

“Look into under the surface” (Jonah 1:1-4)

“Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly – to yourself, your relationship with God, and the people around you.”<sup>1</sup> This is what Peter Scazzero says in his book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality.”

This book helped me a lot. I had felt there was something I missed in my spiritual living, Christian life, discipleship training, not only for my growth, but also for helping others to grow. I knew we can grow from glory to glory, become more like Jesus endlessly, but it seems I and people are repeating in the same level every year, instead of growing. I knew I missed something, but couldn't recognize what I missed.

Peter shared what he learned through not only his study but also his experience. I've got some significant missing elements of our spiritual formation and our discipleship, that helps us to live freely and actively as a Jesus lover.

In this series “Being Set Free,” we are going to look inside ourselves to ponder honestly the genuineness and depth of our relationship with Jesus. And we will take practical steps that will help us freely and actively to love Jesus, others and ourselves.

The main idea that we will be unpacking here is simple, yet its far-reaching. That is emotional health which is defined as our ability to be self-aware and love well. And contemplative spirituality that is slowing down to cultivate our relationship with Jesus. When these two things are brought together they offer nothing short of a spiritual revolution in our lives.<sup>2</sup> It sounds great, isn't it?

### Jonah 1:1-4

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (Book)*, Zondervan, 2006, p.7

<sup>2</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course DVD*, Zondervan, 2014, Session I.

“Jonah is an example of a prophet with a case of emotionally unhealthy spirituality. He hears and serves God but refuses to listen to God’s call to love and show mercy to Nineveh, a world power of that day known for its violent barbaric behavior. Jonah flees 2,400 miles in the opposite direction, to Tarshish, in present day Spain.

And why Tarshish? For one thing, it is a lot more exciting than Nineveh. Nineveh was an ancient site with layer after layer of ruined and unhappy history. Going to Nineveh to preach was not a coveted [or desired] assignment for a Hebrew prophet with good references. But Tarshish was something else. Tarshish was exotic. Tarshish was adventure... Tarshish in the biblical references was a “far off and sometimes idealized port.” It is reported in 1 Kings 10:22 that Solomon’s fleet of Tarshish fetched gold, silver, ivory, monkeys and peacocks... In Tarshish we can have a religious career without having to deal with God.

As Jonah runs, however, God sends a great storm. Jonah loses control of his life and destiny. He is thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish. It was from the belly of the fish that Jonah wrestled with God in prayer.”<sup>3</sup>

Let me ask you. What would be your Nineveh? And what would be your going to Tarshish? Perhaps, your Nineveh might be this series “Being Set Free.” God is taking you to deep inside of you to deal with violence, anger, fear, undeveloped area, unhappy history, unhealthy desire. God wants to prepare you for his great plan. But you may feel, it takes time and effort. Oh, there is something over there looks more fun and exciting. And it’s just good timing. Let’s get the boat. That could be your going to Tarshish.

When we ignore the emotional component of our lives, we move through the motions of Christian disciplines, activities, and behaviors, but deeply rooted behavioral patterns from our pasts continue to hinder us from an authentic life of maturity in Christ.

We often neglect to reflect on what is going on inside us and around us (emotional health) and are too busy to slow down to be with God (contemplative spirituality). As a result, we run the high risk of remaining stuck as spiritual infants, failing to develop into spiritually and emotionally mature adults in Christ.

One Christian described it best: “I was a Christian for twenty-two years. But instead of being a twenty-two-year-old Christian, I was a one-year-old

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day*, Zondervan, 2014, pp.24-25

Christian twenty-two times! I just kept doing the same things over and over and over again.”<sup>4</sup>

So it is tremendously important to slow down so that we can cultivate our relationship with Jesus, and also we can be aware of ourselves well.

Sometimes you may feel uncomfortable with what you find inside of you. So remember once we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our standing before God is based on Jesus's righteousness, not our own. It's based on his perfect record, not our imperfect one. It's based on his cross and resurrection, not our works. So we abide and dwell and walk in his love and his grace alone. So don't be afraid to be real. It's okay to take off our masks of pretending and let Jesus' love strip us of all the false layers that don't belong to him.

Our goal is not to fix people or change people. And actually we can't even fix or change ourselves. That's God's work. What we do is we open up a space so that God can have access to us, and interact with biblical truth in a fresh way, and to open ourselves up to him so he can do his work. So we want to give one another lots of grace and encouragement to take this journey of “Being Set Free,” in God presence.<sup>5</sup>

So now in this study we will be looking at the problem of emotionally unhealthy spirituality. It will begin to unpack the principle that the degree to which we are willing to give Jesus access to what is deeply beneath the surface in our lives, is the degree to which we will experience freedom in him.

