**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY**

**SILENT KILLERS- EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY CHRISTIANITY**

**PASTOR WILLIAM A. LEE, II**

**Let the evil within wicked people come to an end, but make the righteous person secure, O righteous God who examines thoughts and emotions. Psalms 7:9 GW**

God examines thoughts and emotions. That means that God cares about what we really feel and think, not just about what you do. Our daily lives are full of and profoundly emotional. A large study on human emotion in 2015 found that participants experienced at least one emotion 90% of the time, and frequently experienced positive and negative emotions at the same time. What is interesting is that, the researchers didn’t find any gender differences in these results. Men and women in the study experienced a very similar frequency of emotions on a daily basis even though the expression of these emotions was often different. So whether we consider ourselves “emotional” or not, the truth is *everyone* is emotional. The question is, what do you do with your emotions?

 Most of us, in our more honest moments, will admit there are deep layers beneath our day-to-day awareness. As the following illustration shows, only about 10 percent of an iceberg is visible to the eye. This 10 percent represents the visible changes we make that others can see. We are nicer people, more respectful. We attend church and participate regularly. We “clean up our lives” somewhat—from alcohol and drugs to foul language to illicit behavior and beyond. We begin to pray and share Christ with others

 Iceberg Model -What Lies Beneath the Surface



However, what lies beneath the surface of who everyone else knows is often the place where deeper emotional transformation never takes place. It is there that we discover that very, very few of us have emerged out of our families of origin emotionally whole or mature. We in the church believe that the power of Christ could break any curse, which is true, but often we fail to give any thought to how the home we grew up in might still be shaping who we are. While we do believe what Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that when we become a Christian, **old things pass away and all things become new? We need to understand that we still must go back and understand what those old things were in order for them to begin passing away.”**

We all must realize that our families are marked by the consequences of the disobedience of our first parents as described in Genesis 3. Shame, secrets, lies, betrayals, relationship breakdowns, disappointments, and unresolved longings for unconditional love lie beneath the veneer of even the most respectable families. The reality is that often our discipleship and spirituality has not touched a number of deep internal wounds and sin patterns—especially those ugly ones that emerged behind the closed doors of our home during crisis, trials, disagreements, conflicts, and setbacks. Too many Christians find themselves stuck at an immature level of spiritual and emotional development in which their present way of living the Christian life is not transforming the deep places of their lives. The roots of who we are continue unaffected and unmoved. Often our contemporary spiritual models address some of that 90 percent below the surface, but the problem is that a large portion (see the dotted line) remains untouched by Jesus Christ until there is a serious engagement with what we are calling “emotionally healthy spirituality.”

**“Ignoring any aspect of who we are as men and women made in God’s image always results in destructive consequences—in our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves. ”**

The Psalmist in our previous text tells us to examine our emotions which means to inspect something thoroughly. The question then becomes, do we in the church examine our thoughts and emotions or do we have a tendency to ignore, hide, or indulge our feelings? Examining means that we honestly admit our feelings and seek to understand them. Indulging means that we believe your emotions, follow them, and don’t question what’s driving them. Often, the more spiritual or religious we become, the more we want to deny certain emotions because we think we “shouldn’t” feel them. For example, Perhaps I “shouldn’t” feel afraid of what someone thinks of me… but the truth is I *do.* Examining our emotions means dealing with the truth of what’s in our heart, regardless of what we think we “should” or “shouldn’t” feel. God wants us to know and understand what’s really inside us, and our relationship with him won’t be close if we refuse to admit our real thoughts and feelings.

Examining also means being willing to ask yourself *why* you feel what you feel. Examining your emotions means you don’t just dump them on God or people around you, but you ask yourself questions like “Why do I feel this way? What do these feelings reflect about my trust and faith in God?” All of our human emotions can be placed in two categories.

