

THE EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LIFE: Who Are You?
Acts 9:1-19 Ogden Dunes Community Church - July 6, 2025
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Do you remember the first time you heard your own voice on a recording? I wouldn't speak for you, but for me that moment was a shock. I listened to the tape, shook my head, and said, "That's not me, is it?"

Others around me nodded "Yes."

"That's you. That's what you sound like. It's not because there is something wrong with the tape recorder."

Hearing yourself, seeing yourself clearly, knowing yourself can be a challenge. And a shock.

Knowing who you are can be the first step in letting God make you into who you might be. Socrates said, "To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom."

A part of my daily devotions includes the reading of an Old Testament text, a New Testament passage, and a Psalm. The psalmists always shock me by their self-awareness. They recognize, they give voice to, their emotions and feelings. The honesty of the psalmists is breath-taking! They are aware, and in their relationship with God they seem to hide nothing.

In Psalm 141, the psalmist knows he is feeling desperate and needy. He is on the verge of being overwhelmed. And one of the great dangers in his life is his tendency to sell out and live like the crowd...the sinners around him. Not only does he ask God to help take away his lust for evil things, but then he also sees his strange tendency to self-righteousness. The psalmist is in constant prayer *against* the wicked, those who have lost their way, and yet he can tell he is about to fall into temptation's traps.

A few psalms later, in Psalm 147, the psalmist is full of foot-stomping, hallelujah-producing joy because of God's continuing work to rebuild the wrecked city of Jerusalem. Every cell of the psalmist vibrates with joy, with faith, with gladness, at this God who is faithful, who heals the broken-hearted, "binding up the wounds" of those broken by life and circumstance.

Praise fills him. He even sings a song of praise for the God "who sends the snow in all its lovely whiteness, and scatters the frost upon the ground." This God refuses to be hidden, but has revealed his heart by giving the people laws as a guide to life. Praise, praise, praise!

In Psalm 7, the psalmist is angry. He is angry at those who persecute him and make his life difficult, even dragging him away after beating him. In his anger, he demands that God get angry and "end all wickedness." The psalmist is filled with a desire to get God strike back at those who are evil and violent. In this moment, it is not praise and gladness that fill the psalmist but anger...and a desire for divine action...divine vengeance.

We are in the second week of a series of messages on *The Emotionally Healthy Life*. Two weeks ago we talked about looking beneath the surface.

We talked about being aware of what is going on in us.

We explored what it might mean to live with curiosity about what God is up to in us. Because our feelings can be a sign that God is at work wanting us to see something or do something or be something.

In fact, we said two weeks ago that when Jesus calls us to follow, Jesus wants us to bring all of who we are. Jesus wants us to bring our feelings, our emotions, as well as our thoughts and our bodies and soul faith.

And we were reminded we don't need to be afraid of discovering we are unfinished or broken or imperfect because God's love for us never lets go of us. There is nothing we can discover about who we are that will make God walk away from us.

Knowing who you are can be the first step in letting God make you into who you might be.

A major part of the job description for infants and toddlers is to gain a sense of their own identity. They are all about discovering themselves. It's kind of cool to watch. You can listen as an infant suddenly finds his or her own voice. Making noise is one way a toddler or infant has of telling the world, "This is me. I am here."

You can watch babies put their hands together. They look a little surprised when that happens. They touch their hands together and you can tell they're thinking, "Oh, that's me!" Then, they reach out and touch the floor or the hard surface of the kitchen table or the side of the bathtub, and they think, "Oh, that's not me." They learn the world is divided into "me" and "not me."

Then, they get a little older. And they discover what they like and what they don't like. One of my granddaughters didn't like peas. I don't know why she didn't like peas but she didn't. She just couldn't handle eating them. She would put a spoonful of peas in her mouth and then sit there. You could walk away and come back fifteen minutes later. Ella would still have the same mouthful of peas. Sitting in there. Like she was going to get credit for time served. She knows she doesn't like peas. And she knew she liked to dance to the music on the tv show *Glee*. She didn't like peas, but Ella -at a very young age- would sit in the backseat of the car as we drove down the road, saying, "I like Lady Gaga!"

She was getting to know who she was...and is. Finding her voice.

Some of us never really did the work of discovering who we are. Some of us live with a stranger, and the stranger we live with is us.

One of my friends was a super successful man, very bright and moral (in some ways), but he needed to be in control. All the time. He needed to be in control. And he couldn't see that. He didn't know this about himself, and what he didn't know caused great harm...to himself and others.

