

Introduction: We had started this sermon series on Emotionally Healthy Spirituality based on Peter Scazzero's book; many Christ-followers are often unaware of the way that emotional baggage from their past inhibits their spiritual growth in the present faith journey. Like an iceberg, what people see outwardly is merely a fraction of what's really going on inside. Difficulties which appear on the surface usually have deeper roots.

As we have been repeating over and over:

It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

Peter Scazzero

Today we will look at how we need to live in our brokenness and vulnerability.

In Tim Stevens' *Marked by Love* he has a chapter called, "I'm Tired of the Mask"; he mentions that there seems to be an unwritten rule requiring believers to wear masks; it's as though once you became a believer, you have signed a pledge to be fake and you are issued a mask not to be take off at any time. To admit any vulnerability becomes a

sign of minimizing the power of God. And since people are looking to Christians and their leaders to have all the answers and none of the doubts, so they have to live up to that image and don't spill any beans. Share your struggles with therapists only and go on pretending all is well. (Tim Stevens, *Marked by Love*, Kindle location 222, 234, 244.)

This might be an over-exaggeration because not everyone is intentionally walking around with a mask on, but most of us find it difficult to deal with our brokenness and are afraid to be vulnerable; we have built certain walls of separation and cordon off "Don't-even-go-there" areas of our lives.

We are our own spin doctor, image consultant, and press secretary. We fake it, flee from prying eyes, or fight to stay on the surface.

The late leading British writer/speaker Basil Pennington suggests that people are broken and alienated from each other. They are like a bunch of porcupines trying to huddle together for warmth;

they want to get closer to each other but are always driven apart, because they are afraid of the wound they can inflict upon each other with their quills. (Cf. Basil Pennington, *Life of Thomas Merton*.)

The heroes of faith recorded in the Bible *showed* and lived in their brokenness and vulnerability, people with whom God partnered and used to accomplish His redemptive purposes:

Moses who led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt toward the Promise Land was a stutterer and a runaway murderer;

King Saul, chosen to be the first king of Israel, quite a good looking hunk and stood out amongst his peers, was consumed with insecurity and jealousy;

King David whom God described as a man after His own heart abused his power, committed murder and adultery;

Elijah, the miracle-working, prayer-warrior prophet, was bipolar;

Jeremiah the prophet of courage and hope was depressive and suicidal;

Peter, the coward fisherman turned courageous evangelist and an early church leader, was impulsive and reckless, always put his foot in his mouth;

Timothy, the protégé of Paul and commissioned by God as a fulltime worker was an introvert, timid, and lacked self-confidence;

Paul the missionary-pastor-theologian extraordinaire had a pretty hot temper and was arrogant and mean.

But listen to what he says,

¹ Tim. 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy ... ¹⁶so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (NIV)

Paul's personal example here magnifies **God's mercy, grace; that God's life-transforming power is seen even in people who have baggage from their past, because they are given a fresh start and, in the process of maturing, God partners with them to impact the world!**

Paul is the best "floor model" of the saying, "Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet!"

God doesn't desert us because of our struggles, weaknesses and imperfection, but often we are the ones who give up on God in the moment of crisis.

**We cover up our brokenness by
amusing our selves,
finding quick fixes,
looking for god-substitutes,
or using a drug of choice to numb our pain.**

But when we do any of these, we deprive ourselves of experiencing and testifying the world restoring power of God.

Paul never teaches Jesus followers to escape pain and suffering but to live through them:

2 Cor. 10:7 I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (NIV)

As Paul struggles with pain and suffering, he thrives in grace and humility, leaning heavily on God's power make manifest in his weakness! He doesn't ask why but pursues what God wants him to do in the midst of trials and testings!

Let me share with you THREE Practical Takeaways to live in brokenness and vulnerability with the power of God:

Guard your heart and pay attention to God's promptings.

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” (Prov. 4:23; NLT)

The heart in the bible refers to the interplay of the mind, soul, and body; it controls the whole person.

What else does the bible say about the heart?

Jer. 17:9 The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out ... (*The Message*)

The brokenness of our life reveals the complexity of human psyche and what’s going on in our hearts, which is the command-control centre.

Whatever shapes our hearts influences our attitudes, affections, and actions.

Carey Nieuwhof writes about the usual leanings of our way of handling negative feelings: “The gravitational pull is toward unhealthy, not health. Healthy doesn’t happen on its own.”

