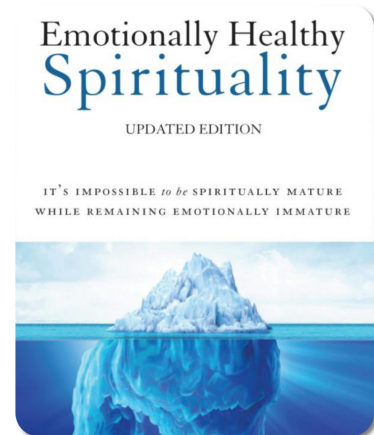


Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

(a summary by Pat Evert)

INTRODUCTION, This book was written out of the reality of our life together as a multiracial, multiethnic community committed to bridging racial, cultural, economic, and gender barriers, and to serving the poor and marginalized. The content of this book emerged out of this soil; their openness to the Holy Spirit and passion for the Lord Jesus is a gift. So please read this book prayerfully . . . thoughtfully . . . slowly. Stop to absorb the glimpses of God and yourself that the Holy Spirit gives you along the way. Chapter three provides the hinge upon which the rest of the book turns, explaining why **both emotional health and contemplative spirituality are indispensable to bringing transformation in Christ to the deep places of our lives.**



PART ONE: The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality

CHAPTER 1 - Recognizing Tip-of-the-Iceberg Spirituality, Something Is Desperately Wrong - John wasn't the problem; I was. Externally I had appeared kind, gracious, and patient, when inwardly I was nothing like that. I so wanted to present a polished image as a good Christian that I cut myself off from what was going on within myself. Pretending was safer than honesty and vulnerability. Church leavers... It wasn't until the pain exposed how much was hiding under my surface of being a "good Christian" that it hit me: whole layers of my emotional life had lain buried, untouched by God's transforming power. I had been too busy for "morbid introspection," too consumed with building God's work to spend time digging around in my subconscious. Yet now the pain was forcing me to face how superficially Jesus had penetrated my inner person, even though I had been a Christian for twenty years. **But crisis taught me I had to go back and understand what those old things were in order for them to begin passing away.** My siblings and I emerged out of that environment scarred. We were emotionally underdeveloped and starved for affection and attention. First, I was not experiencing the joy or contentment Scripture promises us in Christ. I was unhappy, frustrated, overworked, and harried. Second, I was angry, bitter, and depressed. Third, Geri was lonely, tired of functioning as a single mom with our four daughters. She had exposed my nakedness, **emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable.** Pain has an amazing ability to open us to new truth and to get us moving. Am I experiencing the fruit of the Spirit?

CHAPTER 2 - The Top Ten Symptoms of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality,

Our problem revolves around misapplied biblical truths that not only damage our closest relationships but also obstruct God's work of profoundly transforming us deep beneath the iceberg of our lives. **To the degree that we are unable to express our emotions, we remain impaired in our ability to love** God, others, and ourselves well, smoothing over disagreements or "sweeping them under the rug." Do we say one thing to people's faces and then another behind their backs? Do we give people the silent treatment? Do we become sarcastic? Do we give in because we are afraid of not being liked? Do we say yes when we mean no? Do we avoid and withdraw and cut off? The pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and spiritually "together" hovers over most of us. We are all deeply flawed and broken. There are no exceptions. The core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We are not God. Of course, many of us have no trouble at all dispensing advice or pointing out wrongdoing. We spend so much time at it that we end up self-deceived, thinking we have much to give and therefore little to receive from others. After all, we're the ones who are right, aren't we? Sadly, we often turn our differences into moral superiority or virtues. I see it all the time.

CHAPTER 3 - The Radical Antidote: Emotional Health and Contemplative

Spirituality - Bringing Transformation to the Deep Places Our life-and-death struggle is to remain truly connected to God and the choices before us. God, through Revelation, makes clear that no compromise is possible between Christ and the beast. When emotional health and contemplative spirituality are interwoven together in an individual's life, a small group, a church, a university fellowship, or a community, people's lives are dramatically transformed.

