

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality *

Week 3—Going Back in Order to Go Forward

Key Principle: Our family of origin leaves an indelible mark on us. It is important to analyze our past in order to proceed forward in a healthy way.

Emotionally healthy spirituality involves embracing God’s choice to birth us into a particular family, in a particular place, at a particular moment in history.

That choice to embrace our past grants us certain opportunities and gifts. It also hands us a certain amount of “emotional baggage” for 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 past in order to live the life of love that God intends.

The great news of Christianity is that our family of origin does not determine our future. God does! What has gone before us is not our 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. We are transferred out of darkness into the kingdom of light.

For the believer, the Church is now our first family. Discipleship, then, is the putting off of the sinful patterns and habits of our families of origin and being transformed to live as members of Christ’s family.

Beyond the indelible mark our family of origin leaves on us, there may be other significant events or people who have left a mark too (positively or negatively). Particularly if there is a negative, painful, perhaps traumatic event or relationship that we haven’t dealt with in a healthy way, we may need to “go back in order to go forward”.

Additionally, we need trusted people in our lives (mature friends, mentors, spiritual directors, counselors, therapists) of whom we can ask, “How do you experience me? Tell me the feelings and thoughts you have when you are with me. Please be honest with me.” Prayerfully listening to their answers will go a long way toward healing and getting a perspective on areas of our lives that need to be addressed. Needless to say, this takes a lot of courage, as well as a lot of time to process.

Q. How would you describe the family atmosphere you grew up in? (Perhaps try to use just a word or two—ex.: affirming, complaining, critical, approachable, angry, tense, cooperative, competitive, close, distant, fun, serious).

* 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)

- Q. Describe something positive that was passed on to you by your family of origin. Describe something negative that was passed on to you by your family of origin.**
- Q. What is your dad's best trait/quality/characteristic? What is his worst? What is your mom's best trait/quality/characteristic? What is her worst? In what ways are you like your dad? In what ways are you like your mom?**
- Q. What do you think, how do you feel, about the Church as your "first family"? How does this jive with other messages you have been taught? How does accepting this (or not accepting this) effect your discipleship to Jesus?**
- Q. Our need to go back in order to go forward can be summed up in two essential biblical truths:**
- **The blessings and sins of our families going back two to three generations profoundly impact who we are today.**
 - **Discipleship requires putting off the sinful patterns of our family of origin and relearning how to do life God's way in God's family.**
- What concerns or fears might you have in looking back at your family of origin to discern unhealthy patterns and themes? Explain.**

Exercise: We must honestly face the truths about our family of origin as well. Prayerfully complete the chart below. (You may need to scroll down a page)

- **First, list the life messages you received from each of your parents or caretakers (ex.: Don't be weak. Education is everything. You must achieve to be loved. Don't be sad; things could be worse. Make a lot of money. Don't trust people; they will hurt you.).**
- **Next, list any "earthquake" events that sent "aftershocks" into your extended family (ex.: abuse, premature or sudden deaths/ losses, divorces, shameful secrets revealed, etc.).**
- **Review the three separate boxes and summarize what messages about life/yourself/others you internalized. Then fill in the bottom box, "Cumulative messages I received."**

Father (Caretaker)

Messages received about life:

Mother (Caretaker)

Messages received about life:

"Earthquake" events in family history:

-
-
-
-
-



Cumulative messages I received:

Share with the group the message(s) you received. How do those messages compare with the messages below that reflect who you are in the new family of Jesus?

- **It is good that you exist.**
- **You are lovable.**
- **You are good enough.**
- **You are a joy.**
- **You have nothing left to prove.**
- **Your needs are a delight.**
- **You are allowed to make mistakes.**

Q. Going back to in order to go forward can be (likely will be) painful. The tendency for all of us is to avoid pain. As you anticipate exploring your past more in depth, what feelings does that evoke? How much does the potential pain scare you? Presently, do you feel you're ready to explore the past, or are you content with "business as usual"? (Explain). As a Home Group, how can we help each other courageously embark on this journey?