Introduction: Hello, Everyone, we are so glad to have you joining our online worship today! Let us know in the Chat room what's on your mind, your feelings, any sense of God's promptings, and inquiry, or if you would like someone to pray with you any time, our prayer team is ready to do just that.

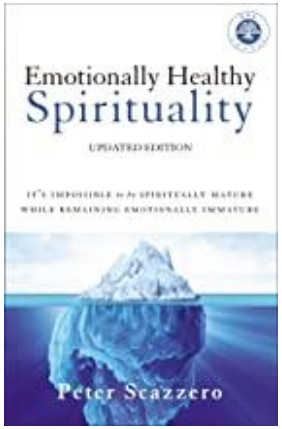
I have been using a professional counseling tool called Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis for over 35 years. I went to training and be certified for administering this tool in Buffalo shortly after I started as a pastor in 1984. And part of the training process was to do a self analysis – and I did. But I felt so embarrassed to show it to my instructor because the result showed that I was a bit psychotic – my profile indicated that I had a high anxiety pattern and a suicidal pattern!

So thank you, Cornerstone, for taking in a highly psychotic pastor who is involved in much counseling ministry here!

Ok, for the record, I can be a bit anxious at times, but I am not suicidal! The result of that analysis was due to missing a bit of the instruction in how I should answer the questions.

However, what I do learn over these years of doing pastoral counseling is this: many people are often ***unaware*** they are carrying some emotional baggage of past hurt that is negatively shaping their thinking, feelings, and behaviors as well as inhibiting their spiritual growth in the present.

Beginning today and every Sunday till the first Sunday in September, we will teach about "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality," which is based on Peter Scazzero's book which I would highly recommend you to purchase [and the e-book might still be on sale for $1.99; and you can also check out different resources at https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/?v=3e8d115eb4b3].



In the coming weeks we will learn how to integrate our emotional health and spirituality so that we can experience the wonderful promises God has given us and improve our interpersonal and social relationships as well as our growth in Christian discipleship journey.

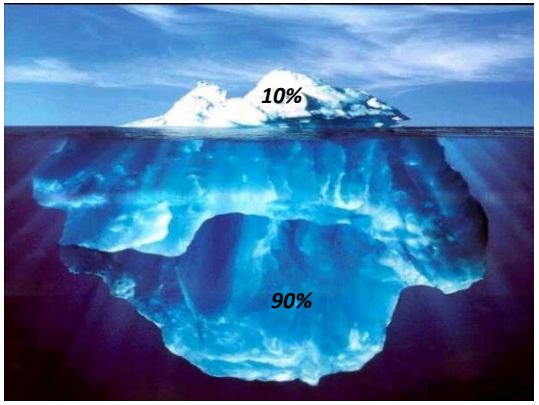
I encourage you to go deeper with each message using our sermon study guides with your family, friends and/or small group, or for personal reflection. You can access that on our website, https://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/messages.

We begin today with the topic, "The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality."

The emotional and spiritual dimensions of life are always interconnected. And as Pete Scazzero reminds us,

"Because people are living real, and helpful, spiritual experiences in certain areas of their lives … they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, ***even if their relational life and interior world is not in order … It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature***." (Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality,* pp. 15,19; emphasis ours.)

What people see on the surface is merely a fraction of what's really beneath the surface – like an iceberg.



Relational conflicts, emotional struggles, and spiritual apathy which appear on the surface usually have deeper roots such as guilt & shame, bitterness & resentment, anger & hostility, fears & anxieties.

Deep emotional difficulties are …

> ***Rooted*** in negative life experiences in the past.
>
> ***Hardened*** by toxic attitudes and harmful habits in the present.
>
> ***Used*** by forces of darkness to drive us away from God and others.

The 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, "***Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards***."

So, before we begin a journey toward an emotionally healthy spirituality, it is imperative for us ***to identify what had broken our hearts, wounded our souls, poisoned our minds, and warped our behaviours in the past and still persisting in the present.***

Peter Scazzero, in the first chapter of his book, elaborates the top ten symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality; I highly recommend you to check out his insightful comments there.

But today we'll look at the story of Jesus' curing of a man who has been crippled for 38 years and if you have your bible you can turn to Jn. 5:1-15, as I refer to it in this message.

On his way to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals, Jesus passes by a pool where a great number of disabled people lie — the blind, the lame, the paralyzed – and learns about this crippled man's situation.

> ***"Do you want to get well?"*** [v. 6.]

Don't you think that this is a strange question to ask someone who is crippled for 38 yrs.? Of course, if I were him, I would think that it's a silly question!

But Jesus' question is ***neither simple nor silly but piercing***, because it exposes ***the inner darkness of the beggar*** – the emotionally unhealthy postures - who never really answered "Yes" to His the simple question.

Based on this story let me suggest three emotionally unhealthy postures that have spiritually paralyzed this man:

1. Playing the blame game.
2. Holding on to an embittered sprit.
3. Resisting change.

Let's dscuss them one at a time.

Playing the blame game.

When Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well, he says,

> **5:7** "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

This cripple beggar …

> blames ***God*** [no one to help me into the pool][i], ***circumstances*** [when the water is stirred], and ***people*** [someone else goes down ahead of me].

