

Living Intentionally

The goal of being more like God doesn't come naturally or happen randomly, it requires purposeful choice in a specific direction.

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

"It's impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature." | Peter Scazzero, Emotional Healthy Spirituality

Emotions Make Us Human

Do you have emotionally healthy spirituality? Are you emotionally mature? Or are you, perhaps, deeply uncomfortable being intimate with your emotions? Did you realise that emotional maturity and spiritual health are intrinsically linked? Our emotions are at the core of what it is to be human and the journey of genuine transformation to emotionally healthy spirituality begins with a commitment to allow yourself to feel.

Are You Emotionally Mature?

Are you as emotionally mature as you'd like to think you are? Ask yourself the following questions and you may be surprised and somewhat perturbed with the answers:

- You find it difficult or impossible to be transparent about your life struggles or how you *really* are. If

someone asks, you reply “I’m fine”, “all good”, or “great week – yours?”.

- You take any suggestion as a personal attack or rejection, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to improve or grow.
- You are intolerant of different views to your own and often tend to speak in very black and white terms about differences ie “right” or “wrong”.
- You may be outwardly helpful, friendly, or giving to others but in private, you’re actually a lousy spouse, parent, or family member.
- Others may describe you as unteachable, proud, insecure, or defensive.
- You may deal with conflict or turmoil with others by using methods that emotionally distance you from the very person you need resolution with. You often choose to talk with someone other than the person you are in conflict with. You avoid face-to-face conversations or simply pretend a situation doesn’t exist.

You might be feeling somewhat dismayed to find yourself in one or more of the above scenarios. The good news is you’re definitely not alone. Many (or most of us, if we’re honest) find ourselves somewhere in the middle of thinking we’re emotionally mature and discovering that, in reality, we’re not. But what does our emotional maturity have to do with our spirituality?

Humanity – Made In The Image And Likeness Of God

Humans are incredibly complex creatures. yet we can divide all these complexities into five general parts or components that, put together, make us a “whole” or “complete” human:

Intellectual – Humans are created superior to animals; we’re able to reason and make decisions for our own lives. The

pursuit of knowledge is inbuilt in humans and the acquisition of knowledge is considered to be highly valuable and profitable.

Spiritual – Humans are also able to comprehend and make decisions based on more than just logical conclusions, knowledge or experience. We have the ability, if we choose, to base our reasoning on spiritual values with moral considerations. We're able to comprehend "higher ideals". [Vines Expository Bible Dictionary](#) defines "spirituality" as "*things that have their origin with God and therefore are in harmony with His character*". The ability to comprehend spiritual things makes us uniquely different to animals.

Physical – Humans aren't insubstantial, rather, our very essence, our consciousness, the thing that makes us, US, is contained within a literal, physical body. We *feel* things physically; touch, cold, heat, hunger, thirst, tiredness, and our physical state can be nurtured or abused (by ourselves or others). Our bodies are incredibly designed and are, as [the Psalmist](#) so aptly described them, "fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

Social – Humans have a natural desire to belong, to be loved, to be "part of something". We're generally extremely social creatures. We tend to develop our circle or tribe and cultivate that to our benefit because we enjoy company and friendship. We hate loneliness or the feeling of being unwanted or not needed. Social rejection or disconnection is actually one of the major causes of depression in humans.

Emotional – Finally, humans are emotional and our emotions are actually connected to all the other parts of us. Our emotions are the very core, the heart, of what it is to be human. We *feel* elation when we *learn* something new (intellectual). We *feel* pain when our bodies experience *hurt* (physical) and we *feel* acceptance and love when we *belong* (social). It should make sense to us that our spirituality and our emotions are deeply connected. But, somehow, we struggle to recognise this connection and, in fact, we often actively seek to disconnect the two. Yet, our spirituality and our emotions are

inseparable.

“The call of emotionally healthy spirituality is a call to a radical, countercultural life. It is a call to intentionality, rhythm, and expectation of a life transformed by the risen Christ, with the power to see through the illusions and pretense of our world.” | Peter Scazzerro

Emotions are data and this data gives us important information, enabling us to make values-based decisions. The problem with ignoring the connection between our emotions and our spirituality is that we then ignore important information about ourselves, how and why we're feeling certain things, and the need to deal with those feelings.

Without acknowledging our emotions and using that information, our values-based decisions, those *“higher ideals”* or *“things that have their origin in God”*, can't be acted upon in a deeply connected and meaningful way.

We become one-dimensional creatures, stagnant and immovable, rather than multi-faceted and growing towards being *“thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17)*, and we certainly don't have an emotionally healthy spirituality.

“There is no greater disaster in spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality. In fact, the true spiritual life is not an escape from reality but an absolute commitment to it.”
| Peter Scazzerro

The Iceberg – What's Really Going On Beneath The Surface

Unresolved or ignored emotions don't just go away. They grow, unchecked, beneath the surface of our life. What people see really is only *“the tip of the iceberg.”* Above the waterline, we may appear to be doing fine, we will often say we *are* fine,

but beneath the surface rage, all the unacknowledged and unresolved emotional feelings that we pretend don't exist. We're not being true to ourselves or others and we're not living authentic, meaningful lives. Here's what happens when we ignore our emotions:

- We become fearful
- We become intolerant
- We become critical
- We become ignorant
- We become disconnected
- We become discontented
- We become disillusioned

Still Not Sure About Being Emotionally Connected? Jesus Was Emotional!

We're told that Jesus was like us, in all aspects of his humanity (Hebrews 4:15). He felt every human need and experienced the broad spectrum of human emotion. However, his emotions were always deeply connected to his spirituality. He felt sadness (Luke 19:41), joy (Luke 10:21), anger and distress (Mark 3:5), sorrow (Matthew 26:37), compassion (Luke 7:13), astonishment (Luke 7:9), stress and anxiety (Luke 12:50), and desperation and emotional vulnerability (Mark 14:32-36).

The challenge to shed our "old false" self in order to live authentically in our "new true" self strikes at the very core of true spirituality. Paul the Apostle, expressed this as, "to put off your old self...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22, 24)." | Peter Scazzero

Emotional courage is listening to what your heart is telling you, ensuring you are emotionally connected with your spirituality and therefore able to make important, values-

based decisions. Knowing yourself completely is critical to knowing God. Ignoring your emotions is ignoring the very way in which you draw closer to and become more like God.

Sometime, discomfort may be the price of admission to a meaningful life. Emotionally healthy spirituality is about reality, not denial or illusion and it's an essential part of being human.

Further Recommended Resources: [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Peter Scazzero](#). [The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage, Susan David, TEDWomen2017](#)

This article was first published 2 April 2018