



Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

Know yourself that you may know God: Part 2 — 1 Samuel 17

Awareness of yourself and your relationship with God are closely related.

Augustine wrote in Confessions, in A.D. 400, “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.”

Meister Eckhart, a Dominican writer from the thirteenth century, wrote, “No one can know God who does not first know himself.”

St. Teresa of Avila wrote in The Way of Perfection: “Almost all problems in the spiritual life stem from a lack of self-knowledge.”

John Calvin in 1530 wrote in the opening of his 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. We unconsciously live someone else’s life, or at least someone else’s expectations for us. This does violence to ourselves, our relationship with God, and ultimately to others.” Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

For example,

- Trying to live as an extrovert when really you're an introvert.
- Finding yourself constantly saying yes to try to please others, when you really want to be able to say no, then wondering why you're over-stretched.
- Bottling up anger or disappointment because they are 'negative' emotions, rather than finding helpful, healthy ways to express them first to God then, if appropriate, to the person who has angered or disappointed you.

Just as these examples cause problems in our relationships with others. The same is true in our relationship with God. If I don’t know myself, how can I offer my whole self to God?

1 Samuel 17 - David and Goliath

Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.



Eighty times Goliath intimidates the Israelites, when in comes David the shepherd boy...

As he (David) was talking with them (his brothers), Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Where does David's confidence come from? Is it just youthful naiveté?

Rather, I suggest that it's because

1. David knows himself and is able to be true to himself.
2. David knows God and is able to trust God.

However, David still faces three challenges, which he needs to cut through before he steps out to face Goliath.

1. His Family (vv.28-31)

David is the youngest of 8 boys, the stay-at-home shepherd. He's been sent to the front line by his Father to deliver food to his brothers and bring back news.

When Eliab, David's eldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, 'Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.'

David is put down by his older brother... You're a nobody; you're useless, go home.

Some of us will have had a difficult time growing up, others are very grateful for the families we grew up in, but all of us have absorbed messages about ourselves from our families.

If our experience was a negative one, then some of those messages may just be plain wrong!

Even those of us who had a positive experience growing up will have picked up positive messages, from well-meaning parents who loved us, that have a shadow side.

Maybe you were encouraged to try hard and always do your best, and high achievement was rewarded with extra attention and treats. Good positive messages – that so easily become perfectionism and a constant need to seek the approval and affirmation of others.

Or some of us grew up in families and cultures where certain true parts of ourselves or emotions are not "acceptable." So they are repressed and hidden to ensure approval

- "Don't think or express certain thoughts."



- “Don’t feel certain feelings.”
- “Don’t make mistakes.”
- “Don’t be weak or vulnerable.”

David is confident in who God has made him to be and confident in God, so he is able to cut through the challenges and messages he is getting from his family.

At some point each of us has to go through a process of finding out who we are, to find our true self underneath all the messages and false selves we put on growing up. Most of us manage it through the teenage years – but it is amazing how many of these messages still hang around in adulthood, even into senior years...

2. Significant Others With Authority and Experience (Saul) vv. 32-33

David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.”

Saul had led an army of 330,000 men. He’s famous, experienced. He knows what he’s doing and he is telling David “You are not able to do it... you are only a boy.”

Saul tries to give David his armour and weapons (who wouldn’t want the King’s own armour?)

Yet David quickly realizes “I cannot go in these, they are not me.”

Maybe you have had teachers/friends/experts in your field give you advice – now or when you were growing up. These people have a lot of experience and you want to seek advice and listen to those who have been there before.

The key here is not that you are to throw out counsel. But, rather, that you are able to seek good counsel and then combine it with a confident knowledge of who you are; of who God made you to be, and what is unique about you in this particular situation.

David knew himself so well that he was able to weigh Saul’s counsel. He was such an expert on himself, confident in who God had made him to be, that he is able to say “No, I can do this!”

3. Goliath (vv.41-43)

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, ‘Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?’ And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ‘Come here,’ he said, ‘and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!’



Goliath is full of bravado, he's larger than life, looking down on David (quite literally) and mocking him. Despised, cursed, mocked and threatened with consequences! Has that ever happened to you?

So often when we face difficult decisions in life we try to weigh the odds – the better we know ourselves, and the man or woman God has made us to be, the better our judgement will be.

Odds not overwhelming for David for two reasons...

4. David knows himself and is able to be true to himself
5. David knows God and is able to trust God

These two together are a powerful combination.

David's guidance comes from inside, from his relationship with God, from the Holy Spirit within him (not any external authority).

- David is not dependent on doing it the right way to be accepted or loved.
- David is not doing it out of guilt or sorrow for the nation of Israel.
- David is not doing it to keep the peace. I will sacrifice myself.
- David not saying I must succeed so people will think well of me and say "What an incredible person!"
- David not saying this is my chance to make an impact on history/the world. I've got to finally achieve something (vs. stupid job with sheep)

As he takes off Saul's armour he is saying "God didn't make me this way. How am I going to do this in a way that fits me?"

David knew he couldn't fight might with might and win. To have gone up against Goliath in ill-fitting, heavy armour and carrying a sword would have been a terrible mistake. It is an even match because he uses the unique gifts and skills that God has given him; he uses his sling shot, a skill's he's practiced and used before against bears and wolves.

I wonder how many Christians lack such self-awareness and self-confidence and would have rushed out "in the name of Jesus", wearing Saul's armour, to wrestle Goliath to the ground? A path of action that, I suggest, would not have ended well!

1. David knows himself and is able to be true to himself.
2. David knows God and is able to trust God.

He realizes: "I have a part of myself, given by God that I can use to defeat this Goliath!" This, alongside his faith, is a powerful combination...



The result is that the whole nation is richly blessed, victorious and God is glorified.

Stop trying to be someone else, be yourself “that the world might know!”

Over the next few weeks we are going to explore how we find our true selves in God, but here are four starters.

1. Pay attention to your interior in silence and solitude.
2. Find trusted companions (even a counsellor if necessary).
3. Step out – you are precious and unique.
4. Pray for courage.

Ephesians 4:22-25 says:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body.

“I promise you that the discovery of your True Self will feel like a thousand pounds of weight have fallen from your back. You will no longer have to build, protect, or promote any idealized self-image. Living in the True Self is quite simply a much happier existence, even though we never live there a full twenty-four hours a day. But you, henceforth, have it as a place to always go back to. You have finally discovered the alternative to your False Self.” Richard Rohr – The Immortal Diamond

Let’s pray...

Reflection Questions:

1. Choose four questions from the list below and privately journal your answer.
 - a. What are you angry about?
 - b. What are you sad about?
 - c. What are you afraid of?
 - d. What are you enjoying?
 - e. What (whom) do you love?
 - f. What are you surprised by?
 - g. What disgusts you?



2. What was it like to journal your feelings?
3. What forces and pressures from circumstances and people cause you to shrink back in fear or 'wear armour' that does not fit your true self?
4. Many of us are so unaccustomed to distinguishing our true self from our false selves that it may seem difficult to know where to begin. As a start, complete the following question:
 - a. I am beginning to realise about myself...
5. Pray and ask that you may know yourself, that you may know God.