

PP 23 (Possibly this will help to list these)

1. Stopping

This is the essence of a Daily Office. We stop our activity and pause to be with the Living God.

2. Centering

Scripture commands us: “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7a) and “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10a). We move into God’s presence and rest there.

3. Silence: Dallas Willard has called *silence* and *solitude* the two most radical disciplines of the Christian life. Henri Nouwen said that “without solitude it is almost impossible to live a spiritual life.”¹¹ And fourthly,

4. Scripture

A good rule to follow when dealing with tools and techniques is this: If it helps, do it. If it does not help you, do not do it—including the Daily Office.

To get started, use the Daily Office book that accompanies THE EHS Course called “EH Day by Day.” Let it help you step out of our 24/7 culture that never stops and develop a rhythm with God in your days.

The Second Ancient Treasure is Sabbath-Keeping **PP**

The Daily Office concerns itself with a daily rhythm. Sabbath-Keeping is about a weekly rhythm for our lives.

The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word that means “to cease, to stop working.” It refers to doing nothing related to work for a twenty-four hour period each week. **PP**

The reason this is so radical is our culture knows nothing of setting aside a whole day (twenty-four hours) to rest and delight in God. Like most, I always considered it an optional extra for most of my Christian life, not something absolutely essential to my discipleship. While I would not put Sabbath keeping on the par with murder or adultery, it is a critical spiritual discipline essential for spiritual formation. We are not saved by Sabbath but Christ. But as Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). It is a gift from God we are called to receive.

Take a look at the 10 commandments with me. The longest and most specific of the Ten Commandments is the fourth: **PP** read the 4th.

- Remember the Sabbath day by ~~keeping it holy~~. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord our God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within

your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

There are two extremes to the way people approach Sabbath. On one extreme is legalism. This says, “If you don’t keep Sabbath, God is angry and it is like you have committed murder.” All kinds of rules and don’ts end up around this

view.. The other extreme is one that treats Sabbath as irrelevant and there is no need to bother with it at all. (what I was taught).

The balanced, and I would argue biblical, position is that Sabbath keeping is a core spiritual formation discipline – like prayer and reading Scripture. We are saved by Jesus – not by praying or reading the Bible. In the same way we aren't saved keeping Sabbath. God doesn't love us more if we do certain things. But the fact is-- if we're not praying or reading the Bible, we're probably not growing very much. The same applies with Sabbath. It is an indicator that we are too busy and that we are doing too much.

Practicing Sabbath is about setting a regular rhythm every 7 days for a 24-hour block of time. Traditional Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends on sundown Saturday. Others choose a day of the week like Saturday or Sunday all day. The apostle Paul seemed to think one day would do as well as another (see Romans 14:1-17). What is important is to select a time period and protect it!

For Geri and I, we normally Sabbath from 6 pm Friday night to 6 pm Saturday night. We will start by lighting a candle, special meal, a prayer. Like the Daily Office, this has changed our marriage, family, and walk with God. It has helped us slow down for a rhythm in a world that keeps moving faster and faster.

The following are four principles of biblical Sabbaths that have served me well in distinguishing a “day off” from a biblical Sabbath. A secular Sabbath is to replenish our energies and make us more effective the other six days. A Sabbath is

:to the Lord our God” and has certain qualities. Each of us has different temperaments, personalities, life-situations, and callings. So the way Sabbath gets worked out will be different for each of us. It will be a process of trial and error for

you to figure out what works best for you. But the following are the principles to guide you: The first is:

1. Stop (PP 26)

Sabbath is first and foremost a day of “stopping.”

Yet most of us can't stop until we are finished whatever it is we think we need to do. We need to complete our projects, answer our e-mails, return all phone messages, complete the balancing of our check books, finish cleaning the house. There's always one more thing to do before stopping.

The Sabbath calls us to build the doing of nothing into our schedules each week. Nothing measurable is accomplished. By the world's standards it is inefficient, unproductive, and useless. As one theologian stated, “To fail to see the value of simply being with God and ‘doing nothing’ is to miss the heart of Christianity.”¹⁵

We stop on Sabbaths because God is on the throne, assuring us the world will not fall apart if we cease our activities. God is at work taking care of the universe. He manages quite well without us having to run things.

The second quality of a Sabbath is:

2. Rest (PP 26)

Once we stop the Sabbath calls us to rest. God rested after his work. We are to do the same—every seventh day- resting from our paid and unpaid work. We rest from things like hurry, physical exhaustion, catching up on errands, technology and machines. Again, what is rest to one person may not be rest to another. When we stop and rest, we respect our humanity and the image of God in us.

3. Delight (PP)

A third component is perhaps the most important. A biblical Sabbath revolves around delighting in what we have been given. God, after finishing his work of creation on the first Sabbath, proclaimed that “It was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God delighted over his creation. He beamed with delight. On Sabbaths we are invited to enjoy and delight in God’s creation and its gifts. That is why if the day turns out to be a lot of “Don’t do this.” And “Don’t do that,” we have missed the point.