Peter discusses about the top ten symptoms to determine if someone is suffering from a bad case of emotionally unhealthy spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

So here's the 10 symptoms. Number one. It's Using God to run from God. For example: My prayers are usually about God doing my will, not me surrendering to his.

In my case using God to run from God is when I think about church activities, ministries, plans, I can skip to deal with difficult areas of my life or my inner being that God wants to change. Or it might be things like, I use God to run

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course Workbook*, Zondervan, 2014, p.18

<sup>5</sup> *DVD*, Session I.

<sup>6</sup> *DVD*, Session I. And *Workbook*, pp.19-20, also “*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (Book)*,” Zondervan, 2006, pp.23-37

from God when I do God's work really to satisfy me, it's not really about him. Where I use God to run from God when I do things in his name that he never asked me to do. I use God to run from God when my prayers are really asking God to do my will, it's like he's my handyman and not my surrendering to his.

The second symptom of emotionally unhealthy spirituality is Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness and fear. For example: I am rarely honest with myself and/or others about the feelings, hurts, and pains beneath the surface of my life.

Most Christians believe that anger, sadness and fear are sins to be avoided, that something is wrong with our spiritual lives if we're feeling them. And like most Christians believe, as I was taught that feelings were unreliable and not to be trusted. This applies especially to the difficult feelings of fear and sadness and anger and hurt and pain. The problem with this is it's not biblical and the practical implications of such a view is enormous. We end up as a half human being suppressing our God-given humanity as men and women made in His image. And we end up missing the many many ways God's actually speaking to us and coming to us.

The third symptom is Dying to the wrong things. For example: I tend to deny healthy, God-given desires and pleasures of life such as friendships, joy, music, beauty, laughter, and nature. At the same time, I find it difficult to die to my self-protectiveness, defensiveness, lack of vulnerability, and judgmental attitude.

It's true Jesus did say if anyone will come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me (Mark 8:34). The question however is what does that mean. Yes, we're to die to the sinful part of who we are, such as defensiveness and detachment from others and arrogance and stubbornness and judgmental attitude and hypocrisy. As well as the more obvious sins described for us in the Bible.

But God doesn't call us to die to the good parts of who we are. God never asked us to die of the healthy desires and pleasures of life, to friendships, to joy, to art, to music, to beauty, to recreation, to laughter, to nature. God created those things and installed them in us, and when he finished, he said "It is very good. (Gen 1:31)" God planted desires in our hearts so we will nurture and water them. And these desires and passions are very often invitations and gifts from him.

The fourth symptom is Denying the past's impact on the present. For example: I rarely consider how my family of origin and significant people/events from my past have shaped my present.

When we come to faith in Christ whether as a child, a teenager or an adult we as the Bible calls were born again. The Apostle Paul says, the old has gone the new has come (2 Cor 5:17), that's our new status in Christ. And yet the work of maturing in Christ, of growing which theologians called sanctification that actually demands that we go back in order to be set free from unhealthy and destructive patterns that prevent us from going forward to all that God has for us. So the goal is to go forward. But we've got to get rid of the baggage we carry first.

The fifth symptom is Dividing our lives into sacred and secular compartments. For example: I easily compartmentalize God to "Christian activities" while usually forgetting about him when I am working, shopping, studying, or recreating.

It's so easy to compartmentalize. God is in Christian activities, like worshiping in a service or praying or reading the bible or going to a small group. But it's easy not to be aware of God when we're at work, or studying, or when we're dealing with money, or taking exams, or playing sports.

And Peter said, embarrassingly many Christians are not so different from the people outside of church. Their lifestyles show following materialism and self-centeredness and sexually immoral as the world in general. And Ron Cider summarized it very well. He says, whether the issue is marriage or sexuality or money or care for the poor, evangelicals are living scandalously unbiblical lives. And the data suggests that in many many crucial areas really Christians are not living any differently from their unbelieving neighbors.

The sixth symptom is Doing for God instead of being with God. For example: I tend to evaluate my spirituality based on how much I am doing for God.

That is, being productive and getting things done are the highest priorities in our modern culture, especially in the West. Just think about how you introduce yourself. I'm belonging to this and doing this. It's actually more obvious for house wives. They often ask each other, "What do you do every day?" Our identities in our doing.