**Positive Emotions**

Several will recognize one of the main Scriptures containing a listing of positive emotions:

**Galatians 5:22-23**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (NIV)**

The verses are situated in a chapter that states those who operate by the flesh (jealousies, outbursts of wrath, murders) would not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:20-21)

**Galatians 5:20-21**

**20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NIV)**

The fruits are what we should have inside that show the Holy Spirit in us, while making life easier for those around us.

**Colossians 3:12-14**

**12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (NIV)**

[Colossians 3:12-14](https://www.biblestudytools.com/nkjv/colossians/passage/?q=colossians+3:12-14) also expounds on the need for Christians to wear tender mercies and meekness every day, forgiving and dealing with others every day and loving everyone as Jesus has done for them.

God also prompts us to have courage in the face of fear, encouraging His faithful follower Joshua to, **”be strong and courageous”** and to not be afraid, for God was with him in whatever situation. Fear is a common feeling that can hold our emotions hostage, which is why fear is discussed several times in biblical text because God wants us to not be afraid when facing dangers, uncertainties, or discouragement. The only fear we should exercise is the fear of God, and fearing life without Him in our lives to love, guide, teach, and forgive us.

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6-7)**

**When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3)**

**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18)**

**Negative Emotions**

The simple truth when it comes to negative emotions is that they are emotions that keep us from enjoying the blessings and love of God. Negative emotions can damper the small miracles God gives us each day and blind us from the true paths of destiny we are on.

As stated earlier, God commanded Joshua to not be afraid because fear is one of the strongest negative emotions we humans can have. Fear can push us to lash out in anger, to cower in a corner, or jump into situations that are not healthy. Moses spoke of this paralyzing fear when he reprimanded the Israelites for being fearful to enter the land God had provided for them, telling them not to be fearful or discouraged because this land was a gift to them from God.

Anger is another emotion that can lead people to make poor decisions that not only hurt themselves but also their loved ones and even strangers. Who could forget how the anger of Balaam pushed him to strike his donkey, who was laying down in respect to an angel of the Lord? Balaam sure got a lesson about his anger when the donkey asked him, verbally, why he struck him and confirmed to Balaam that he had never done anything like this before and always served him faithfully.

Another recognized negative emotion we exhibit at times is worry/anxiety, which could be connected to fear. Jesus teaches us the silliness of worry when He states in Matthew 6:28-30 how flowers and birds don’t worry about their protection or meals, and we shouldn’t worry about our needs being met either.

**Matthew 6:28-33**

**New International Version**

**28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

 Worry demonstrates to God that we doubt His love and provision for us, which only causes more negative emotions to take over our judgment and cloud God’s still, small voice in your life.

 So, in understanding that we are emotional beings with both positive and negative emotions we need to examine how the often faulty way of teaching that takes place in the church has affected our approach to dealing with our emotions. Most of us have been taught that the way to approach life was through fact, faith, and feelings, in that order.

 

As a result, anger, for example, was seen as simply not being important to a Christians walk with God. In fact, it is seen as being dangerous and something that needed to be suppressed. What we have created through this is that most Christians have become either “stuffers” or “inflictors” of their anger.

Stuffers- deny their emotions and stuff them within without dealing with them.

Inflictors- behind closed doors, these people spill out their negative emotions on those closest to them inflicting pain.

Some are both, stuffing it until they finally explode onto others. Classic stuffers find themselves asking God to take away their “bad” feelings and make them more like Christ.” 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.”

Peter Scazzaro in his book Emotionally Healthy Spirituality gives us what he calls the top symptoms indicating if someone is suffering from a bad case of emotionally unhealthy spirituality:

1. Using God to run from God

At times we use Christian activities as an unconscious attempt to escape from pain. There are Christians that are using God to run from God by creating a great deal of “God-activity” and ignore difficult areas in our lives that God wants to change. Some examples:

• When we do God’s work to satisfy us, not him

• When we do things in his name He never asked us to do

• When our prayers are really about God doing our will, not us surrendering to His

• When we demonstrate “Christian behaviors” so significant people think well of us.