We are to slow down and pay attention to the innumerable gifts of life God has provided for us to enjoy. We are to take the time to see the beauty of a tree, a leaf, a flower, to taste our foods, and to really see the people God has placed around us.

Finally...

4. Contemplate(PP)

That is – we see the invisible God in the visible creation. Because we are stopping our work, we intentionally focus on seeing and receiving God through all of life. We ponder His love as it comes through things like food and nature. We slow down to see His gifts. It is true we want to do this on all 7 days, but in particular, we want to train ourselves to see the invisible God in the visible world around us.

Pondering the love of God remains the central focus of our Sabbaths. For this reason Saturday nights to Sunday nights, or all day Sundays, remain the ideal time for Sabbath-keeping for most people whenever possible.

On every Sabbath, we experience a sampling of something greater that awaits us. Our short earthly lives are put in perspective as we look forward to the day when God’s kingdom will come in all its fullness and we will enter an eternal Sabbath feast in God’s perfect presence. There will be a day when we stop, rest, delight, and contemplate him fully when we see Him face to face.

We, along with our staff, will often say “How did we ever live without Sabbath!” The answer is – “We did violence at times to our souls!”

Sabbath-keeping and the Daily Office are two truly counter-cultural spiritual formation practices that enable us to slow down to God’s rhythm. Most importantly, they help us stay tuned in to God’s presence for our days and our weeks.

So as you go into this session, remember this is a radical shift for our lives in the 21st century. It will take a while for you to figure out how to do these things in your context. But let this session guide you in taking your first small steps towards a less hurried life that is more anchored and centered in the love of God.

CLOSING SUMMARY

The key word in this session is the word RHYTHM – that God has created us for rhythm in our 24/7 world. You and I were wired for it – in our days and a rhythm in our weeks.

For the entire EHS Course, we have been working on developing a rhythm in our days through stopping 2x each day to be with Jesus so that we might practice His presence/remember him all through the day. Each week we've encouraged you to engage the *EHS Day by Day Daily Office* book to get you started.

We spent most of this session looking at developing a weekly rhythm of Sabbath – i.e.

PP Sabbath: a 24 hour period each week to STOP, REST, DELIGHT, CONTEMPLATE God. Rather than see it as something burdensome or irrelevant, our goal has been to recapture the gift of Sabbath as Jesus taught: *“The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27)*. In other words- Sabbath is a gift to receive.

The Israelites didn't learn to practice Sabbath overnight. It took them a lot of time as well as trial and error. So it will be for us. And let's face it- the notion of Sabbath rhythm in our culture is very radical and countercultural. This will take time for each of us to figure out. So give yourself lots of grace as you take your first steps around building a 24- hour Sabbath that fits you.

In your workbooks at the end of this session, you will see a number of FAQ's –i.e. frequently asked questions. I imagine that a few of these – and others – emerged in your group.

Why do I need to keep Sabbath for a whole 24-hour period each week? Yes that is biblical. But you may need to start with 12 hours.

How do I go about deciding what specific activities are acceptable and unacceptable on the Sabbath? You'll have to think of activities that create delight and rest for you. That will be different than mine- e.g. I love reading, music, nature, beach, hiking. Working around the house, or Cooking- not on my Delight list –but it may be on yours.

Do you I have to take my Sabbath on a particular day of the week? The important principle is not necessarily to take one specific day as Sabbath. Paul says in Romans 14:5-6 that every day is alike. We're encouraging people to take Sat night to Sun night or all day Sunday because in today's culture. Why? Worship/church is built in as the center. For me- for example, it is Friday night at 6 pm to Saturday night at 6 pm since Sunday is a work day for me. Others work in occupations such as law-enforcement, doctors and nurses, etc. that require work on Sundays.

Do I need a day-off and a Sabbath? You will need at least a half –day, or several hours, to prepare for Sabbath. Part of the Sabbath experience is the preparation time.

Do I spend the Sabbath alone or with other people? What do I do about my tendency to perfectionism? How do I cease from the work of parenting? (No

change the diaper!) **What do I about my children who aren't interested in Sabbath?** The important thing to remember is that this is not a day of don't do!. Sabbath is to be a delight. Rather than simply taking things away, think about things you can add (e.g. special desserts, a movie, a creative family activity – depending on the ages of your children).

-- There are many other practical questions: **Do I have to do Sabbath with my spouse?** NO. We do most of the time. **Can I delight in earthly things?** Yes. That is the point. But to see God as the creator and gift giver to you. The list goes on.

