

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality^{1*}

Week 2—Know Yourself That You May Know God

Key Principle: We cannot know God without being self-aware. Knowing our true self, as opposed to our false self, will go a long way in helping us take off the old self and put on the new self (see Eph. 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10)

In AD 500, Augustine wrote in *Confessions*, “How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?” He prayed: “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee.”

In 1530, John Calvin wrote in his opening of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “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. This does violence to ourselves, to our relationship with God, and ultimately to others.

The journey of genuine transformation to emotionally healthy spirituality begins with a commitment to allow yourself to feel. Feelings are an essential part of our humanity and unique personhood as men and women created in God’s image. Scripture reveals God as an emotional being who feels as a person. Having been created in his image, we also are created with the gift to feel and experience emotions. Some of us may have learned that feelings are not to be trusted; that they are dangerous and can lead us away from God’s will for us. While it is true that we are not to be led by our emotions, they do serve a critical function in our discipleship and discernment of God’s will.

The problem, however, is that we can’t reflect and respond thoughtfully to our feelings if we don’t know what they are. So much of our true selves is buried alive—sadness, rage, anger, tenderness, joy, happiness, fear, depression. Yet God designed our bodies to respond physiologically to those in the world around us. God speaks to us through a knot in the stomach, muscle tension, trembling and shaking, the release of adrenaline into our bloodstream, headaches, and a suddenly elevated heart rate. God may be screaming at us through our physical body while we look for (and prefer) a more “spiritual” signal. The reality is that often our bodies know our feelings before our minds.

God intends that we mature in learning to recognize how he speaks and guides us through our feelings. One of our greatest obstacles in knowing God is our own lack of self-knowledge. So we end up wearing a mask—before God, ourselves, and other people. And we can't become self-aware if we cut off our humanity out of fear of our feelings. This fear leads to unwillingness to know ourselves as we truly are and stunts our growth in Christ.

In “The Cry of the Soul”, Dan Allender and Tremper Longman summarize why awareness of our feelings is so important: Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God. . . . Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice. . . . However, we often turn a deaf ear—through emotional denial, distortion, or disengagement. We strain out anything disturbing in order to gain tenuous control of our inner world. We are frightened and ashamed of what leaks into our consciousness. In neglecting our intense emotions, we are false to ourselves and lose a wonderful opportunity to know God. We forget that change comes through brutal honesty and vulnerability before God. Allow yourself to experience the full weight of your feelings. Allow them without censoring them. Then you can reflect and thoughtfully decide what to do with them. Trust God to come to you through them. This is the first step in the hard work of discipleship.

The Biblical story reveals to us what God thinks of us. Essentially, He says to each of us, “You are loved, and loveable, and I am so glad you exist.” But we live in a world that conveys a different message (Lies!) that we easily hear and believe.

Three powerful lies are: 1.) I am what I do—i.e. my value is in my performance. 2.) I am what I have—i.e. my value is in my possessions. 3.) I am what others think—i.e. my value comes in being popular or liked.

Here are four practical tips to help us get to the core of who we are, our true self: 1.) Pay attention to your interior in silence and solitude—allow yourself to feel and express emotion with God. 2.) Find trusted companions—people who are safe to be your true self with. 3.) Move out of your comfort zone—being our true self isn't easy or comfortable at first, if we expect it to be we'll never make the necessary progress. 4.) Pray for courage.

At times our false self has become such a part of who we are that we don't even realize it. The consequences—fear, self-protection, possessiveness, manipulation, self-destructive tendencies, self-promotion, self-indulgence, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others—are

harder to hide. Living your God-given life involves remaining faithful to your true self. It entails distinguishing your true self from the demands and voices around you and discerning the unique vision, calling, and mission the Father has given to you. It requires listening to God from within yourself and understanding how he has uniquely made you. Knowing your personality, temperament, likes and dislikes, thoughts, and feelings all contribute to your discovery.

Jesus was not *selfless*. He did not live as if only other people counted. He knew his value and worth. He had friends. He asked people to help him. 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.”... living faithfully to our true self in Christ represents one of the great tasks of discipleship.

Q. As you consider feelings/emotions, do you agree/disagree with the statement that they “serve a critical function in our discipleship and discernment of God’s will”? Explain

Q. Have you experience physical symptoms/manifestations of your emotions/feelings (perhaps before you were ever consciously aware of them)? Explain.

Q. Give some thought to the following questions, and then share with the rest of the group...

-What are you angry about?

-What are you sad about?

-What are you anxious about?

-What are you glad about?

(***HG Leaders—two thoughts on this question: First, you might want to break up into smaller groups as you talk through this. Second, listen carefully to people’s answers, listening specifically for the range—or lack thereof—of emotions people allow themselves to experience.)

Q. (possible icebreaker) What is your dream job? Why is that your dream job...what is it about it that makes it so?

Q. Do you believe, deep in your bones, that you are loved, that you are lovable, and God is so glad that you exist? Explain.

Q. Which of the 3 lies listed above are you tempted to believe? Why do you think that is? How can we (as a Home Group/Christ-centered community) help each other believes truths instead of lies?

Q. Of the four practical tips listed above, which is easiest for you? Which is most challenging for you? Focusing on the first two, how do you feel about solitude and silence? Do you have trusted companions who you can be real with? (If you feel like getting really real, is your Home Group a safe environment for you, and do you have any trusted companions in your Home Group?)

Q. Where in life, or with whom, is it difficult to be your true self? Why do you think that is?

Q. Many of us are so unaccustomed to distinguishing between our true self and our false self that it may be difficult to know where to begin. As an aid in that process, try completing the following sentence(s)...

What I am beginning to realize about myself is...

And/or

Over the past couple of years, something I've discovered about myself is...

In an effort to “get to know yourself” a tool/resource you may find helpful is the enneagram. Here are a few links to learn more about that, and even take the test/inventory.

<https://enneagramtest.net>

<http://www.9types.com/rheti/index.php>

<https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions>

Additionally, 3 actions/application steps were presented during the sermon to help us get to know ourselves:

1. Spend some still, quiet time with God (pour out your heart to God, uncensored, and allow Him to reveal you to yourself).
2. Ask some trusted people in your life to tell you what they see in you (just listen...don't be defensive).
3. Be willing to be uncomfortable. Learning about ourselves can be difficult, and growth is usually painful...but good.

* The majority of this document is excerpts from the book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero (ISBN 978-0-310-34857-0), and the “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Workbook” by Peter & Geri Scazzero (ISBN 978-0-310-08519-5)