• When we use his truth to judge and devalue others

• When we exaggerate our accomplishments for God to subtly compete with others

• When we pronounce, “The Lord told me I should do this” when the truth is, “I think the Lord told me to do this”

• When we use Scripture to justify the sinful parts of our family, culture, and nation instead of evaluating them under the Lordship of Christ.

• When we hide behind God talk, deflecting any spotlight on our inner cracks and becoming defensive about our failures

• When we apply biblical truths selectively when it suits our purposes but avoid situations that would require us to make significant life changes

**Example**: John uses God to validate his strong opinions on issues ranging from the appropriate length of women’s skirts in church to political candidates to gender roles to his inability to negotiate issues with fellow non-Christian managers at work. He does not listen to or check out the innumerable assumptions he makes about others. He quickly jumps to conclusions. His friends, family, and coworkers find him unsafe and condescending. John then goes on to convince himself he is doing God’s work by misapplying selected verses of Scripture. “Of course that person hates me,” he says to himself. “All those who desire to be godly will suffer persecution.” Ultimately, however, he is using God to run from God.”

2. Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear

Many of us Christians believe wholeheartedly that anger, sadness, and fear are sins to be avoided, indicating something is wrong with our spiritual life. Anger is dangerous and unloving toward others. Sadness indicates a lack of faith in the promises of God; depression surely reveals a life outside the will of God! And fear? The Bible is filled with commands to “not be anxious about anything” and “do not fear” (Philippians 4:6 and Isaiah 41:10).

**Isaiah 41:10**

**So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

**Philippians 4:6**

**New International Version**

**6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

So what do we do? We try to inflate ourselves with a false confidence to make those feelings go away. We quote Scripture, pray Scripture, and memorize Scripture—anything to keep ourselves from being overwhelmed by those feelings! However, to feel is to be human and to minimize or deny what we feel is a distortion of what it means to be image bearers of our personal God. We deny our feeling so often that we then become unable to express our emotions and we remain impaired in our ability to love God, others, and ourselves well. Our feelings are also a component of what it means to be made in the image of God. To cut them out of our spirituality is to slice off a part of our humanity.”

3. Dying to the wrong things

**“The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” (Iraneus)**

It is true that Jesus did say,

**“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).**

But when we apply this verse rigidly, without qualification from the rest of Scripture, it leads to the very opposite of what God intends. It results in a narrow, faulty theology that says, **The more miserable you are, the more you suffer, the more God loves you. Disregard your unique personhood; it has no place in God’s kingdom.”**

We are to die to the sinful parts of who we are—such as defensiveness, detachment from others, arrogance, stubbornness, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, a lack of vulnerability—as well as the more obvious sins described for us in Scripture: Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Speak the truth (Exodus 20:13–16 and Ephesians 4:25). We are not called by God to die to the “good” parts of who we are. God never asked us to die to the healthy desires and pleasures of life—to friendships, joy, art, music, beauty, recreation, laughter, and nature. God plants desires in our hearts so we will nurture and water them. Often these desires and passions are invitations from God, gifts from him. Yet somehow we feel guilty unwrapping those presents. God never asks us to annihilate the self. We are not to become “non-persons” when we become Christians. The very opposite is true. God intends our deeper, truer self, which he created, to blossom freely as we follow him. ”

4. Denying the past’s impact on the present

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, whether as a child, teenager, or adult, we are, in the dramatic language of the Bible, born again

**John 3:3**

**3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**

The apostle Paul describes it this way: “The old has gone, the new has come!”

**2 Corinthians 5:17**

**17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:**

The old has gone, the new is here! But we need to understand this does not mean that what our past lives were won’t continue to influence us in different ways. Many Christians think that because we accepted Jesus, our old life is no longer in me. The work of growing in Christ (what theologians call sanctification) does not mean we don’t go back to the past as we press ahead to what God has for us. It actually demands we go back in order to break free from unhealthy and destructive patterns that prevent us from loving ourselves and others as God designed.”