Let me close with a biblical insight that might help you, as it has helped me, why this issue of practicing Sabbath is both so powerful and so difficult to do. It has to do with that fact that, as theologian Walter Brueggeman has written, we practice Sabbath, we resist principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12). When Moses gives the Sabbath command in

PP Deut. 5:12-15 *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. . . . Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*

The key phrase in this command is: *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there.* As slaves in Egypt for over 400 years, the Israelites worked seven days a week, 365 days a year. Their parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and great-great grandparents existed for only one reason — to work. They never stopped. They never rested. They never delighted.

In ancient times, Pharaoh was considered a god and worshiped as such. Behind his demonic rule were principalities and powers that enslaved God's people, defining their very existence as nonpersons whose only purpose was to work and produce. When Pharaoh's oppression over God's people had been broken, they were given a new identity. Their worth and value is no longer based on what *they do*; it is based on *who they are* — sons and daughters upon whom the living God has set his love and grace.

Sadly, many of us remain under a harsh taskmaster, a "Pharaoh" who now lives inside our heads, telling us we can't stop or rest. The culture tells us our only value is in what we achieve or produce, that we are losers unless we accomplish more — whatever it may cost us. We are doing well only if we are being productive. We compare ourselves to others who seem to produce more bricks more quickly, and we wonder, *What's my problem?*

In offering us the gift of Sabbath, God invites us to resist the principalities and powers and side with him. Through this weekly practice, we defy every influence that defines us either by our role, or our work. We publicly proclaim to the world that we are not slaves, but free men and women purchased by the blood of Jesus.

To this day, the Jewish people consider Sabbath keeping a central feature of their identity as God's chosen people. And it's remarkable to see how Sabbath still functions as a form of resistance. I especially love the example of B&H Photo.

Located on 9th Avenue in New York City, B&H Photo is the largest non-chain photo and video equipment store in the United States and the second

largest in the world. The owners, along with many of their employees, are Hasidic Jews who dress just as their eighteenth-century ancestors did in Eastern Europe. On any given day, 8,000 to 9,000 people pass through the front door. Yet 70 percent of their business is online, serviced by a 200,000-square-foot warehouse located nearby in Brooklyn.

Even in a competitive marketplace, B&H won't conduct business on the Sabbath. They close their doors at 1 p.m. on Fridays and keep them closed all day Saturday, the biggest shopping day of the week. During Sabbath, customers can peruse the B&H website, but they can't make an online order.

When a newspaper asked the B&H director of communications how they could close not just the retail store but also the website on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving and the busiest shopping day of the year. The director simply replied, "We respond to a higher authority."¹⁷

Sabbath observance can be rich and beautiful, but we have to be willing to create the protective container — the boundaries — that make it possible. In order to enter into it, we have to develop some concrete guidelines that distinguish Sabbath from business as usual the other six days of the week. So use the principles of **PP STOP, REST, DELIGHT, CONTEMPLATE** (see invisible God in visible creation). For some, this may include turning off all social media, phones, and computers. For others, it may be a zero tolerance for any talk about work. Perhaps the Sabbath might start and end with a meal, the lighting of a candle, or a prayer. The key is to take the four principles of Sabbath and build a protective container that fits your temperament, personality, life situation.

Jesus is our Sabbath rest and we are headed for an eternal Sabbath with Him in heaven. In that day, we will STOP all our earthly work, REST from all that work, DELIGHT in His glory and CONTEMPLATE Him fully when we see Him face to face. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said it best: *Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come.* ⁴

May you taste heaven and you embark on this wonderful, liberating journey of discovering the rhythm of practicing Sabbath

Part 7: Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult

After becoming a Christian at the age of 19, I threw myself wholeheartedly into growing in Christ and serving Him. I attended the best leadership conferences available, graduated from seminary, read through the Bible each year, even memorized whole books of the Bible (short ones, of course). I preached sermons, planted a church in the inner city of New York and dedicated all my time, energy and money I had – to serve Jesus Christ.

One of the turning points of my life, however, was at the 17-year mark of being a Christian. God had been trying to get my attention, thru a variety of means, for quite some time at that point. But I was too busy – for Him of course – to actually pay Him much attention.

It was when I finally heard Geri – I mean really heard her. She shared about how lonely she was in our marriage, like a single parent without our 4 girls, that she didn't feel valued or cherished by me. Even though I loved her, she didn't feel that from me

By the grace of God- I finally saw it. I was an emotional infant leading a church. Here I was – Mr. Xian – and my own wife didn't feel loved by me.

WOW. I was embarrassed, ashamed, stricken. Of course, the quality of love inside the church is not really that different than the quality of love outside the church. I just had to look at me- the pastor. And I was so preoccupied with so many things on my mind, the people around me didn't feel much love coming out of me either. I was too busy going on my way.

God had my attention!

I was just another person who appeared to be growing in their love for God but not growing in their love for people.

