

Discipleship: Developing Your Authentic Self

When considering the ideas and thoughts surrounding [Church burnout](#), it became apparent that there is another serious issue facing many Christians today – in both their personal and church lives. The issue is a lack of spiritual and emotional maturity, leading to the cultivation of a ‘false self’ and a layering over our true self.

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” | 1 Corinthians 13:11, NIV

Layering Over Our True Self

When we accept the saving work of Jesus in our lives and commit to a life lived in him, we become a new creature. It is a metaphorical rebirth to ‘newness of life’. We are, as Corinthians explains, like little children, with all the wide-eyed wonder of this new life stretching out before us. This faith and dependence on God to undertake great things for us is commended by Jesus and he goes so far as to say that *“...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 18:2-4, NIV). This childlike faith is essential to beginning a relationship with God, through Jesus, and this kind of faith needs to remain a constant in our lives.

And yet, many Christians never develop further than this moment. They remain as children, spiritually immature and never attaining to the radical transition of living faithfully to their true selves in Christ. Instead of genuine spiritual growth, beginning from their core and being demonstrated exponentially in their lives, Christians layer over their

potential true self with a false reality of who they are.

They are concerned about who other people think they are rather than being concerned about **who God thinks they are**. They are emotionally disconnected from the reality of what life with Jesus really looks like, in real and practical terms. Christian life becomes theory rather than practice. This process of layering – creating and developing a false self over the top of core emotional truths – ensures that we remain entrapped and enslaved to ‘the old man’, rather than liberated in Jesus as a new creation.

The Deception Of The False Self

The deeply entrenched false self is actually a refusal to accept God’s grace and its transforming effect on our life. Instead of being defined by what **God has done for us**, we become defined by who we perceive we are. We tell ourselves, ***I am what I do; I am what I have; I am what others think I am***. We are driven by performance, possessions or popularity, rather than by who we are to God.

The broader culture around us certainly substantiates this point of view and it can be very difficult to dismantle the false self and allow our true self in Christ to emerge. Yet, this is our life’s work and is the essence of what discipleship really means. To think otherwise is to be deceived.

Following God Into The Unknown

Getting to your core requires following God into the unknown – to being committed to emotional and spiritual reality, not denial or illusion. It means developing a relationship with Him and becoming who God has called you to be. Initially, it requires that childlike faith, but on that faith must be built conviction, through the process of discipleship.

Jesus' life was dominated by his conviction that he was sent to do his Father's will. This conviction produced a deep awareness of his life's purpose and he remained deeply connected and authentic to his true self. When people develop Christlike convictions, they too will develop a sense of purpose in life.

At times, our false self has become such a part of who we are that we don't even realise it. However, the consequences – fear, self-protection, possessiveness, manipulation, self-destructive tendencies, self-promotion, self-indulgence, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others – are harder to hide.

Discipleship: Developing Your Authentic Self

To be a disciple, in the biblical sense, is to be actively imitating both the life and teaching of the master. It isn't the same as being a student, by today's modern understanding, but is rather a deliberate apprenticeship which makes the fully formed disciple **a living copy of the master**.

This process of discipleship is a principle-centered, character-based “inside out” approach to developing our authentic self in Christ. It means to start first with ourselves; even more fundamentally, to start with the most **inside** part of self – our core – and to honestly analyse our paradigms, our character and our motives.

“The inside-out approach says that private victories precede public victories, that making and keeping promises to ourselves precedes making and keeping promises to others. It says that it is futile to put personality ahead of character, to try and improve relationships with others before improving ourselves” | Stephen Covey

It is a process that moves us from being a spiritually and emotionally immature child to being a fully mature and developed adult – *“a person dedicated to God, and capable and equipped for every good work.”* (2 Timothy 3:17, NET).

Discipleship Comes From Differentiation

A helpful way to clarify this process of growing in our faithfulness to our true selves is by using the term ‘differentiation’. Differentiation is a person’s capacity to “define his or her own life’s goals and values apart from the pressures of those around them.” The key emphasis of differentiation is on the ability to think clearly and carefully as another means, besides our feelings, of knowing ourselves.

People with a high level of differentiation have their own beliefs, convictions, directions, goals and values apart from the pressures around them. They can choose, before God, how they want to be without being controlled by the approval or disapproval of others.

People with a low level of differentiation are those with little sense of their unique God-given life. They need continual affirmation and validation from others because **they don’t have a clear sense of who they are**. They depend on what other people think and feel in order to have a sense of their own worth and identity.

Church Life Shouldn’t Come At The Expense Of A Personal Relationship With God

A healthy church life provides many benefits. We find peace and fulfillment in Jesus. Our lives become enriched, our burdens are eased, and we develop supportive relationships to help us in hard times. Service within our church becomes something that fills us with joy and deep personal fulfillment.

However, we need to remember that the most important relationship in our life is the one between God and ourselves. He is the one who sees clearly to [the heart of us](#). He can distinguish between our authentic self and the cultivated 'false self' that others may see. And He, alone, judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

Our church life should therefore become an extension of our relationship with God. As church or Christian communities, we need to ensure we develop strategies and skills to grow in our discipleship and to move towards being emotionally and spiritually mature. This includes biblical ways to integrate emotions like anger, sadness or fear and being able to deal with these in authentic ways.

Four Ways To Develop Your Authentic Self

1. Pay attention to your interior (the "heart of you") in silence and solitude.
2. Find trusted companions to help you along the way.
3. Move out of your comfort zone.
4. Pray for courage.

As Christian people, one of the greatest gifts we can give our world is to be a community of emotionally healthy adults who love well. This will take the power of God and a commitment to learn, grow and break with unhealthy, destructive patterns that may go back generations in our families and cultures – and in some cases, our Christian [culture](#) also.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you should love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among one another." | John 13:34-35, BLB

I owe a great deal of thanks to the following authors; Peter Scazzero, Rick Warren and Stephen Covey, for their insight, wisdom and valuable words regarding this subject. I have quoted extensively from their works. In particular, I would highly recommend the book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero as an excellent starting point for anyone genuinely interested in investing in a deep, beneath-the-surface spiritual formation paradigm.

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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 Scazzero

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 Scazzero

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](#)

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