5. Dividing our lives into “secular” and “sacred” compartments

**“Human beings have an uncanny ability to live compartmentalized, double lives.” (Peter Scazzero)**

“Frank attends church and sings about God’s love. On the way home he pronounces the death penalty over another driver. For Frank, Sunday church is for God. Monday to Saturday is for work.

Jane yells at her husband, berating him for his lack of spiritual leadership with the children. He walks away deflated and crushed. She walks away convinced she has fought valiantly in God’s name.

Ken has a disciplined devotional time with God each day before going to work, but then does not think of God’s presence with him all through the day at work or when he returns home to be with his wife and children.

Judith cries during songs about the love and grace of God at her church. But she regularly complains and blames others for the difficulties and trials in her life.”

It is so easy to compartmentalize God to “Christian activities” around church and our spiritual disciplines without thinking of him in our marriages, the disciplining of our children, the spending of our money, our recreation, or even our studying for exams. According to Gallup polls and sociologists, one of the greatest scandals of our day is that “evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered and sexually immoral as the world in general.” The statistics are devastating:

• Church members divorce their spouses as often as their secular neighbors.

• Church members beat their wives as often as their neighbors.

• Church members’ giving patterns indicate they are almost as materialistic as non-Christians.

• White evangelicals are the most likely people to object to neighbors of another race.

• Of the “higher-commitment” evangelicals, 26 percent think premarital sex is acceptable, while 46 percent of “lower-commitment” evangelicals believe it to be okay also.

Ron Sider, in his book The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience, summarizes the level of our compartmentalization: “Whether the issue is marriage and sexuality or money and care for the poor, evangelicals today are living scandalously unbiblical lives. . . . The data suggests that in many crucial areas of life Evangelicals are not living any differently from their unbelieving neighbors. The consequences of this on our witness to Jesus Christ are incalculable, both for ourselves and the world around us. We miss out on the genuine joy of life with Jesus Christ that he promises (John 15:11).

**John 15:11**

**11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**

And the watching world shakes its head, incredulous that we can be so blind we can’t see the large gap between our words and our everyday lives.

6. Doing for God instead of being with God

Being productive and getting things done are high priorities in our Western culture. Praying and enjoying God’s presence for no other reason than to delight in him was a luxury that we could take pleasure in once we get to heaven is the way many Christians have been taught. For now, there was too much to be done. People were lost. The world was in deep trouble and God had entrusted us with the good news of the gospel. We need to realize that work for God that is not nourished by a deep interior life with God will eventually be contaminated by other things such as ego, power, needing approval of and from others, and buying into the wrong ideas of success and the mistaken belief that we can’t fail. When we work for God because of these things, our experience of the gospel often falls off center. We become **“human doings” not “human beings.”** Our experiential sense of worth and validation gradually shifts from God’s unconditional love for us in Christ to our works and performance and the joy of Christ gradually disappears. Our activity for God can only properly flow from a life with God. We cannot give what we do not possess.

**Luke 10:38-42**

**38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”**

7. Spiritualizing Away Conflict

The belief that smoothing over disagreements or “sweeping them under the rug” is to follow Jesus continues to be one of the most destructive myths alive in the church today. For this reason, churches, small groups, ministry teams, denominations, and communities continue to experience the pain of unresolved conflicts. What do you do when faced with the tension and mess of disagreements? Some of us may be guilty of one or more of the following:

• Say one thing to people’s faces and then another behind their backs

• Make promises we have no intention of keeping

• Blame

• Attack

• Give people the silent treatment

• Become sarcastic

• Give in because we are afraid of not being liked

• “Leak” our anger by sending an e-mail containing a not-so-subtle criticism

• Tell only half the truth because we can’t bear to hurt a friend’s feelings

• Say yes when we mean no

• Avoid and withdraw and cut off

• Find an outside person with whom we can share in order to ease our anxiety

Jesus shows us that healthy Christians do not avoid conflict. His life was filled with it! He was in regular conflict with the religious leaders, the crowds, the disciples—even his own family. Out of a desire to bring true peace, Jesus disrupted the false peace all around him. He refused to “spiritualize away” conflict.

