



Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality: Part 1 — 1 Samuel 15:20-24

We all know some things look great on the surface but can be a disaster beneath.

We may know people who seem to have it all together on the outside but are struggling beneath the surface, just like the rest of us. It may be that's how you're feeling?

This Sunday we started a sermon series that looks beneath the veneer. An 8 week series called 'Emotionally Healthy Spirituality', based on a book of the same title by Pete Scazzero.

In this first session we look at Saul as an example of Emotionally Un-healthy Spirituality.

Only 10% of an iceberg is visible above the waterline, 90% is below the surface - so it is with us. People see 10%, but 90% is beneath the surface, hidden from others and sometimes even so deep that it's hidden from us. It is this 90% that we want to explore over the next few weeks.

This is not a quick fix sermon series – this stuff takes work, reflection, conversation with people we trust, but it's worth the effort because emotional health and spiritual maturity cannot be separated. It is impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

When we ignore the emotional component of our lives, we move through the motions of Christian discipleship, activities and behaviours, but deeply rooted behavioural patterns from the past continue to keep us from living an authentic life of maturity in Christ.

We often fail to reflect on what is going on inside us and around us (emotional health) and are too busy to slow down to be with God (contemplative spirituality). As a result, we run the risk of remaining spiritual infants, failing to develop into spiritually and emotionally mature adults in Christ.

Three attributes of Saul's emotionally unhealthy spirituality

1. Saul says no to reflection and self-awareness

Saul's actions are being driven by a need for the approval of others and by overwhelming jealousy. 'I was afraid of the people' he tells the prophet Samuel as an excuse for his actions. And here, 'please honour me before the elders and my people'. Even as their King, Saul is concerned by what others are saying about him; he needs them to like him, he needs their approval. Then he is consumed by jealousy for David, so much so that six times he tries to have David killed.

The emotions, hidden beneath the surface of Saul's life, are controlling his actions. Saul has not spent the time reflecting on his motivation and emotions.

I wonder if we take the time to reflect on the emotions that are driving us. Do we spend time looking beneath the surface of our actions to our experiences and emotions in order to become more self-aware?



You are not living in reality unless you are in touch with what is going on inside. The more you are aware of your own interior being, the more you are able to become aware of God.

2. Saul says no to cultivating his personal relationship with God

Unlike David, there is no indication that Saul is developing and nurturing his relationship with God. He's serving God on the outside, he's doing stuff for God, but he doesn't seem to be spending the time with God in order to listen to his voice.

Samuel says to Saul "to listen is better than sacrifice". Saul is doing the religious stuff, "bringing his sacrifice", but he's not listening to God.

3. Saul says no to being broken through setbacks and difficulties.

Struggles, setbacks, failures and difficulties are a part of life – they happen to all of us. The question is, what do we do with them? Saul ignores them, refuses to acknowledge them and charges on as if nothing has happened. But setback, failures and brokenness can be used by God to teach us important lessons if we allow the time and space to reflect.

Jesus had to learn obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8) so do we.

There is no other way to learn patience than through waiting. There is no other way to learn humility than through being humbled. There are no shortcuts. Adversity strips away illusions and brings about an authentic life.

So, an Emotionally Healthy Spiritual life is one that spends time in reflection, looking beneath the surface at our motivation and emotions. It is one that takes personal responsibility for cultivating a personal relationship with God, and it is one that is prepared to learn the lessons of adversity and brokenness.

An emotionally healthy spirituality is more David than Saul.

Reflection Questions:

1. Verse 11 describes God and Samuel's response to Saul's actions. What about their response impacts you?
2. How does this differ from Saul's response in verse 12 and 13?
3. What might have been going on beneath the surface of Saul's life that he was unaware of?
4. Reread vv.22-23. Describe in your own words how Samuel explains Saul's disobedience?
5. What are some examples of how we go through the motions of making "burnt offerings" and "sacrifices", rather than "obeying the voice of the Lord"?
6. Note the seriousness of v.23a. What positive step(s) could Saul have taken to become aware of his own iceberg and hear the voice of God in his situation? What might be one positive step for you?



The following are the top ten symptoms of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality. Which one symptom is most relevant to your life today?

1. Using religion to run from God
My prayers are usually about God doing my will, not me surrendering to His will.
2. Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness and fear
I am rarely honest with myself or others about the feelings, hurts and pains beneath the surface of my life.
3. Dying to the wrong things
I tend to deny healthy God-given desires and pleasures of life, such as friendships, joy, music, beauty, laughter and nature, while finding it difficult to die to myself protectiveness, defensiveness, a lack of vulnerability and judgmentalism.
4. Denying the past's impact on the present
I rarely consider how my family, or origin, and significant people, or events, from my past have shaped my present.
5. Dividing life into "secular" and "sacred or spiritual" compartments
I easily compartmentalize God to "Christian activities" while forgetting about Him when I am working, shopping, studying or recreating.
6. Doing for God instead of being with God
I tend to evaluate my spirituality based on how much I am doing for God.
7. Spiritualizing away conflict
In the name of "peacemaking" we bury Tensions and conflicts rather than speak the truth in love.
8. Covering brokenness, weakness and failure
Instead of humility and approachability, I am highly reactive and defensive.
9. Living without limits
Those close to me would say I "try to do it all" or "bite off more than I can chew."
10. Judging the spiritual journeys of others
I often find myself occupied and bothered by the faults of others.

Read Chapter 2 of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality here:
<http://www.willowcreek.com/ehs/images/chapter2.pdf>