

STUDY & DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Emotionally Healthy Discipleship



Peter Scazzero



## DEAR LEADER,

Welcome! You are about to embark on a journey that has the potential to change not only your life but your entire ministry.

Implementing a discipleship that deeply transforms people for the sake of the world requires courage because it's about so much more than simply making a few minor tweaks in your ministry. It requires adopting a new and long-term vision for your church, one based on a biblical paradigm shift that impacts how you approach everything about ministry and leadership.

We lead out of who we are more than what we do or say. This means any significant change you hope to experience in your church necessarily begins with you and every other leader—staff and volunteer—in your church.

Such transformation requires intentionality, prayer, and companions for the journey. I pray you and your group provide that kind of support for one another as you take your next steps.

My hope is that the insights and practices you discover in *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* will give you a fresh vision to build a spiritual counterculture that deeply transforms lives. As you and your team courageously set aside time to learn and be equipped, my prayer is that you will experience God's love more profoundly and become the leaders God intends you to be. And, in the process, may you experience an infusion of God's power for the sake of the world around you.

Blessings to you,

*Pete*

   / petescazzero

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# Facilitator Guidelines

## PREPARE YOURSELF

- If you are the senior leader of your group, you may choose to facilitate the study yourself, to delegate facilitation to another group member, or to rotate facilitation among members from week to week.
- Read through the book chapter and corresponding discussion guide before each session. Becoming familiar with the flow of the questions will allow you to comfortably facilitate the discussion.
- Short chapter videos are also available from [emotionallyhealthy.org/discipleshipvideos](http://emotionallyhealthy.org/discipleshipvideos).
- Participate in the group as a member. When appropriate, lead by example by being vulnerable and open in sharing experiences from your own journey.
- Relax. You don't need to be an expert. Freely say, "I don't know" when someone asks a question you can't answer.
- You are an expert only on your own journey. Respect where each person is in his/her personal journey with Christ. The Holy Spirit will prompt and lead each person differently and at a different pace through this material. Remember that people change slowly—and that includes you!

## LEAD THE GROUP

- Create and maintain a safe environment for sharing. Devote your full attention to each person who speaks. When appropriate, affirm the value of participants' comments, questions, and vulnerability.
- Discussion questions are designed to promote self-discovery and self-disclosure. Make it clear that sharing is a choice. Invite, but don't pressure. Everyone always has the option to share or not share.
- Begin and end on time. Although the nature of this material lends itself to lengthy sharing, it's best to pace the discussion for a fifty-five-minute block of time. If a topic generates considerable interest, it's better to continue the discussion in a subsequent meeting rather than go over time.
- If your group is larger than six people, you may want to split into smaller groups or pairs for some questions so everyone has a chance to participate within the allotted time.

- Read the “Discussion Guidelines for the Group” (page 6) as you begin Session 1 and 2. They provide a framework for having a meaningful discussion.
- The “Highlights” section at the beginning of each session is meant to refresh participants’ memories of what they have read in the book. It is not expected that you read it aloud.
- In the “Discussion” section, some sessions include multiple questions on a given topic. In order to complete the session within the allotted time, you may need to choose just one question for discussion. Also note that each session intentionally begins with the same question, “What stands out most to you about this chapter?” This open-ended question gives participants a chance to comment on what matters most to them whether or not that topic is addressed in the remaining questions.
- The discussion guide assumes participants have read the corresponding chapters in *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* before your meeting. Conclude each meeting by noting the “Reading Assignment” for the next meeting.
- The “Going Deeper” section provides options for those who want to deepen their learning between sessions.

# Discussion Guidelines for the Group

## COME PREPARED

To get the most out of our time together, complete the reading assignment prior to our meeting. Also bring your book with you to each meeting.

## CREATE SAFETY AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY

Sharing is optional, not required.

Devote your full attention to each person who speaks. Be sensitive, kind, and generous to one another with your comments.

Honor one another by maintaining confidentiality. Anything shared within the group should not be repeated outside the group.

## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

Limit your sharing to your own experiences by using “I” statements. For example, “I feel angry when he does that,” rather than, “He makes me angry.” Making “I” statements is a way to take responsibility for thoughts and emotions rather than attributing them to someone else.

## REFRAIN FROM DOMINATING DISCUSSIONS

Be brief in your sharing so that everyone has an opportunity to speak.

## TURN TO WONDER

If you feel judgmental or defensive when someone else is sharing, turn those feelings to wonder instead. Ask yourself, *I wonder what brought her to this belief. I wonder what he is feeling right now. I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself.*

## WELCOME SILENCE

Attentive listening includes silence. If that happens, refrain from rushing in with comments.

Use any silence as an opportunity to continue listening—to what was just said, to your own heart, and to the Holy Spirit.

## JUST SAY NO TO FIXING, SAVING, AND SETTING OTHER PEOPLE STRAIGHT

Respect each person’s journey and trust the Holy Spirit to prompt and lead each person differently and at a different pace. Focus on providing support and acceptance rather than instruction, accountability, or correction. This applies at all times—within the meeting and beyond the meeting.

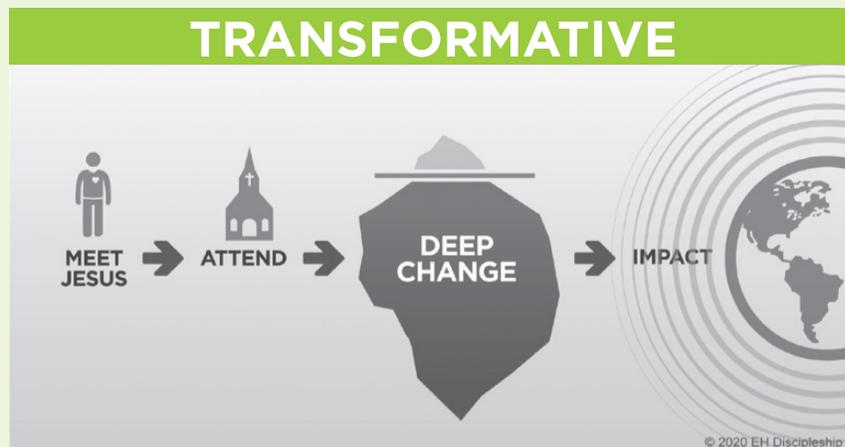


# 1

## The Difficult Journey to Move Beyond Shallow Discipleship

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The spiritual life of leaders is reproduced in those they lead.
- The *traditional* model of discipleship expects people to mature spiritually as they connect in small groups, serve in various ministries, and give financially. The *transformative* model of discipleship expects people to mature spiritually as they experience deep and lasting change beneath the surface of their lives.



- Too often, the traditional approach to discipleship results in lives that have the appearance of spiritual maturity but remain largely unchanged beneath the surface.