<https://careynieuwhof.com/why-do-we-hate->

[each-other-so-much-anger-new-epidemic/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Why+do+we+hate+each+other+so+much%3F+%28Some+thoughts+on+the+breakdown+of+dialogue+%29&utm_campaign=8%2F1+Why+do+we+hate+so+much%3F](https://careynieuwhof.com/why-do-we-hate-each-other-so-much-anger-new-epidemic/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Why+do+we+hate+each+other+so+much%3F+%28Some+thoughts+on+the+breakdown+of+dialogue+%29&utm_campaign=8%2F1+Why+do+we+hate+so+much%3F))

What do you do with the “hopelessly dark and deceitful” feelings and try to make sense of the puzzling heart?

God knows us more than we know ourselves; His intimate knowledge of each one of us is more thorough and penetrating than any “Diagnostic Imaging”!

Therefore, we must get back to God and pray as David did: “Ps. 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” (NLT)

Make space - take time out – to prayerfully discern and make use of the redemptive potential of those

“dark and deceitful” thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

- Recall and review how God poured His grace and mercy in the different pain points of your life.
- In view of the purpose and calling He created you to fulfill, i.e., being conformed to the image of Christ, ask what He wants you to learn in the present.

Keep in mind these words: “God knows us better than we know ourselves. God does His deepest work in our darkest hours.” (A.W. Tozer)

Spiritual discernment is the ability to see that God is not just our means of escape from tough times but that He is moulding our character along the same lines as the life of Jesus.

But God has also put people in our lives as supportive network and “signs” of His presence. No man is an island; we need each other to fully grasp the multi-dimensions of God’s love, as we continue in our healing journey.

This leads us to the second practical takeaway:

Invite others into your private world.

Listen to what Paul teaches:

Gal. 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (NIV)

Rom. 12:15 Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. (*The Message*)

Carrying each other’s burdens assumes the opening up of our inner world to one another; people don’t know what’s going on and what we are struggling with inside, until we are willing to break down the walls of self-protection.

Loneliness is a growing epidemic – in 2018 the British government even launched its first loneliness strategy and appointed a minister to deal with millions of people who feel lonely and isolated
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-launches-governments-first-loneliness-strategy>).

In fact, many are isolated, lacking supportive and meaningful relationships, not being understood or socially engaging; this pandemic lockdown exacerbates the sense of social alienation.

But loneliness can be self-inflicted; most of us are afraid to open up and being vulnerable because

- we don't want to show our weaknesses/struggles;
- we don't want to be judged by others;
- we don't want to become a topic of people's conversation.

But the heavy burdens in our hearts can be lightened by our open admission of our inadequacies, weaknesses, and limitations.

The darkness of our inner world can only be brightened when we open the window of our soul and let the light of other's love come in.

And this certainly leads to our third practical takeaway:

Remember: We are all "wounded healers."

In order to deal with the pain and suffering caused by human wrong doings, the Almighty God enters this world in the lowliest fashion, forsaking His power, glory and majesty and taking on a human identity, experiences the same harshness of life we all face to identify with humanity, and to offer hope and healing as He walks with each one of us along the way - Jesus becomes a wounded healer who can sympathize with humanity.

Heb. 2:17-18 That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life ... he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed. (*The Message*)

We are instructed by the apostle to **imitate God's way** in encouraging and comforting others.

2 Cor. 1:3-4 All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. (*The Message*)

Not all can identify with our strengths, but many will be touched by our weakness.

Sharing our pain connects us with others in the most profound way.

“We bless others naturally through our strengths. But we bless others supernaturally through our weaknesses.” (Len Sweet)

As priests to one another, we bring each other to the mercy seat of Christ and are drawn closer to God together.

Here is a testimony from Lewis Myer: “It is the only place I know where status means nothing. Nobody fools anybody else. Everyone is here because he or she made a slobbering mess of his or her life and is trying to put the pieces back together again ... For one small hour the high and mighty descend and the lowly rise. The leveling that results is what people mean when they use the word brotherhood.”

Wouldn't you want to be in such a community?
Guess what gathering Lewis Myer is talking about?

It's AA 12 Steps Recovery Program! I am sure the church – God's people – can do much better than AA! (As we have seen and heard in the different testimonies of those who graduated from the Freedom Session and the next one will start on Oct. 8th [<https://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/freedomsession>])

Conclusion:

To live in our brokenness and vulnerability is being authentic. The aim or goal for authenticity is not self-disclosure and catharsis but personal growth, maturity, healthy relationships, and supportive community that reflect the restoring power and purpose of God for the world.

“Of course [God] wants you to be happy, but that is not His highest aim. God's glory and His purpose are the end of all things. So seek out the eternal purpose of God and get in line with it.”

(François Fénelon, 17th C writer, poet, Archbishop)

Don't deny, ignore, or cover your brokenness but live in and through them by the grace and power of God who has called us to partner with Him to restore lives for eternity!