The family business included a son and a son in law in senior management positions. So the man had grandkids all over the place. Close by.

Then, one day, I received an email from the steel man's son. He was telling all of us he had relocated to Texas. He said it was such a relief to get out of the family business and all the drama. Now, far away, he could breathe. The young executive sent this letter to his pastor, his business partners, his friends, and his father.

My friend ran off his wife.

He ran off his son and his wife and children.

He ran off his son-in-law and his wife and children.
And he ran me off.

My friend is like the guy driving the big, black SUV who pulled into a spot outside the Bloomington Bagel Company on College Mall Road one morning. He swung his big rig into an opening parking spot, and I saw the four-door Camry next to the black SUV rock for a moment. Sitting there, working on a sermon, I thought the guy in the big SUV had hit the Toyota. I walked out and looked at the right front side of the SUV and there was a big smear of white paint on the SUV bumper.

"Excuse me," I said to the man getting out of the SUV, "I think you hit that Camry when you pulled in just now."

"No, I didn't," the man said as he turned to walk away.

"I think you did," I said. "You hit it hard enough that the car rocked and you have a paint smear on the front right side of your bumper."

The man growled at me. Swore at me. Shrugged it off.

The driver of the SUV started to leave his business card under the windshield wiper on the Camry. "Please don't do that," I said. "Why don't you step in one of these shops and see if you can find the driver of the car you hit?" So he did.

He had no clue. He was just driving, wheeling and dealing in his big set of wheels, and he didn't know he was hitting people.

Do you know who you are?

How can we follow Jesus, how can we step into the abundant life Jesus intends for us, if we live blind to who we are and what is going on inside us?

Peter Scarzerro, in his *The Emotionally Healthy Church Workbook* (pg. 37), lists -from his own experience- some signs that there are cracks in our emotional life. He speaks out of his experience as a leader and a pastor. Pastor Scarzerro put together something a list he calls *Spotting Cracks in Your Emotional Life*:

- Serving others is becoming a chore, a duty, a burden, instead of a joy.
- Seeing people as obstacles rather than as gifts.
- Always feeling overextended and overworked.
- Constantly serving, doing, and giving with very little receiving, enjoy and relaxing.
- Feeling guilty about taking time off and having personal recreation.
- Putting out fire after never-ending fire - a crisis-to-crisis lifestyle.
- Lacking flexibility and hours to fulfill recreational commitments and promises.
- A spouse who is lonely or depressed.
- An inability to leave work unfinished to make room for quality time with loved ones.
- Denial of a problem.
- Touchiness or defensiveness at the suggestion that something might be wrong.
- Feeling resentful, depressed or angry.

- Feeling isolated from people and disappointed.
- Inability to let people honestly know what I am feeling.

Do you know who you are?

Knowing who you are can be the first step in letting God make you into who you might be.

One of the things I learned from Scazzerro, which was helpful, was his description of the major “emotional ages.” The truth, you know, is that we can be highly educated, supremely capable in our work, and have lived forty or fifty or sixty years, and still be an emotional infant or child.

Here are the “emotional ages,” as he describes them.

Let me share with you his description of ***Emotional Infants***: ***Like a physical infant, I look for other people to take care of me more than I care for them. I often have difficulty in describing and experiencing my feelings in healthy ways and rarely enter the emotional world of others. I am consistently driven by a need for instant gratification, often using others as objects to meet my needs, and I’m unaware of how my behavior is affecting/hurting them. People sometimes perceive me as inconsiderate, insensitive and self-centered.***

His summary of ***Emotional Children*** is as follows: ***Like a physical child, when life is going my way and I am receiving all the things I want and need, I am content and seem emotionally well-adjusted. However, as soon as disappointment, stress, tragedy or anger enter the picture, I quickly unravel inside. I interpret disagreements as a personal offense and I’m easily hurt by others. When I don’t get my way, I often complain, throw an emotional tantrum, withdraw, manipulate, drag my feet, become sarcastic, or take revenge. I have difficulty calmly discussing with others what I want and expect from them in a mature, loving way.***

What do ***Emotional Adults*** look like? ***I can respect and love others without having to change them or becoming critical and judgmental. I don’t expect others to be perfect in meeting my relational needs, whether it be my spouse, parents, friends, boss, or pastor. I love and appreciate people for who they are as individuals, the good and the bad, and not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. When under stress, I don’t fall into a victim mentality or a blame game. I can state my own beliefs and values to those who disagree with me, without becoming adversarial.***

I am able to accurately assess my limits, strengths and weaknesses, and freely discuss them with others. Deeply in tune with my own emotions and feelings, I can move into the emotional world of others, meeting them at the place of their feelings, needs, and concerns. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ, that I have nothing to prove.