## DISCUSSION

Before beginning, read aloud “Discussion Guidelines for the Group” (page 6).

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “The Difficult Journey to Move beyond Shallow Discipleship”?
2. The author shares many of the personal and leadership struggles that ultimately led him to a deeper discipleship. Which of the struggles listed below, if any, resonates most with you right now? Briefly explain why.
  - My ministry is growing but it feels like something is missing.
  - My heart is shrinking.
  - Leadership feels like a heavy burden.
  - I feel like I’m working hard for God but at the same time losing my soul.
  - I’m beginning to wonder if there is a disconnect between my discipleship and my spiritual growth.
  - I’m working hard in ministry, but my efforts rarely seem to bear long-term fruit in people’s lives.
  - I feel stuck. It’s been a long time since I experienced the power of God in my life or in my leadership.
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Cladding is a metaphor for discipleship that looks good on the surface but cannot endure severe storms or the test of time. Stone is a metaphor for discipleship that is load bearing but also time-consuming, challenging, and costly.
  - How do you respond to the statement, “Much of discipleship in the church today is the spiritual equivalent of cladding”? To what degree does it align or not align with your own experiences or observations?
  - It is often in the context of crisis, upheaval, or stress that discipleship is revealed for what it is—cladding or stone. What have your recent or current hardships revealed about your discipleship? For example, in what ways has it failed you or sustained you?
4. Becoming an emotionally healthy disciple is a process characterized as “raw, messy, and weighty.” It is also time-consuming, challenging, and costly.
  - In what ways, if any, has your experience of discipleship been characterized by these words?

- What three words would you use to characterize the current discipleship process at your church, or in your ministry?

**5.** Briefly recall the struggle you identified in question 2.

- What needs or desires might that struggle represent? For example, “My heart is shrinking,” might indicate a need for rest or a desire for change.
- If these needs or desires were met, how do you most hope your life, or your leadership, might be different?
- If it’s true that we lead out of who we are more than what we do or say, how might the struggle you identified be impacting your leadership?
- What, if anything, might change if you were to lead from this place of struggle—where you are being invited to transformation—rather than leading only from your perceived strengths?

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 1, “The Four Failures that Undermine Deep Discipleship.” Between now and then, become an observer of what you consider spiritual maturity and immaturity. What examples do you notice in yourself and in others?

## GOING DEEPER

The goal of emotionally healthy discipleship is to experience deep change, both personally and organizationally. Set aside a block of time to prayerfully reflect on any ways you feel stuck or wish things were different—in your life, in your leadership, and in your organization. For each stuck point, write down a corresponding “I need” statement. For example, *I need a breakthrough. I need these mountains to move. I need hope.* Be specific, writing down as many statements as come to mind for each stuck point. Entrust your list to God in prayer, asking him meet you in your need.

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## 2

# The Four Failures that Undermine Deep Discipleship

## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Shallow discipleship and spiritual immaturity are largely considered normal.
- Too many people accept without question a faith that promises freedom and abundance in Jesus, and yet never seem to notice how they remain imprisoned, especially in unbiblical ways of relating to themselves and others.
- There are four fundamental failures that undermine deep discipleship and keep people spiritually immature.
  1. We tolerate emotional immaturity. We do so because we no longer measure our love for God by the degree to which we love others, and because we elevate the spiritual and distrust the emotional.
  2. We emphasize *doing for* God over *being with* God. In our efforts to serve God, most of us actually end up skimping on our relationship with God.
  3. We ignore the treasures of church history. The church has been shaped by misconceptions and ignorance about its own larger history.
  4. We define success wrongly. We define our success by the numbers, and bigger is always the goal. However, according to Scripture, success is becoming the person God calls you to become and doing what God calls you to do—in his way, and according to his timetable.

## DISCUSSION

Before beginning, read aloud “Discussion Guidelines for the Group” (page 6).

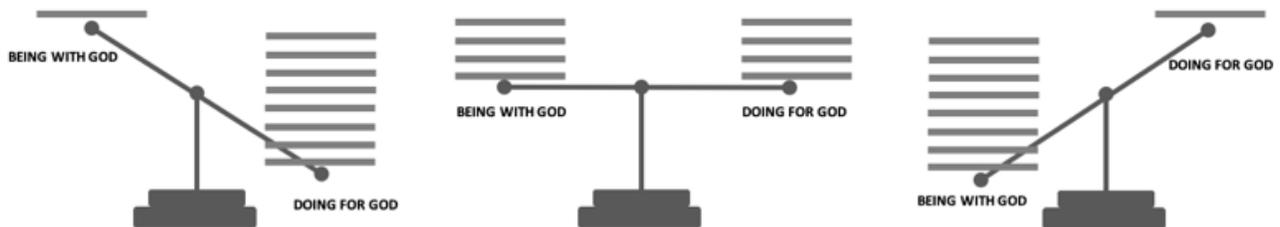
1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “The Four Failures that Undermine Deep Discipleship”?

## 2. Failure 1: We tolerate emotional immaturity.

- In the book, briefly review the bullet list examples of emotional immaturity in action (page 6). In what ways, if any, have you been blind to such inconsistencies—in others as well as in yourself? In other words, what emotional immaturities have you come to see as normal?
- If the only measure of spiritual growth were the degree to which a person loves God by loving others, what, if anything, would need to change about your current discipleship model?
- In what ways is your leadership an ally in helping you to become more loving with each passing year? In what ways is it an adversary, making it more difficult for you to become more loving?

## 3. Failure 2: We emphasize *doing for* God over *being with* God.

- One of the greatest challenges for every ministry leader is how to balance our *being with* God and our *doing for* God. Using the lopsided and balanced scales as references, complete the blank scale by drawing a crossbeam to represent the current balance between your being with God and your doing for God. For example, are you somewhat lopsided, very lopsided, balanced?



- When we disciple or lead others, we essentially give away who we are—specifically, who we are in God. This means we can give away only what we possess, which is the life and faith we actually live each day. Based on the scale you just drew, how would you describe what it is you have to give away?

**4.** Failure 3: We ignore the treasures of church history.

- Overall, how have churches and Christian organizations shaped your understanding of larger church history? (For example, have they promoted learning more about it, ignored it, considered it irrelevant?)
- What gaps, misinformation, or misconceptions, if any, did this create in your understanding of the church? Of discipleship?

**5.** Failure 4: We define success wrongly.

- Complete the following sentences:

I feel like a success in leadership or ministry when . . .

I feel like a failure in leadership or ministry when . . .

- What, if anything, might change if the first priority on your official job description were something like this: “To grow and mature as a disciple of Jesus, leading others out of a deep inner life with Jesus”?