In the first century, the Christians in the church in Corinth also failed to make that connection. They were zealous, diligent, and absolutely committed to having God as

Lord of their lives. They had faith to move mountains, gave great amounts of money to the poor, and were incredibly gifted. But they did not love people.

They did not link loving God to loving people. They had, like many today, a disconnected spirituality. Paul wrote: *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels...If I have the gift of prophecy... if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

Jesus always integrated the presence of God with the practice of loving people. He summarized the entire Bible for us in light of this unbreakable union: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and*

with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

What Jesus says is that the essence of true Christian spirituality is to love well.

This requires that we experience connection with God, with ourselves, and with other people. God invites us to practice his presence in our daily lives. At the same time, he invites us to "practice the presence of people," within an awareness of his presence, in our daily relationships.

For this reason we placed this session between Daily Office and Sabbath and session 8 on going the next step to develop a Rule of Life. It is meant to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground. We are about both loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and loving people. They are inseparable.

Now, regardless of our chronological age, we are at different stages of emotional maturity. We can be in our thirties or forties physically, and yet be emotionally a teenager or infant. Here's a description of the 4 emotional stages we find ourselves in. See which of these you identify with most:

Emotional Infants

- Look for others to take care of them
- Have great difficulty entering into the world of others
- Are driven by need for instant gratification
- Use others as objects to meet their needs

Emotional Children

- Are content and happy as long as they receive what they want
- Unravel quickly from stress, disappointments, trials
- Interpret disagreements as personal offenses
- Are easily hurt
- Complain, withdraw or become sarcastic when they don't get their way
- Have great difficulty calmly discussing their needs and wants in a mature, loving way

Emotional Adolescents

- Tend to be defensive
- Are threatened and alarmed by criticism
- Keep score of what they give so they can ask for something later in return
- Deal with conflict poorly.
- Become preoccupied with themselves
- Are critical and judgmental

Emotional Adults

- Are able to ask for what they need, want, or prefer—clearly, directly, honestly
- Recognize, manage, and take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings
- Can, when under stress, state their own beliefs and values without becoming adversarial
- Respect others without having to change them
- Give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect
- Have the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others

When we accept Jesus Christ and become Christians, growing into emotionally mature adults is not natural. That requires intentional discipleship. Nobody would debate that a spiritually mature Christian is one who loves well. The problem is that few of us have learned practically how to do that.

This is one of the greatest gifts we can give our world -- be a community of emotionally healthy adults who love well. This takes the power of God and a commitment to learn, grow, and break with unhealthy, destructive patterns from our families and cultures—and in some cases, our Christian culture also.

We learn many skills to be competent in our careers and at school. We invest thousands of dollars and years of our time. We don't learn, however, the skills necessary to grow into an emotionally mature adult who loves well.

The Bible is clear what we are to do. But it does not give us the specific “how to's” that will change from culture to culture, generation to generation. Part of growing into an emotionally mature Christian is learning how to apply practically

and effectively the truths we believe. For example:

- * be quick to hear and slow to speak
- * be angry and sin not
- * speak the truth in love
- * be a true peacemaker
- * do not bear false witness against my neighbor
- * get rid of all bitterness, rage, and envy

Many of us believe loving well is learned automatically, that it is just a “feeling.” We underestimate the depth of our bad habits and what is needed to sustain long-term, Christ-like change in our relationships.

Growing into an emotionally mature Christian adult means I experience each individual (including myself) as sacred, or as Martin Buber put it, as a “Thou” rather than an “It”. **PP** It requires learning, practicing and integrating such skills as speaking respectfully, listening with empathy, negotiating conflict fairly and uncovering the

hidden expectations I have of others...just to name a few.

This belief led Geri and me, many years ago, to begin creating and gathering exercises and tools, so people could learn how love well-i.e. how to grow into an emotionally mature adults. We wanted to move people from defensiveness, reactivity, and fear, to openness, empathy, and vulnerability.

We realized people needed to experience a new, kingdom-way of relating that was outside their comfort zone. Practicing new skills like the one in this session will cause a level of discomfort initially. They are easy to understand but difficult to implement. But by repeatedly practicing mature, godly behaviors, we have seen people freed from lifelong cycles of emotional immaturity. They serve as a key link in moving people into becoming mothers and fathers of the faith.

This intentionality to grow into an emotionally mature adult, this commitment we made to learn skills to love well - transformed our marriage of course. It also changed our parenting of our 4 girls. We then brought this to our church body at New Life Fellowship. Singles learned skills. Married couples. Young Adults as well. This commitment to grow into emotionally mature adults actually has changed the entire culture of New Life.

Even now, at our staff meeting each week, we begin with an EH Skill that creates a wonderful atmosphere –We share an appreciation of the previous week. It is simple but wonderful way to create a culture of thankfulness and praise. As you probably can suspect, many people don't' grow up in that....

