Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

Introduction

This book will principally address two aspects of our spirituality:

1. Dealing with the emotional aspects of our lives which tend to reverberate in our spiritual lives.

2. Developing a deeper spirituality and real connection with God.

The assumption seems to be that the two play off one another.

We will be talking honestly about our emotional health, our fears, discouragement, emotional exhaustion, even our anger.

We will be trying to develop non-traditional kinds of spiritual disciplines that will help us to have a more “real,” connected relationship with God.

Today:

Ch 1 The Problem of Unhealthy Spirituality.

Technically, this is an oxymoron. There is no such thing as “unhealthy” spirituality.

Describing the problem.

Read quote on top of p. 9 “Christian spirituality, without integration of emotional health, can be deadly—to yourself, your relationship with God,, and the people around you.”

Early in our movement, we treated emotional health issues as spiritual issues.

Depression: Pray more.

Discouragement: Get “flat fired up.”

By the 1980s, a book “Competent to Counsel” was really popular.

The title comes from Romans 15:14 “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge ad competent to counsel one another.”

This scripture is true, of course, but we implied that any disciple has sufficient knowledge to counsel any other disciple, no matter the emotional/psychological problem.

I remember shielding members from “discipling.” Not every issue is a sin issue. Some issues are principally emotional/psychological.

p. 12 “Very few people emerge out of their families of origin emotionally whole or mature. In my early years of ministry, I believed the power of Christ could break any curse, so I barely gave any thought to hoe the home I’d left long ago might still be shaping me.”

p. 15 For those first seventeen years as a devoted follower of Christ, however, the emotional aspects of my humanity remained largely untouched. They were rarely talked about in Sunday classes, small groups or church leadership settings. In fact, the phrase “emotional aspects of my humanity seemed to belong in a professional counselor’s vocabulary, not the vocabulary of the church.

But then, as you read (or will read), his family fell apart.

His wife left the church he was leading!

He uses the iceberg model.

Top 7% (he says 10 %) is the things that you and I see. It is the surface activity and surface spirituality.

Our standard techniques: Pray more, read the Bible, have quiet times, have discipling relationships, share your faith can deal with the 7%, and can even have some effect on part of the 93%.

But the claim is that there are deeper, hidden things which, if we do not deal with them, will NOT change at all.

It will retard our spiritual growth. It will prevent our maturity.

This part NOT solved by the usual religious activities.

Again, the authors will propose a two-pronged solution, as already mentioned.

Scazzero describes how he did all the right things, built a great church, started many ministries.

His wife said to him, “Oh yes, by the way, the church you pastor? I quit. Your leadership isn’t worth following.”

She knew that he was not spiritually mature. That he was full of anger, resentment, jealousy…

He describes five aspects of all human beings on p. 20:

Social

Intellectual

Physical

Emotional

Spiritual

All are important. We become mature as an integrated, organic whole involving all five.

The leaders of the church are called to help the entire church grow socially, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and yes, even physically.

If we leave one out, the whole will suffer.

This book deals primarily with two of them.

Q: Which two?

Some marks of emotionally unhealthy spirituality: (He lists 10. I will cover five of them)

1. Denying the impact of the past on the present.

After all, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. Behold! The old has gone and the new has come!

True, but we need to understand that this is one of those already but not yet things.

Becoming a Christian is not some sort of magic wand that wipes away the effect of past trauma and hurts of all sorts.

2. Dividing our lives too sharply into the secular and the spiritual compartments.

p. 29 A Gallup poll “Evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered and sexually immoral as the world in general.”

This is an exaggeration when it comes to us, but not as much as we wish.

Some of us still struggle with drinking, looking at women, focusing on pleasure in unhealthy ways, etc. This is not just a sin problem. It is also a symptom of lack of emotional health.

3. Doing for God, not being with God. Having an overly works-oriented Christianity.

p. 30 “For most of my Christian life, I wondered if monks were truly Christian.”

Not that we will become monks, but we could not even understand the positive aspects of being alone with God, contemplative lifestyle, withdrawing to a lonely place, etc.

4. Covering our brokenness, weaknesses and failures.

We feel pressure to appear spiritually strong, which we confuse with being emotionally “strong.”

He uses the example of David and Bathsheba. The Bible does not cover up David’s terrible sins. It also calls David a man after God’s heart.

To me, this is more of a cause than a symptom of emotional immaturity, but…

5. Judging others’ spiritual journey. p. 36

Example of a spiritual discipline I was taught:

The breath prayer.

Breathe in: Some attribute of God.

Breathe out: Therefore I will do this.

For me. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace I will rely on him.

Discussion questions:

What might you use as a “breath prayer”?

Which is more motivating for you, working on your emotional health or deepening your connection with God. Why?