## READING ASSIGNMENT

Before your next meeting, read Chapter 2, “The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Personal Assessment.” Allow sufficient time to complete the assessment without rushing.

## GOING DEEPER

Do a high level assessment of the current state of discipleship in your context by considering it through the lens of the four failures. Using the descriptions in the book as a reference, ask, “To what degree is this failure evident in our people and organization?” For each failure, circle the number on the continuum below that best describes your response, noting it as “Failure 1,” “Failure 2,” etc.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of us					Completely true of us				

What do the four numbers you circled reveal about the current state of discipleship in your church or organization?

Repeat the process again, this time to assess these same dynamics in yourself. Ask, “To what degree is this failure evident in my life and leadership?”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of us					Completely true of us				

What do the four numbers you circled reveal about the current state of your discipleship?

What similarities and differences are there between the two assessments?



# 3

## The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Personal Assessment

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The foundational definition of an emotionally healthy disciple: “An emotionally healthy disciple slows down to be *with Jesus*, goes beneath the surface of their life to be deeply transformed *by Jesus*, and offers their life as a gift to the world *for Jesus*.”
- Seven marks of an emotionally healthy disciple:
  1. Be Before You Do
  2. Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized Jesus
  3. Embrace God’s Gift of Limits
  4. Discover the Hidden Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss
  5. Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity
  6. Break the Power of the Past
  7. Lead Out of Weakness and Vulnerability
- Being an emotionally healthy disciple is not an all-or-nothing condition; it operates on a continuum that ranges from mild to severe and may change from one season of life and ministry to the next.
- In the process of becoming emotionally healthy, we progress through growth stages: emotional infant, emotional child, emotional adolescent, emotional adult.

## DISCUSSION

Before beginning, read aloud “Discussion Guidelines for the Group” (page 6).

1. What was it like for you to complete “The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Personal Assessment”? For example, did you feel apprehensive, relieved, skeptical, surprised? Briefly explain why.
2. One of the benefits of any assessment is that it provides a snapshot of current reality to help identify needs and plan for future learning and growth.
  - How would you describe your assessment “snapshot”?
  - What are one or two things you learned about yourself? For example, what surprised you most?
3. Which of the seven marks is the greatest challenge for you personally or in leadership? If you feel comfortable, note the statements from the assessment you find especially relevant.
4. Although the assessment focuses on you as an individual, the seven marks of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship can also characterize Christian organizations and groups.
  - Which of the seven marks might be the greatest challenge for your church, ministry, or organization as a whole?
  - Which of the seven marks might be the greatest source of health and strength for your church, ministry, or organization?
5. In the book, briefly review the descriptions of an emotional infant, emotional child, emotional adolescent, and emotional adult (pages 33–34).
  - What one or two statements from the descriptions resonate most with you right now?
  - What patterns did you discern, either from reading the descriptions or from plotting your results to create the graph?
  - Even if your assessment results are sobering, they can also be a source of encouragement and motivation. In what ways does your assessment give you hope or motivate you to become an emotionally healthier disciple and leader?



## READING ASSIGNMENT

Before your next meeting, read Chapter 3, “Be Before You Do.” Between now and then, take note of any challenges you face in slowing down your life to be with God, to care for yourself, to be with loved ones, or to have integrity in the way you lead others.

## GOING DEEPER

In the book, review your assessment totals and graph on page 32. Use the mark of emotionally healthy discipleship in which you scored the lowest to journal your responses to the following prompts.

- Over the last week, I have observed my level of maturity (infant, child, adolescent, adult) in this area in the following ways . . .
- My level of maturity in this area impacts my relationships in various ways.

It impacts how I relate to God by . . .

It impacts how I relate to myself by . . .

It impacts how I relate to others by . . .

It impacts how I relate to those I lead by . . .



# 4

## Be Before You Do

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- A person who practices “being” before “doing” operates from a place of emotional and spiritual fullness, deeply aware of themselves and others. As a result, their being with God is sufficient to sustain their doing for God.
- *Emotional fullness* is evidenced in disciples and leaders as a high level of awareness—of their feelings, weaknesses and limits, how their past impacts their present, and how others experience them. *Spiritual fullness* is evidenced as a healthy balance between being with God and doing for God.
- Healthy Christian disciples and leaders recognize that their presence—with God, themselves, and others—is their greatest gift and contribution to those they lead.
- Three statements summarize the be-before-you-do approach to ministry:
  - You cannot give what you do not possess.
  - What you do is important, but who you are is even more important.
  - The state you are in is the state you give to others.
- The core challenge that makes *being before doing* so difficult is that it forces us to come face-to-face with our false self.
- Characteristic external behaviors of the false self include self-protection, possessiveness, manipulation, self-promotion, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others.

### DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Be Before You Do”?

- 2.** The chapter opens with two versions of a typical morning for a leader named Carlos—Carlos the *doing* leader and Carlos the *being* leader.
- What did you find most intriguing about the differences between Carlos the *doing* leader and Carlos the *being* leader?
  - Which aspects of Carlos the *doing* leader do you relate to most? Which aspects of Carlos the *being* leader do you aspire to most? Briefly share why.
- 3.** A person who practices “being” before “doing” operates from a place of emotional and spiritual fullness, deeply aware of themselves and others. As a result, their *being with* God is sufficient to sustain their *doing for* God. Who do you know that embodies this description? How do this person’s words, actions, and presence convey emotional and spiritual fullness?
- 4.** Healthy Christian disciples and leaders recognize that their presence—with God, themselves, and others—is their greatest gift and contribution to those they lead.
- If it’s true that the state you are in is the state you give to others, how would you characterize the state you gave to others over the last twenty-four hours?
  - What contribution did your presence make specifically to those you lead?
  - What comes to mind in response to the question, “Do I really want people to imitate the way I am living?”
- 5.** Briefly review the following definitions of false self and true self:

The *false self* is not a bad or deceitful self so much as a construct of externals—everything from appearance and education to talents and success—that we use to both protect ourselves and to bolster our sense of self-worth.

The *true self* is “your total self as you were created by God . . . the unique face of God that has been set aside from eternity for you.”<sup>1\*</sup>

- The author shared the story of a pastor named Craig whose false self revolved around a subconscious question, “What do these people need me to be so we can relate together?” If your false self were to take the form of a question, what might it be? What question(s) are you subconsciously asking when you walk into a room?

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<sup>1</sup> \* David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91.