The 9th chapter of Acts tells us about one of the most dramatic stories in the New Testament. You might want to open your Bible to Acts 9:1-16. What you'll find there is an account of how the living Christ caught up with one person. It is about one person who, with the help of God, came face to face with who he was...who he really was...and who he might be.

Saul was raised as an observant, faithful, thinking Jew. He grew up to be a man with extraordinary leadership abilities, a well developed intellect, an amazing way with words, a profound appreciation for the traditions and rituals of his people, and a deep love for God's holiness...God's way.

When the new faith people called "the way" or Christianity spread around the Mediterranean, Saul noticed. The stories about Jesus seemed like outrageous lies. And there was this persistent rumor that Jesus, after being put to death, had been seen walking around. Teaching. *Eating meals with his friends!*

There are times when we are so convinced we are right that we end up doing enormous damage. Saul began to lead teams of Jewish police into the homes of Christians. He and his teams would arrest men, women and children and put them in prison. Sometimes when you think you are right, sometimes when you think God is on your side, sometimes when you and your beliefs feel threatened, you end up doing things you never thought you'd do.

Saul started out, I'm sure, motivated by his love for God. A passion for truth. But he ended up becoming a judgmental, angry, bitter, violent bully.

On his way to the city of Damascus to arrest more Christians, Saul is stopped in his tracks. Suddenly, the sky around him lights up. We don't know what happened exactly but Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice say, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*"

Saul asks the question every one of us must finally ask of Jesus, "*Who are you?*"

"*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,*" the voice replies. "*Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.*"

There are moments when you see who you are and what you have become with absolute clarity. Sometimes those moments are so shocking you shut down. You see who you have become and you can't handle it. You can't process it.

The Bible tells us Saul stands there speechless. The man who always had a way with words didn't know what to say. The man who was sure he saw things with perfect clarity can't see a thing. The Bible says Saul's ears are open but he sees nothing. When you come face with face with who you have become, and the damage you have done, your eyes stop working in the old way. You have to learn to see the world with new eyes...in new ways.

The writer of Acts tells us Saul didn't eat or drink anything for three days. His eyes didn't work for three days.

Which is the Bible's way of telling us this is a resurrection story.

The old Saul dies out there on the road to Damascus. The old way of thinking and seeing and speaking and doing, the old way of seeing others and God, the old way of dealing with his anger, the old way of letting the need to be right shove grace and love to the sidelines, all die out there on the road to Damascus.

On the road to Damascus the living Christ shows up and helps Saul see who he was, who he had become, and who he might be.

What happens out there on the road is so profound, so radical, that Saul ends up getting a new name. Which is what happens in the Bible when God turns your around: you often end up with a new name.

Do you know who you are? Have you taken the time, and done the hard work, to look inside?

I can tell you that, after all these years, I am still learning who I am. The good I work to claim, to celebrate, and the bad -or broken- I want to face with courage, asking Jesus to help me.

To see who we are, to know who we are, is a powerful thing.

It can free us to claim, to rejoice in, the good that is in us. I have known people who had beautiful voices, but they never knew that or claimed it. You know how it is: you hear them singing in church, and you tell them, "You have a beautiful voice." They are shocked. Sometimes, they stagger back. They have a voice, but they have lived all their life shrugging off that part of who they are. We had to help them see it. I have known people who were healers, and they were always dismissing their gifts in that department. We had to help them see their healing gifts. I have known people who were prophets, who had uncommon courage when it came to lifting up issues of injustice and racism and corruption. We had to help them see the courage and holy boldness residing in their own heart and soul. They missed it.

To know who you are is to celebrate, to claim, to engage your gifts.

To know yourself is also to see the shadow side of who you are. If we don't see it, then the shadow side can end up running our lives, wrecking our relationship with God, and wounding those we love. Like my friend who always had to be in control. We can't become a new creation in Christ, if we don't see -and face- our weak places, our shadow side, our greed or shame or anger or arrogance.

Finally, to know ourselves, and bring that person to God in honesty and vulnerability, allows God to do good work in us. We may be made up of broken pieces of glass, but when we finally admit that then we can allow God to put those pieces together in a way that brings love, hope, justice, and beauty into the world. Maybe that is what is happening as we bring ourselves to this table: we come here and the living Christ gives us a new name as we -like Paul- see with new eyes and live with a new heart.