How? We finally integrated the biblical truth that spiritual maturity and emotional maturity are inseparable. It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. **PP** As you will hopefully see, once you see this connection, it changes everything.

Jesus was aware of the need for the practical living out of a life of loving

well. He knew that great messages to the multitudes alone were not enough for people to truly “get it”. So he chose twelve disciples, and with them, he modeled the practical application of his teaching. He had his disciples practice and he supervised them.

In this session you will take some first steps at breaking the power of our pasts and growing into an emotionally mature adult in the new family of Jesus.

Practically walking out what we believe and building a countercultural community that relates maturely is truly one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves and the world around us.

So allow yourself to be stretched as you look at the famous parable of the Good Samaritan and then actually practice one concrete skill around the area of expectations.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Let me begin our wrap up with a contrast. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day, the church leaders of his time, were diligent, zealous and totally committed to God. They memorized whole books of the Bible. They gave more than 10% of their income. They prayed 5x a day. They evangelized. Yet they were emotionally immature. Unlike Jesus, they did not delight in people. They weren’t approachable, safe, warm, kind and loving. They didn’t link growing in their ability to love God with growing in their ability to love people. Is it any wonder they criticized Jesus repeatedly for being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19)? He delighted in people and life too much.

How do I follow the example of the Good Samaritan who showed such beautiful compassion on the beaten man on the side of the road and at the same time set limits so I am a loving person for the long haul? That takes skills and learning.

Let me close our time with 2 applications for us:

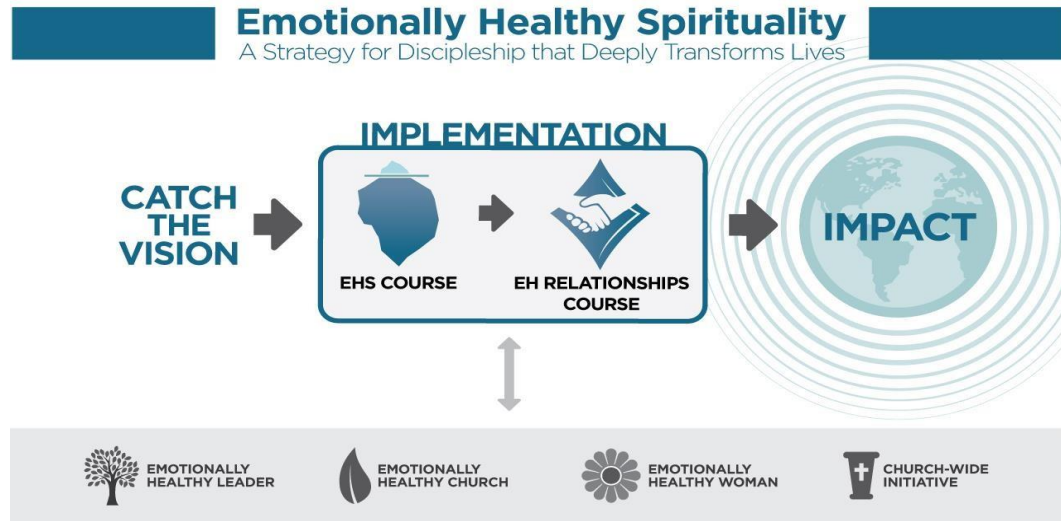
1. PP Become Aware of How Your Family of Origin did Emotional Connection.

- Did you learn to trust?
- Did you learn to respect others?
- Did you learn to wait and to take turns?
- Did you learn to speak clearly, respectfully honestly and in a timely way?
- Were your feelings allowed?
- Did you learn to listen well?
- What did you learn about processing your anger?
- What did you learn about clean fighting and negotiating differences?

Becoming a Christian does not automatically make us into an emotionally mature adult who loves well. Is this important? Paul reminds in 1 Cor. 13 – if we don't have love, we don't have anything.

We must go back to go forward. Thankfully, because of Jesus inside of us, we have enormous power by the Holy Spirit to change! We can learn to do things different than the imprints on us from our family of origins and our pasts. But this is an issue of getting equipped.

PP 2. Take Practical Steps of Discipleship to Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult



There are 2 foundational courses in emotionally healthy spirituality introduce people to a serious, transformative discipleship with Jesus. The first Course – The EHS Course, which is what you are in now, emphasizes the interior life and developing our 1st hand relationship with Jesus. The 2nd course is called *The Emotionally Healthy Relationships Course*. This deals with 8 skills – developed over an 18 year period- that teach us how to love well in the new family of Jesus. We did one of those skills today called “Clarify Expectations.”

NOTE: I would consider if you could keep the graphic up while I am speaking up to this point.