The problem is that our identity as Christians is in God's love for us, not our doing, it's in our being with him. Our activity for God can only properly flow

from a life with God as we are “being”, not “deading.” We cannot give what we do not possess. And when our doing and our work for God is not nourished by a deep interior life with him, we end up off-center. Our sense of worth and recognition ends up shifting from God's unconditional love to us, to our work in performance. And what happens is the joy of Christ gradually just disappears. And we become human doings, not human beings.

The seventh symptom is Spiritualizing away conflict. For example: I usually miss out on true peace by smoothing over disagreements, burying tensions, and avoiding conflict, rather than disrupting false peace as Jesus did.

Nobody likes conflict. But in our reality, conflict is everywhere, from law courts to workplaces, to classrooms, to neighborhoods, to marriages, to friendships. We smooth over them. We sweep them under the rug. We pray they go away.

Yet Jesus was in regular conflict with the religious leaders, the crowds, the disciples, even his own family. And out of a desire to bring true peace Jesus broke up false peace all around him. He refused to spiritualize it away. Instead, he actually engaged in conflict in a way that brought life and brought his kingdom.

The eighth symptom is Covering over brokenness, weakness and failure. For example: I have a hard time speaking freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes.

It's also a symptom of emotionally unhealthy spirituality. We experience the pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and spiritual. And that pressure drives many of us. We feel guilty for not measuring up, for not making the grade.

And yet the Bible does not spin the flaws and weaknesses of its heroes. Abraham lied. Hosea's wife was a prostitute. Peter rebuked Jesus. Noah got drunk. Jonah was a racist. Jacob lied. John-Mark deserted Paul. Elijah burnt out. Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. Thomas doubted. And all these people send the same message that every human being on earth, regardless of their gifts and their strengths, is weak, vulnerable and dependent on God and other people.

The ninth symptom is Living without limits. For example: Those close to me would say, “I often ‘try to do it all’ or ‘bite off more than I can chew.’”

A core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We're not God. We can't serve everyone in need. We're human beings.

And when we cross over limits given to us by God, we end up in trouble. Just look at Adam and Eve. Once they cross the limit set by God in the Garden of Eden, their lives became lives full of troubles.

On the other hand, Jesus modeled limits for us as a human being. Fully God yet fully human, he did not heal every person who was sick in Galilee. He did not raise every dead person. He did not feed all the hungry beggars. A life without limits forgets something: that is to know God as God, and that we are not.

And then finally the tenth symptom is Judging other people's spiritual journey. For example: I often find myself occupied and bothered by the faults of those around me.

Somehow I learned that it was my responsibility to correct people in error or in sin, and to always counsel people who are mixed up about the bible truth and the worldly ideas, or to correct the ones who aren't in the place with God where I think they should be. If I didn't do it, I felt guilty. I saw something questionable, but I didn't respond to it, or I didn't know what to do, then I felt as if I was a failure.

Most of us are pretty good at pointing out other's wrongdoing, correcting others, or giving advice. But Jesus said "You can see the speck in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the log in your own eye. How can you say, 'My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you don't see the log in your own eye?" (Matt 7:3-4 CEV). I must see the damage which sin has done to every part of who I am emotionally and intellectually, will, spirit, my body, before I can actually attempt to remove the speck from my brother's eye.

As I said at the beginning, what we do is we open up a space so that God can have access to us, and interact with biblical truth in a fresh way, and to open ourselves up to him so he can do his work.

Guilt would not give us the solutions we look for. It only adds self-hatred to your problems. But guilt would ask us one very important question in life. The question is "Are you limiting your own intimacy with God?" I hope and pray that you will have more passion for knowing God.

Perhaps you are challenged by today's message, thinking "How can I break through?" This is the first step, "Knowing yourself in knowing God." Next time, we will look at two characters, Saul and David. They are great examples of "Knowing yourself in knowing God." Don't miss it!

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection

Which symptom of emotionally unhealthy spirituality may be most relevant in your life today?

Read Jonah 1:1-4. What internal or external storm might God be sending into your life as a sign that something is not right spiritually?

Read Jonah 2:1-10. When did Jonah pray this prayer? Was it after he was taken out from the belly of the fish? Where did he pray this? What would be your three nights and three days in the belly of the fish? What would you do there?

What might be one way your busyness blocks you from listening and communing intimately with the living God?

What is one step you can take today to slow down and live more attentive to the voice of Jesus?

Taken from "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course Workbook," Zondevan, 2014, p.19, and "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day" by Peter Scazzero, Zondevan, 2014, p.25, p.29, p.34.