- The false self can be difficult to identify but some of the characteristic external behaviors of the false self include self-protection, possessiveness, manipulation, self-promotion, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others. If you had to explain the false self to someone else using an example from your own life, what would it be?
  - In the book, one of the statements on the false self assessment (pages 47–48) is, “My sense of worth/well-being comes from what I have (possessions), what I do (accomplishments), or what others think of me (popularity).” What material possession, if you were to lose it, would cause you to lose a sense of worth and well-being? Similarly, what accomplishments and aspect of your popularity (reputation), if lost, would most diminish your sense of worth and well-being?
6. What challenges make it difficult for you *to be before you do*—to slow down your life to be with God, to care for yourself, to be with loved ones, to have integrity in the way you lead others?

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 4, “Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus.” Between now and then, pay attention to any ways in which you find yourself adjusting what you say or do in order to make a more favorable impression.

## GOING DEEPER

- Watch *Breathe: Being with God in Silence*, a fifteen-minute guided reflection. Access the video at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/silence/?v=4096ee8eef7d#silence-video>. Before starting the video, find a quiet and comfortable place to sit that is free of potential distractions. Depending on the device you use to watch the video, silence apps (such as email and text notifications) and place any gadgets out of sight. Keep your hands and lap empty. There is no need to take notes. Simply relax and allow yourself to be led.
- Listen to one or more of the following the Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast episodes:
  - “Why You Need More than a Quiet Time, Part 1,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Why-You-Need-More-Than-a-Quiet-Time-Part-1/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “Why Leaders Need More than a Quiet Time, Part 2,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Why-Leaders-Need-More-than-a-Quiet-Time-Pt.-2/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “Slowing Down for Loving Union,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Chapter-4-Slowing-Down-for-Loving-Union/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.



# 5

## Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Within the church, to “Americanize” Jesus is to follow him because he makes life better and more enjoyable.
- It is possible to be *Christ-centered* but not *cross-centered*. To be Christ-centered is to be captivated by Jesus as a triumphant Savior who offers us an abundant life with greater sense of power and influence in our lives. To be cross-centered is to follow Jesus as a Savior who embraced the cross, making that the pattern of our lives and leadership.
- Four key differences between the world’s discipleship and Jesus’s discipleship:

The World’s Discipleship	Jesus’ Discipleship
Be popular.	Reject popularity. <i>(Be popular with me.)</i>
Be great.	Reject “greatness-ism.” <i>(Be great with me.)</i>
Be successful.	Reject “success-ism.” <i>(Be a success with me.)</i>
Avoid suffering and failure.	Embrace suffering and failure. <i>(Be faithful to me.)</i>

- When who we are—our identity as a loved daughter or son of God—becomes inseparable from our leadership role, we are especially vulnerable to one of the most subtle and treacherous temptations from the Evil One: to equate our worth with our success in ministry and leadership.
- Three essential practices for following the crucified Jesus: relax in Jesus, detach for Jesus, listen to Jesus.

## DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus”?
2. To be Christ-centered rather than cross-centered is to reject the centrality of the cross by fixating on how our relationship with Jesus makes our life better and gives us a greater, not a lesser, sense of power, control, and influence.
  - Such “Americanizing” of discipleship is often subtle. How did the examples of Madison, Alex, and Joan (pages 63–65) help you better understand and recognize what it means to embrace rather than avoid the cross in discipleship?
  - What subtle or not-so-subtle examples of Christ-centered discipleship do you recognize within your own church, ministry, or organization? Within yourself?
3. There are four key differences between worldly discipleship and Jesus’s discipleship.
  - *Be popular versus reject popularity.* Most of us place a higher premium on what other people think than we realize. Subtle examples include lying in order to be a “good witness,” pretending things are okay when they’re not, saying yes when we would rather say no, remaining silent about preferences out of fear of what others might think, or any other preoccupation with securing the approval or affirmation. In what ways might this temptation to be popular be uniquely challenging for leaders in your context? In what ways, if any, has it led you to do and say things to impress people or to make decisions you might not otherwise have made?
  - *Be great versus reject greatness-ism.* Greatness-ism is preoccupied with status and privilege. The alternative to greatness-ism is lowliness. Lowliness is a humility that expresses itself in a willingness to be curious, open, flexible, and teachable—regardless of the title or position we hold. Briefly identify a current leadership challenge you face. How would you approach it if greatness-ism were your sole concern? If lowliness were your sole concern?
  - *Be successful versus reject success-ism.* According to Jesus, success is becoming the person God calls you to become and doing what God calls you to do—in his way, and according to his timetable. The final temptation Satan posed to Jesus in the desert was to do what God had called him to do but *not* in God’s way or according to God’s timetable. In what ways might this be a temptation for your church, ministry, or organization right now?

- *Avoid suffering and failure versus embrace suffering and failure.* Jesus had a choice—to leave the cross or stay on it. Out of love, he chose to stay. Embracing the cross is possible only when we have a choice to do otherwise—to save ourselves instead. Jesus described taking up one’s cross as a *daily* choice (Luke 9:23). As a leader, what kind of daily choices do you face to embrace the cross or save yourself? To choose suffering and weakness or to save face?
- 4.** Three practices can help us take steps to follow the crucified Jesus: relax in Jesus, detach for Jesus, listen to Jesus. As you read the descriptions of each practice, which did you feel most drawn to or intrigued by? Briefly share why.

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 5, “Embrace God’s Gift of Limits.” Between now and then, take note of any limits you encounter. For example, limits on your time, money, energy, emotions, or circumstances.

## GOING DEEPER

- Listen to the Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast episode, “Waiting on the Cross with Jesus,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Waiting-on-the-Cross-with-Jesus/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
- Journal your responses to these two questions from the book:

*In what ways do I try to avoid the suffering and failure Jesus might be setting before me?*

*Before whom do I most dread looking foolish? Name them, offering your responses back to the Father in prayer.*



# 6

## Embrace God’s Gift of Limits

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Without a deep theological and practical understanding of limits, we severely compromise our ability to love God, ourselves, and others over the long haul. Limits are a deeply spiritual issue.
- The examples of Adam and Eve, Jesus, and John the Baptist demonstrate that what we do with our limits has far-reaching consequences, for good or ill.
- In bypassing or denying our limits, we bypass and miss God as well.
- Receiving the gift of limits requires asking two primary questions: *What limits do I need to receive and submit to joyfully as God’s invitation to trust him? What limits is God asking me to break through by faith so that others might know him, or so that I might become the person he intends?*
- Limits offer many gifts. They protect us, keep us grounded and humble, and break our self-will. They are God’s means of giving us direction, wisdom, and encounters with himself.
- We each have a unique set of personal limits related to six areas of life: personality and temperament; current season of life; marriage or singleness; emotional, physical, and intellectual capacities; family of origin; time.
- Four ways to receive the gift of limits as a church: systematize self-care of leaders, set limits on invasive people, give people freedom to say no, teach healthy boundaries.

### DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Embrace God’s Gift of Limits”?

2. What experiences from your own life came to mind when you read the opening story about the man holding the rope? What has holding onto the rope cost you over the years?
3. Embracing the gift of limits can be especially challenging for leaders. Using the continuum below, what number would you choose to characterize your posture toward limits overall? Share the reasons for your response.



4. We each have a unique set of personal limits we must receive in areas of life such as personality and temperament; current season of life; marriage or singleness; emotional, physical, and intellectual capacities; family of origin; time.
  - In which area of life are you most aware of your need to receive a limit right now? Briefly share why.
  - In which area of life are you most aware of how your limits are truly a gift, a means of God giving you direction, wisdom, and encounters with himself?
5. God invites us to break through some limits by faith so that others might know him, or so that we might become the person he intends. The author describes how, after twenty years of denial, he accepted God’s invitation to break through the limit of a weakness in his character. As a result, he experienced what he described as the “most significant, God-transforming season of my entire leadership journey.”
  - As a leader, how do you understand the differences between legitimate strengths and weaknesses with your gifts, and immaturities or weaknesses of character?
  - All of us have areas of denial or resistance, perhaps especially in connection with the limits of our immaturity. What did breaking through his denial and the limit of his weakness require of the author?
  - What insights or encouragement did you gain from the author’s breakthrough?

6. Listed below are four ways to intentionally embed the gift of limits into a church or organization. Based on the unique needs and issues you face as a team, how would you prioritize this list? Use the numbers 1–4 to rank the statements, indicating which you would prioritize first, second, third, and fourth.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Systematize self-care of leaders.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Set limits on invasive people.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Give people freedom to say no.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Model and teach healthy boundaries.**

- Which did you identify as the first priority? Briefly share why.
- If you could fully implement your first priority, share your hopes for how things might change by completing the following sentence: *We'll know we've embedded this limit into our ministry or organization when . . .*



## READING ASSIGNMENT

Before your next meeting, read Chapter 6, “Discover the Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss.” As an option, consider identifying in advance a loss you have experienced recently in leadership or in life and use it as a lens through which to read and reflect on the chapter.

## GOING DEEPER

Listen to one or more of the following the Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast episodes:

- “Teams that Embrace Rhythms and Limits, Part 1, accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Teams-that-Embrace-Rhythms-and-Limits-Part-1/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
- “Teams that Embrace Rhythms and Limits, Part 2, accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Teams-that-Embrace-Rhythms-and-Limits-Part-2/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.



# Discover the Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss

## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- God gives us treasures on the pathway through grief that we could never anticipate or choose for ourselves. They are treasures hidden in darkness (Isaiah 45:3).
- Learning to welcome and hold sorrow and grief before God is central to the work of discipleship.
- We resist loss and grief because we resist losing control and we have a faulty theology that interprets losses as interruptions.
- Our culture and our churches are loss denying and grief phobic. Our society has trained us well to pay attention to success but not to loss and pain. In order to keep these feelings at bay, we develop a variety of coping strategies to redirect our attention away from whatever painful reality we might be facing.
- A refusal to embrace our sorrows and to grieve them fully condemns us, and our churches, to a shallow spirituality that blocks the work of the Holy Spirit in us.
- God’s three phases for processing grief and loss:
  1. Phase One: Pay Attention to Pain
  2. Phase Two: Wait in the Confusing In-Between
  3. Phase Three: Allow the Old to Birth the New

## DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Discover the Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss”?

**2.** We accumulate a vast array of losses over a lifetime. In which of the categories listed below have you experienced some form of loss in the last six to twelve months? Briefly share how you grieved, avoided grief, or otherwise responded to the loss(es).

- Devastating losses:* premature death of a loved one, disability, mental illness, divorce, abuse, trauma, serious illness, suicide, betrayal, job loss, bankruptcy
- Unexpected losses:* cataclysmic events (terrorist attacks, pandemic, chemical spill), natural disasters (earthquake, hurricane, tornado, tsunami, drought), crime, fire, flood
- Internal losses:* loss of identity, purpose, self-worth, confidence, sense of safety
- Natural or expected losses:* graduation, retirement, geographic move, growing up, end of a small group, death of an elderly loved one
- Leadership losses:* departure of key staff or volunteers, restructuring, layoffs, unrealized dreams, economic downturns, broken relationships, moral failure, role change
- Other:* \_\_\_\_\_

**3.** The Christian community often has a problematic response to grief and loss, viewing it as a loss of control or an interruption to be overcome. As a result, many of us try to avoid it or numb it with a variety of coping strategies.

- In what ways, if any, have you experienced the church or other Christians as “loss denying and grief phobic”?
- Embracing grief and loss require surrender, descent, and a loss of control. These are never easy experiences for anyone, but why might they be especially challenging for you right now?
- For leaders especially, one big obstacle to grieving is that we are sometimes the ones who created the situations that caused us and others such pain in the first place. What do you think it means to grieve in such situations?

**4.** One consequence of refusing to embrace our sorrows and grieve them fully is a shallow spirituality.

- Briefly recall the recent services, programs, and various events of your church or organization. When was the last time you devoted time and attention to collective lament, grief, or sadness? How did people respond?
- For your ministry or organization as a whole, how would you characterize the shallowness or depth of spirituality when it comes to grief and loss? For example, how readily do people acknowledge their own losses and engage others about them? How readily do they minimize or ignore the pain of their losses?

5. The chapter explored three phases for processing grief and loss: pay attention to pain, wait in the confusing “in-between,” and allow the old to birth the new.
  - Which of these do you find most difficult? Briefly share why.
  - In connection with the loss(es) you identified in question 2, which of the three phases are you in? Or, which do you feel God may be inviting you to enter?
  
6. The promise of embracing our sorrows is that there are treasures waiting for us that we can't receive any other way. Scazzero identifies five treasures of resurrection we experience on the other side of loss and grief. Which statement below comes closest to describing a treasure you need from God right now? Briefly share why.
  - I need God to offer me a revelation of himself.
  - I need God to make me softer and more compassionate.
  - I need God to give me a greater revelation of myself.
  - I need God to make me more of my true self in Christ.
  - I need God to make me more truly alive to our astonishing world.

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 7, “Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity.” Between now and then, become an observer of your routine interactions, noting when you are and are not able to be fully present with others. Do so without making self-judgments and without shaming. The goal is simply to be a respectful observer.

## GOING DEEPER

- Take a personal grieving retreat. Set aside several hours or a whole day to name and grieve your losses. Consider losses from childhood on by decade. Consider personal losses as well as leadership losses. If you find it helpful, plot them out on a timeline. For each loss, consider the degree to which you have or have not grieved. Ask God to guide you as you navigate the three phases for processing loss and grief.
- Listen to one or more of the following Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast episodes:
  - “Why the Confusing In-between Is Where God Wants to Meet You,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Why-the-Confusing-in-Between-is-Where-God-Wants-to-Meet-You/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “Why Great Leaders Are Great Grievers, Part 1,” <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/why-great-leaders-are-great-grievers-part-1/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “Why Great Leaders Are Great Grievers, Part 2,” <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/why-great-leaders-are-great-grievers-part-2-eh-leader-podcast/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.