We saw how easily we can make assumptions about what someone should do without checking it out. And as we said, for an expectation to be valid, it must be conscious, realistic, spoken, and agreed upon. The Emotionally Healthy Relationships Course teaches 8 tools or skills to grown into emotionally mature adults who love well in the new family of Jesus. They are:

- PP** (list the 8 1 by 1)
- The Community Temperature Reading
 - Stop Mind Reading
 - Clarify Expectations
 - Genogram Your Family

- Explore the Iceberg
- Incarnational Listening
- Climb the Ladder of Integrity
- Clean Fighting

Don't underestimate what is involved in doing these skills. You are breaking generations of unhealthy ways of relating that go back in your family and culture -- perhaps 100's of years! That is no small thing. These skills don't just become part of you overnight. Give yourself time and grace. Remember, Israel coming out of Egypt took 400 years. (This is the same principle we learned last week of how challenging it is to slow down and develop rhythms for Sabbath).

Always remember that even though you change, it doesn't mean those around you have. So I like to remind myself of a famous story about a Hasidic rabbi on his deathbed who said the following: *When I was young, I set out to change the world. When I grew a little older I perceived this was too ambitious so I set out to change my state. This too I realized was too ambitious so I set out to change my town. When I realized I could not even do this, I tried to change my family. Now as an old man I know that I should have started by changing myself. If I had started with myself, maybe then I would have succeeded in changing my family, the town, or even the state – and who knows maybe even the world.*

So let me pray for you as we close – that God will strengthen you, give you grace. Before I do, however, let me encourage you to continue seeking to develop a daily rhythm with *The EHS Day by Day* devotional. You'll want to use Week 7 that reinforces today's theme of *Growing Into an Emotionally Mature Adult*. And read the final chapter in the EHS book as we prepare for our final session together.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you embark on this new journey. May the Lord make His face shine upon you.... May the power of the Holy Spirit fill you that old destructive patterns deeply embedded inside you be broken up and may God rebuild you and set you free – so that you don't only practice the presence of God but practice the presence of people. In Jesus' name! AMEN.

Session 8: Go the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life

Congratulations! We are in Session 8 of the EHS Course--“Go the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life. We have sought to help you begin a new phase of your spiritual journey. We have looked at: **PP**

The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality

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 Rhythm of the Daily Office and Sabbath

and Growing into an Emotionally Mature Adult.

This session is intended to bring all our previous studies together.

One of the main reasons people turn away from Christianity is because of the many so-called rules that exist. Many of these rules lead to constraint, legalism and squeezes joy out of us. So associating Christian faith with rules seems counter-intuitive. But there's a spiritual formation practice called “Developing a Rule of Life” within Christian faith that is not meant to constrain us. I actually liberates us. It is a “Rule” that has the purpose of infusing joy rather than squeezing it out. I'm referring to a “Rule of Life”.

So, our focus for this session is taking a small step to develop a personal “Rule of life” to center your life around the love of God.

When most people reflect on their relationship with God, what we see is compartmentalization. That is -- we separate our spiritual life from other parts of our life – like home or work or recreation. Before God, however, every aspect of our lives is equally sacred. What we are missing is an intentional plan to live this out.

The background to this session is a recognition that powerful, external forces exist in the culture to cut us off from communion/abiding/remaining with Jesus. Behind these distractions and seductions to pull you and me away from Christ, the Bible says, are

demonic evil powers. The challenge to resist the Beast (as the book of Revelation describes the problem) requires a radical solution. Simply committing ourselves to spiritual disciplines or try harder is not enough.

At the same time, within us is our own fallen flesh/nature that naturally resists God's will. Our tendency is to do our own will, not God's will – or at least twist His arm to do what we want.

For this reason, this final session is to introduce you to another ancient buried treasure out of the church history called a Rule of Life.

A Rule of Life finds its roots in the men and women who withdrew from society as hermits to the deserts of Egypt and Syria during the third to fifth centuries to seek God after the emperor had made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire. They wanted to free themselves from the worldliness found both inside and outside the church. They wanted to truly find God and thus bring Him to both the church and the world. They eventually formed communities and organized their daily life around an agreed

up plan consisting of work, prayer, and the study of Scripture. They knew that to grow and mature spiritually, they needed both one another, and a thoughtful, conscious, purposeful plan. They called this plan a Rule of Life.

Again, please don't be intimidated by the word *rule*. The word comes from the ancient Greek word for "trellis." **PP** A trellis is a tool that enables a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life is a trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. It's been said that a rule of life is "'an exterior framework for an interior journey': a kind of scaffolding to use to build the spiritual structure of our individual life with God." It is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do.

It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do.

The goal - to be with God and to love him in everything we do.

The early church in Acts 2, as you shall see during your Bible study, gathered around a Rule of Life with particular practices that enabled them to prefer the love of Christ above all things – prayer, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread.

