

Know Yourself that You may Know God – Becoming our Authentic Selves

If you've seen the movie, Barbie, you'll remember this scene when Barbie arrives in the real world and gets a glimpse into what it's like to be a female and experiences the heartache that comes from being human. As Barbie connects with her emotions and sheds some tears for the very first time, I love the honesty of her response, she says "*that felt achy, but good*".

Have you ever felt when you expressed emotion? Achy but good?

When was the last time you allowed yourself to really be with emotion? Joy, delight? Sadness? Grief? Surprise? Anger?

As we continue into week two of our Emotionally Healthy Spirituality journey, we learn from Pete Scazzero that **awareness of ourselves and our relationship with God are deeply related**. Pete says that the challenge to shed our false selves in order to live authentically in our new true selves strikes at the very **core** of authentic spirituality.

The apostle Paul expresses 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)

Augustine wrote *in Confessions*, in AD 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, "None 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."

Scazzero says that the vast majority of us go to our graves without knowing who we are – meaning we unconsciously live someone else's life, or at least someone else's expectations of us. This hurts us, our relationship with God, and ultimately others.

And he says that before we can live authentically, **we must first get to know ourselves. And that includes getting to know our emotions!**

If you were with us last week then you'll remember that Jeff Martens taught us from chapter one of Pete Scazzero's book that ***It's impossible to be spiritually mature, while remaining emotionally immature***. Jeff asked us - Are we prepared to look beneath the surface of the water, to the 90% of the iceberg of our lives, where Jesus wants to do the deep work of making us emotionally healthy and spiritually whole human beings? We considered how might that lead to spiritual growth, healing, and transformation that we've only ever dreamed of?

One of the 10 symptoms of Emotionally *Unhealthy* Spirituality that we looked at was "ignoring emotions of anger, sadness, and fear".

This takes me back a few years...I'm not sure what exactly made me jump so fast to join a group that Psychologist Dr. Hillary McBride was facilitating over Zoom in the spring of 2021— especially considering it was called “an invitation to pain” —The write up said something about *pain* and *writing* and *embodiment* and *experiences*, and I guess that was enough to captivate me and so on a whim, I joined.

It was the second lockdown in the pandemic, and our three girls and I were all working on our individual computers at home. From WIFI crashing to food being made constantly in the kitchen and the espresso maker cranking out non-stop lattes, the house felt FULL. Fortunately, our camper was parked in the driveway, and this became my office for a while. The camper was the place from which I participated in the small group with 20 other participants from all over North America. The camper in the driveway was the place from which I woke up to the way our emotions can get stuffed down and the way that emotions get stuck in our bodies.

I learned from Hillary that our bodies are not just physical, but also physiological, and that emotions are an important part of being a body. All emotions are important and are there to teach us. Many of us were not taught as children how to be with and to feel our emotions (this is often especially true for boys). When we are unable to be with our emotions, when we sweep them under the rug, we sweep them into our nervous system, where they grow and fester, until eventually they erupt. When emotional pain is suppressed, it ends up *driving* us in unconscious ways.

We heal when we can be with what we feel is how Hillary summed it up best for me.

I learned that I needed to feel my feelings, rather than trying to reason myself out of them. I couldn't *think* my way out of my big feelings because to do so doesn't actually honour the emotions. And so, I learned how to honour, hold and welcome emotion, which didn't overwhelm me like I feared they might and I was transformed in the process.

For me it was more than just naming the emotions (I was good at that). It's being *with* the emotions and understanding that there is no such thing as a bad emotion. Instead, like we learned from Rich Villodas in the introductory week of this series, they are human and have something to tell us.

And, our emotions actually help us encounter God, in not just knowing ourselves but knowing the One in who's image we're created. Because, did you know that God feels?

Consider the following scriptures and what we learn about God and God's emotions:

God *saw that it was good.... very good* (Genesis 1:25,31). In other words, God delighted, relished, beamed with delight over us.

I, the Lord your God, am a *jealous* God (Exodus 20:5).

“For a long time, I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, *I cry out, I gasp and pant*” Isaiah 42:14.

“The *fierce anger* of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart” (Jeremiah 30:24).

I have *loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with kindness* (Jeremiah 31:3).

“How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me; all my *compassion is aroused* (Hosea 11:8).

“He began to *be sorrowful and troubled*. Then he said to them, ‘my soul is *overwhelmed with sorrow* to the point of death’ (Matthew 26:37-38).

He looked around them in *anger and, deeply distressed* at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand’ (Mark 3:5).

At that time Jesus, *full of joy* through the Holy Spirit...” (Luke 10:21).

If God is a God who feels...and feels deeply.... and as people made in God’s image...it makes sense that we have emotions and if God is able to feel deeply then we know that God is able to handle our BIG emotions.