# 8

## Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- It is possible to have profound spiritual experiences, a “faith that can move mountains,” and still lack a deeply present love for people.
- A person may be chronologically thirty-five or fifty-five or seventy-five but still function as an emotional infant or child in his or her relationships.
- Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It is impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.
- Love—not ministry activities or spiritual practices—is the measure of spiritual maturity.
- Martin Buber described two kinds of relationships: I-It and I-Thou. When we relate to a person as an object or means to an end, we treat them as an “It.” When we relate to people as sacred or holy, we treat them as a “Thou.”
- Five qualities of I-It and I-Thou relationships:

I-It Relationship	I-Thou Relationship
Distracted, goal-oriented	Fully attentive, listening-oriented
Others are objects or extensions of oneself	Others are persons, unique and separate
Judgmental, conditional acceptance	Nonjudgmental, radical acceptance
Monologue, debate, make my point	Dialogue, exploration, curiosity
Withhold myself, limited sharing	Offer myself, vulnerable self-disclosure
Closed, unwilling to learn or change	Open, willing to learn and change

- We must refuse to accept that people are growing in love for God in ways that do not translate into growing in love for people.
- Discipling people in how to love others, especially those with whom we disagree or who drive us crazy, needs the same time and energy we give to equipping them to love God. The two loves are, as Jesus said, inseparable.

## DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity”?
2. The demands of Christian leadership can make it difficult to distinguish between loving people for who they are versus using them for how they contribute to the mission. Complete the following sentences:

*In leadership, I know I'm loving people for who they are when . . .*

*In leadership, I know I'm using people for how they contribute to the mission when . . .*

3. Scazzero describes the painful realization that the quality of love expressed inside the church is not really different from the way people relate outside the church. In the book, briefly review the bullet list of examples (page 138).
  - Of the seven examples, how many would you say characterize your ministry or organization?
  - Which of the seven examples is most evident or most problematic right now?
4. In the book, briefly review the five key qualities that distinguish I-It and I-Thou relationships, as well as the bullet list of I-It examples (pages 141).
  - Which of these qualities (in either column on the chart) did you become aware of as you observed your routine interactions recently?
  - Using this list of examples as a reference, what I-It behaviors have you observed in yourself recently in the context of your leadership or ministry?
  - Which of the I-Thou characteristics have you noticed recently in how someone else related to you? How, specifically, did they treat you as a “Thou”?
5. One way to practice the presence of people in everyday life is to ask three questions: *Am I fully present or distracted? Am I loving or judging? Am I open or closed to being changed?*
  - To judge people is to turn our differences into virtues of moral superiority, which diminishes their humanity by reducing them to objects (I-It). The alternative is to be open and curious. What makes judgment easy and curiosity difficult, especially in the context of leadership? What does curiosity require of you?

- How do you respond to the statement, “We need to be open to being changed because it’s a requirement for dialogue”? In what ways does it challenge you? In what ways does it encourage you?
- 6.** As portrayed in the film *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean provides an extreme example of what it means to love by living in the tension between two worlds.
- Based on her example, how would you characterize the “death to self” required for her to love incarnationally? What did it cost her?
  - In what relationships or circumstances do you sense God may be inviting you live in two worlds—to listen deeply even though you may not fully agree with what the other person is saying—and to do so without reacting, growing impatient, or becoming defensive? What death to self might be required?

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 8, “Break the Power of the Past.” Between now and then, consider setting aside time to reflect on this question, “What one or two unhealthy patterns from my family of origin have most impacted who I am today?”

## GOING DEEPER

- Learn and integrate one of the Emotionally Healthy Relationship Skills—Take Your Community Temperature Reading—accessible as part of the free Team Transformation Videos provided by Emotionally Healthy Discipleship. Go to: [www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team)
- Listen to one or more of the following episodes of the Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast:
  - “Seeing God in the Eyes of Your Enemies,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Seeing-God-in-the-Eyes-of-Your-Enemies/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “The Explosive Power of Listening,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/The-Explosive-Power-of-Listening/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.



# 9

## Break the Power of the Past

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Resistance to looking at our own past and unwillingness to wrestle with its implications for leadership will deeply impact those we lead. Churches will not mature beyond the maturity of their leaders.
- Scripture and life teach us that an intricate, complex relationship exists between the kind of person we are today and our past.
- Scripture offers us a three-part framework for discipleship that frees us from the power of the past:
  1. Acknowledge how the blessings and sins of your family—going back three to four generations—profoundly impact who you are today.
  2. Recognize you have been birthed into a new family—the family of Jesus.
  3. Put off the sinful patterns of your family of origin and culture and learn how to do life in the new family of Jesus.
- The expression “Jesus may live in our hearts, but grandpa lives in your bones,” captures the challenge of discipleship that is slow and painful.
- We have been shaped by forces other than our status as children of God. The hard work of discipleship is necessary in order to let go of unbiblical ways of living and to learn to live in the new family.
- Every leader must wrestle with the question, “How much of my family history might be running the church or ministry God has entrusted to my care?”

### DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Break the Power of the Past”?

- 2.** Family patterns from the past inevitably play out in present relationships and behavior.
  - How did you respond to the idea that you have been shaped not only by your family of origin but also by family patterns going back three or four generations?
  - In the book, what insights did you discover by looking at the generational family patterns of Abraham and David (pages 165–167).
  
- 3.** Using a tool such as the genogram gives us a big picture view of our family history, similar to the Overview Effect of seeing Earth from space.
  - How would you describe the Overview Effect of looking at generational patterns and dynamics in your own family? What themes or other insights emerged from considering the big picture?
  - In the book, briefly review the bullet list of questions about relational dynamics (pages 170–171). Which question(s) did you find most helpful in identifying how your past might be impacting your present? Briefly share why.
  
- 4.** Learning to live fully in the new family of Jesus requires unlearning the unhealthy patterns from our past, our “unbiblical family commandments.”
  - In the book, briefly review the examples of unbiblical family commandments (page 173). Whether they were spoken or unspoken, what were one or two commandments you learned growing up?
  - In what ways have these commandments influenced you as a leader, both in the past and recently?
  - The author writes, “Breaking the power of the past requires a crucifixion and everything in us screams against it.” In what ways, if any, do you feel resistant to the hard work of discipleship in connection with your past?
  
