



Session 1: The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality

Introduction

Welcome to Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. As a part of this course you are invited to be open and vulnerable. Be open to yourself, to God, and to the people in your group. It is ok if you feel a little bit uncomfortable. Just know you are invited to be as vulnerable as you would like to be.

As a group let's agree to follow these guidelines:

1. Speak only for yourself, use "I" statements
2. Keep your sharing to 2-3 minutes, give room for others to share
3. No fixing, saving, or setting other people straight
4. Trust and learn from silence, there is no pressure to share
5. Observe confidentiality

Today we are talking about the problem of *unhealthy* spirituality. Emotional health and spiritual maturity cannot be separated. It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

We often neglect 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 stuck as spiritual infants, failing to develop into spiritually and emotionally mature adults in Christ.

For starters

The following are ten symptoms of emotionally *unhealthy* spirituality. As this list is read aloud mark the symptom or symptoms that are most relevant to your life.

- 1. Using God to run from God** (*I fill my life with Christian activities to avoid addressing difficult issues in my life*)
- 2. Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear** (*I am rarely honest with myself and/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.*)
- 4. Denying the past's impact on the present** (*I rarely consider how my family of origin and significant people/events from my past have shaped my present.*)

- **5. Dividing life into “secular” and “sacred” compartments** (*I easily compartmentalize God to “Christian activities” while usually forgetting about God when I am working or playing.*)
- **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** (*I tend to smooth over disagreements, bury tensions, and avoid conflict, rather than disrupting false peace as Jesus did.*)
- **8. Covering over brokenness, weakness, and failure** (*I have a hard time speaking freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes.*)
- **9. Living without limits** (*Those close to me would say that I often “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 those around me.*)

Share one or two of the symptoms you marked.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:7-34

In this story we meet King Saul, the first king of Israel. As you listen to these Scriptures, pay attention to the emotions described in this story. Don't overthink the implications of this passage. Simply allow the story to be the story.

7 And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

10 The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. 12 And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” 13 And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” 14 And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” 15 Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

17 And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” 20 And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of

the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” 22 And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.” 24 Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

1. In verse 11, what do you notice about God and Samuel’s responses to Saul’s failure?
2. Reread verses 12 and 24. What might have been going on beneath the surface of Saul’s life (his “iceberg”) that he was unaware of?
3. Reread verses 22-23. Take a moment to write down in your own words how Samuel explains Saul’s disobedience. Share what you have written down.
4. List one or two examples of how you go through the motions of making “burnt offerings” and “sacrifices” rather than obeying Jesus, doing what God wants you to do. Take a moment to right down a couple of examples and then share one of them.
5. In what ways can you relate to Saul?
6. Take 5 minutes to write down answers to the following questions and then be ready to share with the group.

What challenges keep you from slowing down your life to be with God?

The remaining sessions will address ways we can make changes in our lives. At this point, what might be one or two simple steps you can take toward beginning to slow down your life?