Although this man has experienced Christ's mercy, compassion, and power in curing him, there are other signs of unresolved emotional and spiritual issues in his life that draw him away from Jesus:

> **9** … The day on which this [healing miracle] took place was a Sabbath, **10** and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."
>
> **11** But he replied, "***The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'***" **12** So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

[13] The man who was healed had ***no idea who it was***, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Isn't it reasonable to expect this cripple who is cured at the very least tries to find out the name/identity of the miracle worker in the first place? Shouldn't he be grateful and joyful, testifying to everyone about what just happened?

But instead we see that when he is questioned and threatened by some religious leaders - what I call the Jesus-haters - under such stressful and unfriendly circumstances, he is afraid of their disapproval and acted cowardly and basically saying this: "It's not my fault … that man made me do it! Now, what's his name again? I am not guilty … don't blame me … go talk to the guy who told me to do whatever; go and punish him."

These are all signs of self-centeredness and refusal to take personal responsibility of his own action.

BTW don't we also play this blame game for the present pandemic, or when we encounter health challenges, relational struggles, marital conflict, financial crisis, etc.?

The story circles back to the religious leaders, but this time the initiative comes from the now cured crippled man and exposes another emotionally unhealthy posture:

Holding on to an embittered spirit.

So after running into Jesus again and not liking what He has said to him, he reports back to the Jesus-haters: "[15] ***The man went away and told the Jewish leaders*** that it was Jesus who had made him well."

Jesus' admonition – stop sinning - provokes his cynical or angry response to get back at Jesus. His action reveals his bitterness and resentment toward Jesus. But why would he be bitter toward the One who cured him?

Could there be some unrecorded bargaining between him and the Jewish leaders? Did he try to get something more from Jesus who refused his request? Did he repeat the accusations of the religious leaders to threaten Jesus?

We know that ***hurt people, hurt people***!

This man is conditioned to act out of his deep seated hurt and self-love over 38 yrs., a default reaction when people/events/words trigger hurtful memories, negative feelings that tear away the scabs of the infected wounds which have never been healed in his soul.

We can all identify with this man, can't we? When people or words push our buttons that pinch our sensitive nerves, some explode with angry words or jest, others with punitive or violent behaviours.

Someone once said, "***Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.***" Of course, this is the irony of the story – Jesus is offering a new beginning and a new life to this man; but this man is drowning himself in resentment.

This leads us to his third emotional unhealthy posture:

Resisting change.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. ***Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you***."

Jesus' words to this man here immediately trigger us to ask why He would tell him to stop sinning. Maybe those imagined conversations between this man and the Jewish leaders and his threats to Jesus do appear most probable conjectures.

Jesus' warning to this man also shows that ***he doesn't want to change.*** He is refusing to get rid of stuffs that usually provide ***emotional security and comforts – unwholesome habits of attitudes and self-serving manipulations***.

He is holding tight ***the very things that stop him from pursuing what's good and what's honouring to God***; he fails to grasp Jesus' good intention and restoring love.

If repentance means 180 degrees turning around, a complete change in direction, then here there's a clear indication of ***an unrepentant heart*** that is manifested in his user-friendly spirit that merely wants to get what he desires.

See, one genuine and personal encounter with Jesus – even if it involves an extraordinary miracle - is ***not just a onetime transaction***; it should be ***a relationship that begins a process of life transformation***.

There is more to life than just being well physically on this side of eternity; it calls for ***a renewal of vocation*** – faithful obedience in living out God's original purpose in our day-to-day living, being salt and light, serving as signpost of hope of restoration in the coming new heaven and earth when all things will be made right.

Conclusion: Ignoring or bypassing emotionally unhealthy baggage ***hinders our growth toward spiritual maturity and creates vulnerable points of attack for Satan and the forces of darkness***.

"Being honest with oneself and with God is the only way to get through all the emotional garbage that has piled up over the years." (Charles Kraft, *Deep Wounds, Deep Healing*, p. 28.)

Here are three practical steps you could take to begin a journey of developing an emotionally healthy spirituality:

- ✓ ***Accept personal responsibility.***
- ✓ ***Identify deep wounds*** [which have been set aside but constantly creating havoc, e.g., guilt & shame, bitterness & resentment, anger & hostility, fears & anxieties.]
- ✓ ***Take practical steps toward healings.***

  You can join a 6-session Online Workshop and learn biblical principles that will help you experience "beneath the surface" transformation. Every Thursdays, 7:00-8:30pm, July 30 to September 6.
  You can sign up using the Cornerstone apps or by visiting our website, https://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/spirituality

The most tragic result is to have been "cured" but not "healed."

The invalid who is cure physically, but not heal emotionally and spiritually; Jesus offers him a new

beginning and a new life but he could get over his emotionally unhealthy postures.

The death of Jesus has brought us and all creation shalom; the healing we received includes all aspects of our being, mind, will, soul, and body.

As we celebrate the Lord's Table today, we remember the words of Isaiah:

"53:4Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that ***brought us peace*** was on him, and by his wounds ***we are healed***."

God has given us all that we need to break free from unhealthy and destructive patterns so whatever we do for Him and others is daily ***nourished by God's redeeming grace and mercy, found in our total acceptance in Jesus, and enabled by the renewing power of the Spirit.***

So if you have your elements ready, let celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

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[i] ***4*** *From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.*