- 5.** Just as families pass on patterns and legacies over multiple generations, so do local churches, denominations, parachurch movements, and nonprofits.
  - In the book, briefly review the chart of positive and negative legacies of one ministry’s history (page 184). What two or three positive legacies do you associate with your church or organization?

- What negative legacies might be operating, or impacting, your church or organization? (Be sure to consider any “shadow” legacies, negative consequences of the positive legacies.)
- 6.** The New Testament assumes that growing into maturity as a disciple happens within the context of a healthy local church where we are “reparented” in doing life Christ’s way.
- If the church is a place where people bring their entire histories with them through the door, what challenges do you anticipate in teaching your people what it means to function as the new family of Jesus?
  - In the book, briefly review the bullet list of the five pathways for setting your church free (page 185). Which of the five pathways inspires the most hope in you as a tool that might truly help your people to become free spiritually and emotionally?

## READING ASSIGNMENT



Before your next meeting, read Chapter 9, “Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability.” Between now and then, pay attention to circumstances or relationships in which you are most likely to avoid being seen as weak or vulnerable.

## GOING DEEPER

- Watch the video, “Explore Your Genogram,” accessible as part of the free Team Transformation Videos provided by Emotionally Healthy Discipleship. Go to: [www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team)
- Listen to one or more of the following Emotionally Healthy Leadership podcast episodes:
  - “Become a Team that Goes Back to Go Forward, Part 1,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Become-a-Team-that-Goes-Back-to-Go-Forward-Part-1/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.
  - “Become a Team that Goes Back to Go Forward, Part 2,” accessible at <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Become-a-Team-that-Goes-Back-to-Go-Forward-Part-2/?v=4096ee8eef7d>.



# 10

## Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability

### CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Western culture, including the church, places a high value on power and influence.
- Pride and defensiveness in a follower of Jesus, much less a leader or a church, is a glaring contradiction.
- Paul considered his great weakness to be his badge of apostleship and authority from God to the point that he boasted about it (2 Corinthians 12:8–10).
- King David knew that acknowledging imperfections was critical, not only for his own spiritual health, but also for the health of those he led.
- God built brokenness and weakness into the fabric of all life when he set in motion the consequences of the fall (Genesis 3:16–19). He did this so that our weakness would drive us to seek him and recognize our need for him as a Savior.
- While the larger world treats weakness and failure as a liability, God sees our weakness and vulnerability as a gift and the source of our greatest strength in him.
- God invites us to a posture of constant brokenness and vulnerability—one in which we lean into him in order to be lavishly overwhelmed by his love.

### DISCUSSION

1. What stood out most to you from this chapter on “Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability”?
2. The author opens the chapter by detailing how his upbringing, ministry models, professional training, and theology contributed to his inability to be weak and vulnerable. Over the years, what did you learn or absorb about weakness and vulnerability from similar sources?

3. In the book, briefly review the chart contrasting weak and vulnerable leadership with proud and defensive leadership (page 193). Which one or two statements on the chart do you relate to most right now? Briefly share why.
4. We tend to think of vulnerability as an occasional and unwanted experience, but the invitation of emotionally healthy discipleship is to make vulnerability a lifestyle.
  - The author uses a series of “Not” and “It’s easier to” statements to describe the ways he is tempted to not be vulnerable in daily life. In the book, briefly review the bullet list statements on page 204, and then complete the following sentences:

*One of the pressure points where I am tempted to not be vulnerable is:*

*Not \_\_\_\_\_, It’s easier to \_\_\_\_\_.*

- To be vulnerable is to be open or exposed, to be capable of being wounded. It requires accepting the fact that we’re not as put together or mature as we’d like to think we are. What is it about the vulnerability you just identified that leaves you feeling open, exposed, or not put together?
5. Rembrandt’s painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, provides a picture of what it looks like to practice vulnerability each day, particularly in the postures of the two sons. The posture of the younger son is one of brokenness; the posture of the older son is one of lostness. Both sons have left home, which is the place of the Father’s love.
    - If the image is a picture of what it looks like to practice vulnerability each day, how would you describe your posture right now? How would you depict yourself in Rembrandt’s painting?
    - What aspects of the younger son’s brokenness do you find most compelling?
    - Part of the older son’s lostness is his self-sufficiency and his attachment to his righteousness—he has done nothing wrong externally, but his heart is far from right. In what ways, if any, do you recognize this dynamic in yourself?
  6. When a church is characterized by weakness and vulnerability, “People enjoy a taste of God’s beauty and presence in Christ. A glimpse of the truth and goodness of heaven shines. God’s gentle power flows. People soften.” What comes to mind when you imagine this vision being realized in your context?



## READING ASSIGNMENT

- As a next step, read and discuss the following: “Implementing Emotionally Healthy Discipleship” (pages 211–223)
- Read: “Church Culture Revolution” (pages 225–234)

## GOING DEEPER

- Spend time meditating on Rembrandt’s painting, “The Return of the Prodigal Son” (page 205). Better yet, read Henri Nouwen’s book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

## NEXT STEPS

- See our website, [www.emotionallyhealthy.org](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org), to keep abreast of future equipping events and new resources.
- Sign Up for Pete Scazzero’s Weekly Insights on Church Leadership and Discipleship at [emotionallyhealthy.org/sign-up](http://emotionallyhealthy.org/sign-up).
- Do the Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course first as a leadership team for your own formation, and then introduce it to the people in your ministry.

# The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course

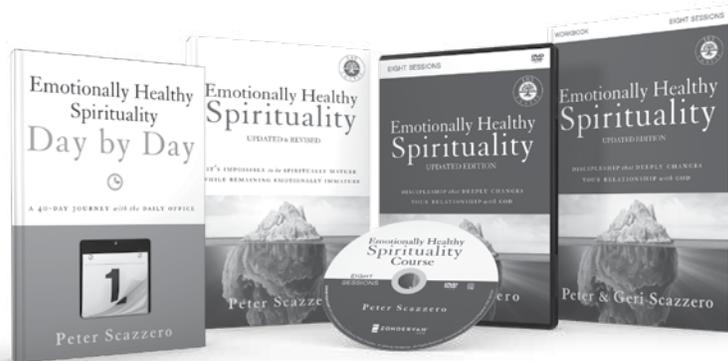
By Peter And Geri Scazzero

*A proven strategy that moves people from shallow discipleship to deep transformation in Christ.*

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## PART 1

Introducing people to a transformative spirituality with God.