Emotional health/Contemplative spirituality:

1. The Gift of Slowing Down - You may be slowing down, but the real question is, are you paying attention to God? Martha was actively serving Jesus, but she was missing Jesus. She is busy in the "doing" of life. Mary is engaged in what we will call the contemplative life. Is there imbalance in my contemplation and activity. The active life in the world for God can only properly flow from a life with God. **God has a unique combination of activity and contemplation for each of us.** We know we have found our balance when we are so deeply rooted in God that our activity is marked by the peaceful, joyful, rich quality of our contemplation.
2. The Gift of Anchoring in God's Love - **Christianity is not about our disciplined pursuit of God**, but about God's relentless pursuit of us. Like the prodigal son, they are content to relate to God as hired servants rather than enjoy the full privileges of sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. The Sabbath practice of truly stopping one day each week to rest, to delight in God's creation and to take care of myself, **anchors me in the practice of "being,"** not simply "doing," every seven days. It is always true to some extent that we make our images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us. Eventually we become like the God we image.
3. The Gift of Breaking Free from Illusions - We convince ourselves that we cannot live without certain earthly pleasures, accomplishments, and relationships. We become "attached" (or "addicted," to use a contemporary word. The call of

emotionally healthy spirituality is a call to a radical, countercultural life. **The practices of contemplative spirituality** provide a “container,” a boundary, so that Jesus continues as the beginning, the middle, and the end of our lives. Thus the practices of emotional health never lead us to a self-absorbed narcissism; they lead us to Christ.

PART TWO: The Pathway to Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

CHAPTER 4 - Know Yourself That You May Know God. Becoming Your Authentic Self

St. Teresa of Avila wrote in *The Way of Perfection*: “Almost all problems in the spiritual life stem from a lack of self-knowledge.” We need permission to consider their feelings. To my surprise, God was able to handle my wild emotions as they erupted after thirty-six years of stuffing them. I came alive like never before. And I rediscovered his love and grace—much like David, Job, and Jeremiah. I also began the journey to know myself that I might know God. In neglecting our intense emotions we are false to ourselves and lose a wonderful opportunity to know God. We forget that **change comes through brutal honesty and vulnerability before God.**

And when I finally allowed myself to begin asking, “How do I feel about the church, my life, different relationships around me?” Before God and others, it released an outpouring that set me free but everyone around me.

Temptation One: I Am What I Do (Performance) - How easily earthly success tempts us to find our worth and value outside of God’s inexhaustible, free love for him in Christ.

Temptation Two: I Am What I Have (Possession)

Temptation Three: I Am What Others Think (Popularity) - True freedom comes when we no longer need to be somebody special in other people’s eyes because **we know we are loveable and good enough.**

Living your God-given life involves remaining faithful to your true self. It entails distinguishing your true self from the demands and voices around you and discerning the unique vision, calling, and mission the Father has given to you. It requires listening to God from within yourself and understanding how he has uniquely made you. Jesus’ life, in living faithfully to his true self, he disappointed a lot of people. **Jesus was not selfless.** He did not live as if only other people counted. He knew his value and worth. He had friends. He asked people to help him. At the same time Jesus was not selfish. He did not live as if nobody else counted. He gave his life out of love for others. From a place of loving union with his Father, Jesus had a mature, healthy “true self.” God invites us to remove the false layers we wear **to reveal our authentic self**, to awaken the “seeds of true self” he has planted within us.

1. Pay Attention to Your Interior in Silence and Solitude
2. Find Trusted Companions - At least two critical forces hinder such a profound shift. The pressure of others to keep us living lives that are not our own is enormous. And, our own stubborn self-will.
3. Move Out of Your Comfort Zone - The pain of living a life that was not God's for me finally was greater than the pain of change.
4. Pray for Courage, it will be contested

Getting to know yourself so that you might know God is the adventure of a lifetime.

CHAPTER 5 - Going Back in Order to Go Forward, Breaking the Power of the Past.

Why are so many of us living lives with deeply entrenched parts of us apparently untouched by the power and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ? This entire book, I hope, begins to offer an answer to this challenge. A common, **deadly commandment** that prevails inside and outside the church is, **"You must achieve to be loved."** In other words, we must be competent in the context of competition—in school, sports, recreation, work, neighborhood, church—to feel of worth and value. As a result, many people struggle with an "achievement addiction." Because so few people do the hard work of going back in order to go forward, the symptoms of a disconnected spirituality are everywhere. The compartmentalization of our spirituality from the rest of our lives becomes necessary because there is so little integration. I know. I lived that way for years.

I Over-functioned

I Over-Performed

I Had Cultural, Not Biblical, Expectations for Marriage and Family

I Resolved Conflict Poorly

I Didn't Let Myself Feel

Yet for the first seventeen years of my discipleship and the profound impact my family history had upon me blocked that truth from penetrating deeply into my experience. The truth is that I did "lose a leg in my childhood." I cannot get that back. Yet because, by God's grace, I have gone back; I can walk. I may walk with a limp, but I am no longer crippled.

CHAPTER 6 - Journey Through the Wall, Letting Go of Power and Control - In addition to purging our will and understanding of the deadly sins mentioned above, God also adds something into our souls. He mysteriously infuses or imparts his love into us. God powerfully invades us when we persevere patiently through this suffering. Our great temptation is to quit or go backwards, **but if we remain still, listening for his voice, God will insert something of himself into our character that will mark the rest of our journey with him. People on the other side of the Wall are freed from judging others.** I like control. He is utterly incomprehensible.