Each local church has a *trellis*, or a Rule of Life. God has raised up various local churches in different cities and communities. We finally commit to one that has a structure, a trellis, a "rule" that we believe will help us grow upward and deeper with Jesus. This may include midweek services, worship, preaching, small groups, ministries, and particular emphases.

On a personal level, however, few people have a conscious plan for developing their spiritual lives. Most Christians are not intentional, but rather function like cars on autopilot. We have an unconscious way that we develop our spiritual lives. That may include reading the Bible in the morning for few minutes, attending church and small group weekly, giving money, praying at dinner, etc. We come to church and interact with whatever is handed to us. We are, for the most part, passive and not intentional.

The invitation of this session is to intentionally take one step to develop your own personal "Rule of Life". The key word here is INTENTIONALITY. It requires intentionally to anchor us in the hurricane pace and beast of our twenty-first-century world. Swimming against such a strong current, without the anchor of a Rule of Life, is almost impossible. Eventually we find ourselves unfocused, distracted, and adrift spiritually.

Intentionally thinking though my own personal "Rule of Life" has been life-changing for me. Each year I take a period of time to think through my "Rule." This has served me in enabling to maintain a rhythm and balance for my entire life. In other words because I have a commitment to Sabbath, rest, delighting in life, cultivating my walk with Christ – I am much more aware of my limits. That when I say yes to add another work project or commitment to my life (like writing a book), I'm looking at the implications on how this will affect my time with God, myself, Geri, our girls.

This ancient spiritual discipline has helped put work in its proper place and helped me to slow down.

You will have time to do an exercise in this session to do some reflection around a story of getting lost, and dying, in a blizzard. You'll be asked about the nature of your blizzard at this time, and what wonderful things in your life might be

lost or obscured because you can't see clearly where you are going. You will want to get a

sense, not simply for this session, but for your life – what are the kind of external or internal things that send you into a blizzard. Why? So you can have intentionally and consciously craft a life that is about receiving and giving the love of God.

To get started in beginning to craft our own rule of life, it is important we see the Big Picture. The following is a suggested list of twelve elements consider as you begin to develop your personal Rule of Life. The challenge before you is for you to pick one or two and grow in that. Let me briefly take you through them one by one: **PP**

1. Scripture. You may want to begin praying the Psalms. Or reading the Bible through in a year, or begin meditating on Scripture each day.

2. Silence and Solitude. You may want to grow in taking 2-5 minutes a day to be in stillness before the Lord, or take a 3 hr retreat once a month.

3. Daily Office (Prayer) – You may want to begin a second midday prayer time between 11 and 2 each day over the next few months

4. Study – you may want to take a course at our church or nearby Bible school or commit yourself to read a Christian book every two months.

5. Sabbath – You may want to begin setting apart a 24 hr period to Sabbath to the Lord. This may be your year project, starting with a ½ day and then building up.

6. Simplicity – Maybe you want to remove distractions by downsizing your commitments or to being giving a percentage of your income - 5% or moving to a tithe of 10%.

7. Play and Recreation – This may include finding activities that breathe life in you. Some of you may take up a hobby like hiking, cooking, art, music.

8. Service and Mission – It may be time for you to step out and begin using your time, or talents to serve others.

9. Care for the Physical Body – This could be getting 8 hours sleep or exercising, or shifting your diet.

10. Emotional Health – you may want to join a small group that deals with issues of mature relationships, or find a mentor, or begin journaling around losses you have not grieved well. You may want to find a counselor for a season.

11. Family – This area concerns itself with growing in your marriage, parenting, your relationships with the opposite sex as a single person. Maybe you want to get training so that you begin relating differently to your parents or siblings.

12. Community (companions for the journey). You may want to find a spiritual director or an accountability group, or again, a mentor

Some of you will want to add new elements (e.g., hospitality) and/or delete others. The choice is yours.

Developing an intentional Rule of Life takes trial and error, and time. You will need to learn a great deal about yourself. For example, what kinds of spiritual practices bring you closer to God? Which drive you away from him? How can you discern the right combination for your particular Rule of Life? You may also want to learn more about each of the twelve areas I just listed.

My personal Rule of Life is a constantly changing document. It is a “live” work in progress—always.

Give yourself lots of time for the slow development of what works best for you. As you examine your life, you may notice many areas that need work. The best approach is to start with only one or two elements for the first few months. Then, after you experience some success with those, you will want to add another building block to your Rule. Or you may want to stay with the same element to work on over a long period of time.

Be willing to make mistakes, try again, and learn new things.

And be careful to avoid any traces of legalism. You want to be careful that this treasure of a spiritual discipline, like all that we do, does not become a “Have to” rather than a “want to” out of love for Christ. If it feels like a heavy yoke for you or anyone in the group, throw it off. Jesus’ yoke is easy and light. His yoke and call to us fits our uniqueness, perfectly.