**Matthew 18:15-17**

**15 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’[c] 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

8. Covering over brokenness, weakness, and failure

The pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and spiritually “together” hovers over most of us. We feel guilty for not measuring up, for not making the grade. We forget that not one of us is perfect and that we are all sinners. We forget that David, one of God’s most beloved friends, committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. Talk about a scandal! How many of us would not have erased that from the history books forever lest the name of God be disgraced? David did not. Instead he used his absolute power as king to ensure the details of his colossal failure were published in the history books for all future generations! In fact, David wrote a song about his failure to be sung in Israel’s worship services and to be published in their worship manual, the psalms. (Hopefully he asked Bathsheba’s permission first!) David knew

**“the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).”**

9. Living without limits

There are many Christians who carry around guilt for never doing enough. This guilt often leads to discouragement. And this discouragement often leads Christians to disengagement and isolation from “needy people” because they don’t know what else to do. The core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We are not God. We cannot serve everyone in need. We are human. When Paul said,

**“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13)**

The context was that of learning to be content in all circumstances. The strength he received from Christ was not the strength to change, deny, or defy his circumstances; it was the strength to be content in the midst of them, to surrender to God’s loving will for him

**Philippians 4:11-13**

**11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**

Jesus modeled this for us as a human being—fully God yet fully human. He did not heal every sick person in Palestine. He did not raise every dead person. He did not feed all the hungry beggars or set up job development centers for the poor of Jerusalem. He didn’t do it, and we shouldn’t feel we have to. But somehow we do. Why don’t we take appropriate care of ourselves? Why are so many Christians, along with the rest of our culture, frantic, exhausted, overloaded, and hurried? Few Christians make the connection between love of self and love of others. Sadly, many believe that taking care of themselves is a sin, a “psychologizing” of the gospel taken from our self-centered culture. I believed that myself for years. It is true we are called to consider others more important than ourselves

**Philippians 2:3**

**3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,**

We are called to lay down our lives for others

**1 John 3:16**

**16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

But remember, you first need a “self” to lay down. As Parker Palmer said, “Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, “we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.”

10. Judging other people’s spiritual journey

**The monk,” said one of the Desert Fathers, “must die to his neighbor and never judge him at all in any way whatever.” He continued: “If you are occupied with your own faults, you have no time to see those of your neighbor.”**

One of the greatest dangers in Christianity is when it becomes “us versus them.” In Jesus’ day there was the superior “in group” of Pharisees who obeyed God’s commands. And there was the inferior “out group” of sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. Sadly, we often turn our differences into moral superiority or virtues. We judge people for their music (too soft or too loud) and the length of their hair (too short or too long). We judge them for dressing up or dressing down, for the movies they watch and the cars they buy. We create never-ending groups to subtly categorize people:

• “Those artists and musicians. They are so flakey.”

• “Those engineers. They are so cerebral. They’re cold as fish.”

• “Men are idiots. They’re socially infantile.”

• “Women are overly sensitive and emotional.”

• “The rich are self-indulgent and selfish.”

• “The poor are lazy.”

We judge the Presbyterians for being too structured. We judge the Pentecostals for lacking structure. We judge Episcopalians for their candles and their written prayers. We judge Roman Catholics for their view of the Lord’s Supper etc…. We end up eliminating them in our minds, trying to make others like us, abandoning them altogether or falling into a “Who cares?” indifference toward them. In some ways the silence of unconcern can be more deadly than hate. Like Jesus said, unless I first take the log out of my own eye, knowing that I have huge blind spots, I am dangerous. I must see the extensive damage sin has done to every part of who I am—emotion, intellect, body, will, and spirit—before I can attempt to remove the speck from my brother’s eye (Matthew 7:1–5).

**Matthew 7:1-5**

**Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.**