Yes, God is everything revealed in Scripture, but also infinitely more. God is not an object that I can determine, master, possess, or command. And still I try to somehow use my "clear ideas" about God to give me power over him, to somehow possess him. Unconsciously, I make a deal with God that goes something like this: "I obey and keep

my part of the bargain. Now you bless me. Do not allow any serious suffering.” God doesn’t appreciate being demoted to the rank of our personal secretary or assistant. Remember who we are dealing with here: God is immanent (so close) and yet transcendent (so utterly above and far from us). God is knowable, yet he is unknowable. God is inside us and beside us, yet he is wholly different from us. For this reason Augustine wrote, “If you understand, it is not God you understand.” One of the great fruits of the Wall is a childlike, deepened love for mystery. **We can rest more easily and live more freely on the other side of the Wall, knowing that God is in control and worthy of our trust.**

CHAPTER 7 - Enlarge Your Soul Through Grief and Loss, Surrendering to Your Limits - Finally, we lose our wrong ideas about God and the church (thank God!). What makes this so difficult is how much we invested of our lives into a certain way of following Jesus, into certain applications of biblical truths, only to realize much of it was foolishness or perhaps even wrong. We feel betrayed by a church tradition, a leader, or even God Himself. We realize God truly is much larger and more incomprehensible than we thought. It is healthy to not fully experience painful realities when we are that young so that we survive emotionally. **We move from a “Give me, give me and give me” prayer life** to an intimate, loving prayer life characterized by a loving union with God. When we grieve God’s way, we are changed forever.

CHAPTER 8 - Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath, Stopping to Breathe the Air of Eternity - Any sense of rhythm in our daily, weekly, and yearly lives has been swallowed up in the blizzard of our lives. It is the resetting of our entire lives toward a new destination—God. It is an entirely new way of being in the world. When done as a “want to” rather than a “have to,” they offer us a rhythm for our lives that binds us to the living God. Action, then passivity; **striving, then letting go, doing all one can do and then being carried . . .** only in this rhythm is the spirit realized. If we can stop for one day a week, or for mini-Sabbaths each day (the Daily Office), we touch something deep within us as image bearers of God. Our human brain, our bodies, our spirits, and our emotions become wired by God for **the rhythm of work and rest in him**, not so much a turning to God to get something but to be with Someone. The key, remember, is regular remembrance of God, not length.

All these people realized that the stopping for the Daily Office to be with God is the key to creating a continual and easy familiarity with God’s presence the rest of the day. **It is the rhythm of stopping that makes the “practice of the presence of God,”** to use Brother Lawrence’s phrase, a real possibility. Israel lived as slaves in Egypt for over four hundred years. They never had a day off. The longest and most specific of the Ten Commandments is the fourth. As one theologian stated, **“To fail to see the value of simply being with God and ‘doing nothing’ is to miss the heart of Christianity.** Think about it. He gives you over seven weeks (fifty-two days in all) of snow days every year! And if you begin to practice stopping, resting, delighting, and contemplating for one twenty-four-hour period each week, you will soon find your other six days becoming infused with those same qualities. I suspect that has always been God’s plan. Sabbath

by Peter Scazzero

keeping and the Daily Office summon us to **slow down to God's rhythm**. And in doing violence to ourselves, we are unable to love others in and through the love of Christ.

CHAPTER 9 Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult, Learning New Skills to Love Well - **Love is “to reveal the beauty of another person to themselves,”** wrote Jean Vanier. When genuine love is released in a relationship, God's presence is manifest. The separate space between us becomes sacred space. True peacemakers love God, others, and themselves enough to disrupt false peace. Jesus models this for us. Nonetheless, unresolved conflicts are one of the greatest tensions in Christians' lives today. Most of us hate them. We don't know what to do with them. Instead of risking any more broken relationships, we prefer to ignore the difficult issues and settle for a “false peace,” hoping against hope they will somehow go away. They don't. And we all learn, sooner or later, that you can't build Christ's kingdom on lies and pretense. Only the truth will do.

CHAPTER 10 - Go the Next Step to Develop a "Rule of Life," Loving Christ Above All Else” - And in doing so, like Chauntecleer, the very quality of our lives holds the possibility of being transformed into a gift to our families, friends, coworkers, and communities. A Rule of Life, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. Take some time to reflect on the four characteristics of biblical Sabbaths—stop, rest, delight, contemplate. Trust God to run the universe without you. Begin to look at your weeks as preparing for Sabbath! In the same way, **may God give you the courage to faithfully live your unique life in Christ. And may love invade you. It will never fail to teach you what you must do.**