My prayer for you now is that this final session, along with the entire EHS Course will serve only as a beginning of a great journey with Christ that will give you such great joy and delight that it can’t help but spill over to those around you.

Remember, as Benedict wrote 1,500 years ago, “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way. The love of Christ must come before all else.” Keep that before you and you won’t stray too far off.

CLOSING SUMMARY

[Catherine the Great](#) (1729-1796), Russia’s great empress, had a Field Marshall named Grigori Potemkin who organized a tour of southern Russia for her. The tour was planned over 4 years and covered a distance of 1,000 miles. To impress the Empress, Potemkin created fake villages where “happy” peasants were transported back and forth. All along the way Catherine gazed out on seemingly happy subjects lining the streets. Thus, the term **PP Potemkin village** entered our vocabulary to refer to “an impressive facade, or show, created to hide an undesirable fact or condition.”

In the same way, it is easy and tempting to have a spirituality that looks good on the outside without very much beneath or behind it. We can believe, attend church, even read our Bibles, sing in worship, and live respectable lives. And then we become so caught up in the culture and the busyness around us, that we end up like a Potemkin Village. We don’t have the time to open up our interior lives to Jesus so He can change us, nor to develop our own 1st hand relationship with Jesus.

The EHS Course was developed over many years to address the crisis of discipleship in the church today. Our intention has been to introduce you to a deep, beneath the surface spirituality that hopefully will serve as a framework for the rest of your discipleship journey. In this 8 Session course, our goal has been to introduce you to 8 critical themes in discipleship that we often ignore in our churches.

We began with:

PP (all 8)

- The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality - Saul
- -Know Yourself to Know God- David
- -Going Back to Go Forward - Joseph
- -Journey through the Wall - Abraham
- -Enlarge Your Soul through Grief and Loss - Jesus
- -Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath - Daniel
- -Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult – Good Samaritan
- -Go the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life – Acts 2

In this final session, you hopefully identified one or two practical steps that God is inviting you to take as our Course concludes. However, it is important that we keep perspective on how slowly we learn and change.

Benjamin Bloom, a great educational psychologist, along with a team of thinkers, developed a brilliant way of looking at how people learn. This has been adapted and revised many times over the last 60 years, and it continues to be a standard in many educational systems around the world.³ Bloom distinguishes five levels of knowing, or “getting,” a value. We tend to think in one of two ways: I know something or I don’t know something. For example, I value caring for the poor or I don’t value caring for the poor. What we don’t always understand is it takes a long time — and many small incremental steps — to really “get” a new value or truth. In fact, it requires moving through five distinct levels.⁴

Let me illustrate this with my own journey of coming to value slowing down my life to spend more time with Jesus.

PP This graphic “Getting EHS” comes from *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* book page 44

1. **Awareness:** *“Slowing down is an interesting idea.”* I first thought about this in a serious way in 1994 when I was experiencing pain in both my personal life and in my leadership.
2. **Ponder:** *“Help me understand more about slowing down.”* When I started the emotionally healthy journey in 1996, I read books, listened to messages on slowing down, and preached about it in sermons.
3. **Value:** *“I really believe it is important for everybody to slow down.”* I dabbled in a few new behaviors like Sabbath, solitude, and one-day retreats with God, but my actions and behaviors didn’t fundamentally change --for years.
4. **Prioritize:** *“I am shifting my entire life around as I slow down to be with Jesus.”* When I took my second sabbatical in 2003 – 2004, I reprioritized my time, energy, and schedule in order to integrate this new value for a four-month period. It helped me to kick-start a new way of leading and living out this value. It was life changing.
5. **Own:** *“All my decisions and actions are based on this new value.”* Moving from *prioritizing* to *owning* took me another six to eight years. I had a lot of work to do to integrate this value with the demands and challenges of pastoring New Life. While I still fail at times, slowing down to be with Jesus now informs all I do. My entire body feels it when I, or others around me, violate this value.

You'll notice that the chart highlights the large gap between levels three and four — *value* and *prioritize*. Why? Because that is the point that requires a radical, often difficult shift. Many people love the ideas and principles of emotionally healthy spirituality. However, moving from *valuing* to *prioritizing* is a very big challenge.

So let me encourage you. The changes you seek – from what you learned in the EHS Course -won't happen overnight, but they will happen if you persevere in them over time. So take for example, the topic of going back to go forward and how our past impacts our following of Christ. After 20 years, my understanding of this continues to deepen and mature. The same goes for The Wall (Session 4) and how indispensable biblical grief and loss are for becoming mature followers of Christ (Session 5).

Take your time. Entrust yourself to God's care and ask him to lead you into the next step in your process. Tens of thousands of people around the world are on this journey with you and are experiencing powerful transformation in both their personal lives and their churches.

Stay with it, taking one step at a time. It is an exciting journey. And I promise you - neither you, nor those around you, will ever be the same