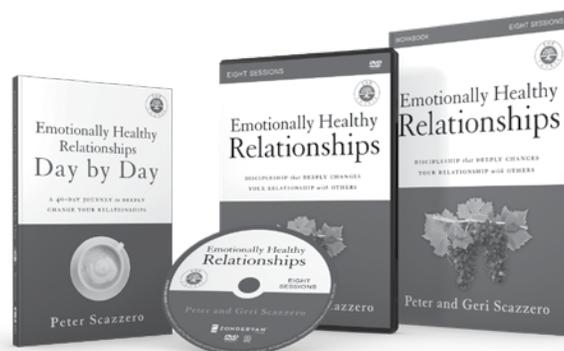
### Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

- Eight-session DVD video study with leader support resources
- Workbook
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Book*
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day*

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## PART 2

Practical skills to launch people into a transformative spirituality with others.



### Emotionally Healthy Relationships

- Eight-session DVD video study with leader support resources
- Workbook
- *Emotionally Healthy Relationships Day by Day*

### ALSO BY PETER SCAZZERO

*The Emotionally Healthy Leader*  
*The Emotionally Healthy Woman* (with Geri Scazzero)

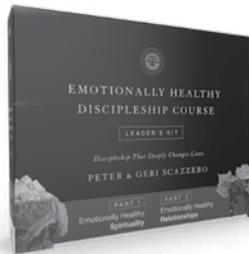
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## Here Are Your 3 Steps:

1

### GET THE KIT

Includes everything you need to run the course



Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course Leader's Kit  
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Get access today at:

**[EmotionallyHealthy.org/lead](https://EmotionallyHealthy.org/lead)**



# The Emotionally Healthy Leader Podcast

Pete Scazzero hosts the top-ranked Emotionally Healthy Leader podcast sharing insights around church leadership and discipleship from his over 25 years of experience.

In the Emotionally Healthy Leader podcast you learn pathways to experience transformation personally, with your team, and ultimately, with your entire church or ministry.

What listeners are saying:

*“This podcast teaches me to be an agent of change in a culture that is defined by “doing” rather than “being.” In a culture obsessed with external success...it’s refreshing to hear leaders learn to lead out of their overflow of God’s love for them that can only be achieved by slowing down to abide in the love of Jesus.”*

—Reviewer MarineMike NY

*“This stuff can save your life, ministry and relationships.”*

—Reviewer Brent Squires

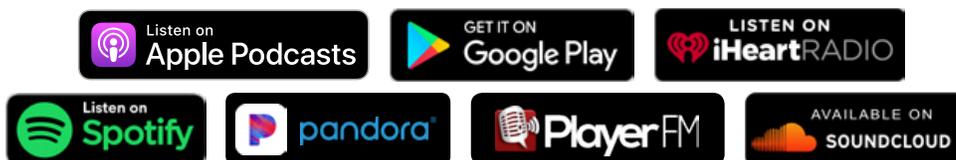
*“These podcasts are worth listening to each and every time they come out. They cut to the core of issues and give you practical steps to be a better leader and a better Christian.”*

—Reviewer jhamination

*“This podcast is the best resource out there I know for helping me fulfill God’s plan for myself and his church!”*

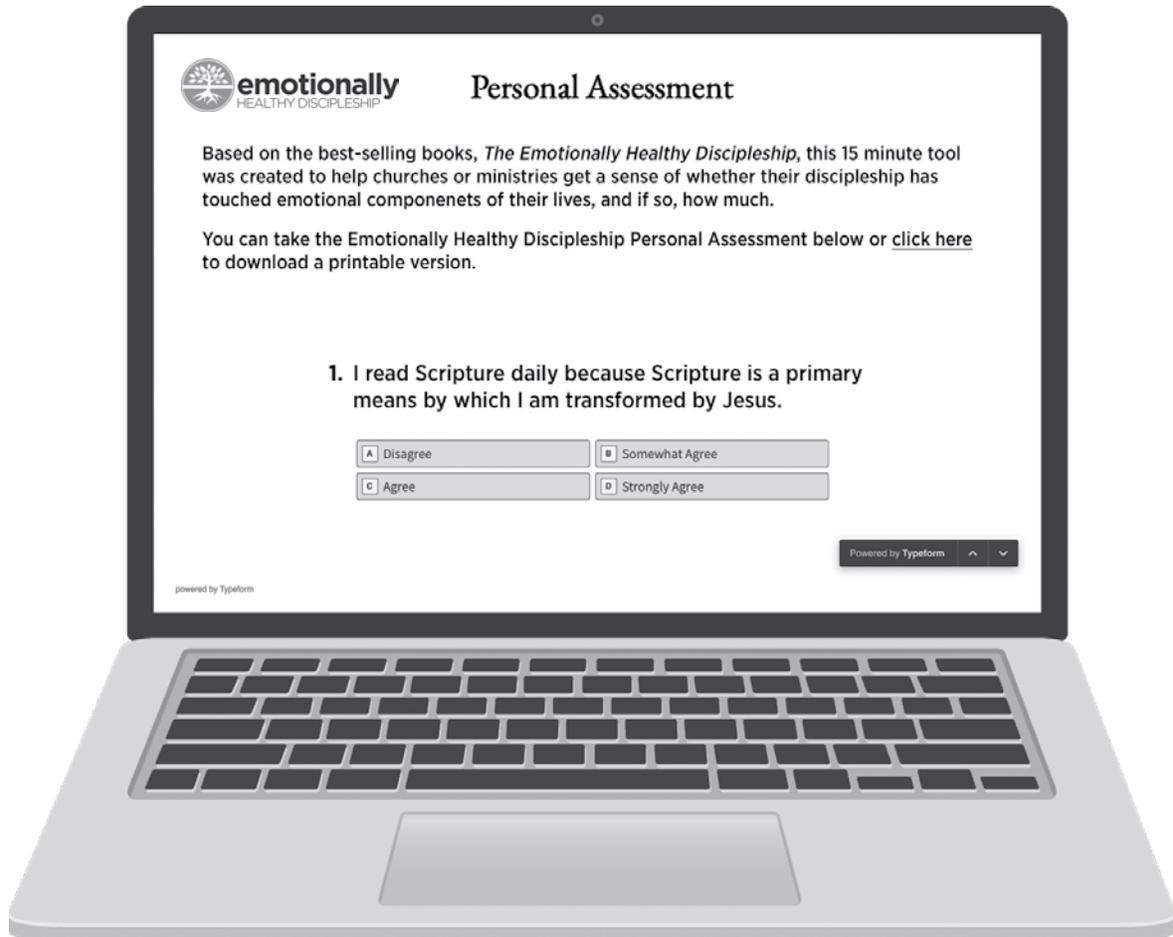
—Reviewer Pershing

**[EmotionallyHealthy.org/Podcast](https://EmotionallyHealthy.org/Podcast)**



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Are you an Emotional Infant, Child, Teen or Adult? This powerful 15- minute diagnostic tool enables you to determine your level of maturity.

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**[emotionallyhealthy.org/mature](https://emotionallyhealthy.org/mature)**