It turns out that naming and embracing our feelings is essential to encountering God – reality leads to reality – the more real we are able to be the more that we are able to encounter God and know how beloved we are in our journey of becoming our Authentic Selves

As we think about knowing ourselves, it’s important that we become aware of the false identities that are so easy to adopt so that we can shed them. We read in the New Testament of the bible that right after the baptism of Jesus and before his public ministry begins that Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^[a] by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’^[b]”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’^[c]”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’^[d]”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’^[e]”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

(Matthew 4:1-11)

As we meditate on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, three false identities or masks are offered to us. Jesus is tempted to tell stones to become bread, Jesus is brought to see the kingdoms of the world and their splendor and promised all of them if he will bow down and worship the devil and then the devil invites him to throw himself down from the highest point of the temple if he is indeed the Son of God. Jesus is tempted to buy into the identity of performance, possessions, and popularity. Those false identities are a temptation for us as well.

If we back up a bit, before the passage of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness begins, we are given a snapshot of Jesus’ understanding of who he is when we read about his baptism in the Jordan river. We read that heaven opens, the Spirit descends like a dove, and Jesus hears the father say “this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). In other words, God the father tells him – you belong to me, you are loved, you are good. Jesus has yet to perform miracles or to die on the cross for the sins of humanity and nonetheless receives an experiential affirmation that he is **deeply** loved by his heavenly Father for who he *is*. This love is the very foundation of how Jesus sees and feels about himself.

Living and swimming in the river of God’s deep love for us in Christ is at the very heart of true spirituality. This experiential knowing of God’s love and acceptance provides the only sure foundation for loving and accepting our true selves. Only the love of God in Christ is capable of bearing the weight of our true identity. God has created each one of us with a unique personality, thoughts, dreams, temperament, feelings, gifts and desires – this is what makes us authentically us. And all of who we are – including all our emotions – is deeply loved by God.

And, these three temptations threaten us just like they did to Jesus telling us that we will never be enough, not loveable, not good enough.

Temptation One – I am what I do (performance)

Temptation Two – I am what I have (possessions)

Temptation Three – I am what others think (popularity)

The invitation for you and I is to resist these temptations, shed our false identities, and know that we belong to God, are deeply loved, and that God is pleased with us...that we are good and that

God delights in us. *This* is where our true identity, our belovedness comes from. The more that we know who we are, the more that we can truly know and experience God.

Like Jesus, we can find our own unique identity in the generous and abounding love of the father.

Getting to our core requires following God into the unknown, into a relationship with God that turns our present spirituality upside down. God invites us to remove the false layers we wear to reveal our authentic selves.

Maybe like me you're asking, what supports us as we shed our false self, be true to our emotions before God, develop our Authentic self, and allow our True Self in Christ to emerge? In chapter two of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Pete Scazzero walks us through four practical truths that can help us begin the radical transition of living faithful to our true self in Christ:

1. Solitude and Silence.

This means we spend time alone so that we can listen...to our feelings...the full weight of them...and get curious about them...asking questions like...why did I respond that way to that situation? Why was I angry? What was I afraid of? Excited about? This requires slowing down our pace...so that you and I can listen to what God wants us to hear.

2. Trusted Companions.

We all need guides to accompany us on this journey...we especially those guides who have more experience and wisdom than us. In the journey of emotionally healthy spirituality we are talking about radical change at the very core of our being. At least two critical forces hinder us – first the pressure of others to keep us living lives that are not our own is enormous – and second, our own stubbornness and the possibility of self-deception is so great that without mature companions we can easily fall into the trap of living in illusions. My trusted companions have included mentors, close friends, therapists and a spiritual director. If you're thinking 'I don't have anyone to walk with me on this journey' Ask God to lead you and bring someone into your life for this season. Or maybe ask someone that you respect for suggestions. You could also jump into the second week of our *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* short term groups offered at each location. Trusted companions are essential on the inner journey.

3. Getting out of our Comfort Zone.

Allowing your True Self to come forth can be frightening. Ask yourself, "am I living faithfully to the life God has asked me to live?" The ultimate gift we can give the world is our True Self living in loving union with God. How can we affirm the unique identities of others if we don't first affirm our own? Can we really love our neighbours if we don't love ourselves? This inner journey is uncomfortable and if you are feeling that, you are in good company.

4. Pray for courage.

In the spirit of getting out of our comfort zone, being our authentic selves before God and others takes courage, and so we need God's help. Bring this to God. Pray for courage. Tell God what you need!

As we wrap up, coming to know ourselves is essential in knowing God and coming to know ourselves requires us being real about what we feel. God is a God of feelings, and we are people with big feelings!

Knowing ourselves requires getting to know what we feel, being real about that and allowing those emotions to guide us in our journey of deepening our relationship with God, shedding our false self, and becoming more of our True and Authentic selves.

Getting to know ourselves so that we may know God is the adventure of a lifetime.

And as Augustine prayed, "Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee."

(Leads into spiritual practice)