

THE 8 TOP 8

SIGNS OF AN EMOTIONALLY UNHEALTHY CHRISTIAN

BY PETE SCAZZERO



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Preaching

The Top Eight Signs of an Emotionally Unhealthy Christian

This article is excerpted from Emotionally Healthy Spirituality by Pete Scazzero.

For more information about Pete and Emotionally Healthy Discipleship go to www.emotionallyhealthy.org or follow him on Facebook or Twitter @petescazzero

A number of years ago I had to face the fact that I would never grow spiritually beyond my level of health emotionally. I had many unhealthy patterns of thought and behavior that had dug ruts in my soul, and they were wreaking havoc in my personal life and in the church I was leading.

The reality was that my discipleship and spirituality had not touched a number of deep internal wounds and sin patterns. I was stuck at an immature level of spiritual and emotional development. And my way of living the Christian life was not transforming the deep places in my life.

In short order, here are the top eight signs that I was an emotionally unhealthy Christian:

I. USING GOD TO RUN FROM GOD



I tended to create a great deal of “God-activity” in order to avoid difficult areas in my life God wants to change. I know I’m in trouble when I ...

- Pray about God doing my will, not about me surrendering to his will
- Demonstrate “Christian behaviors” so significant people think well of me
 - Use biblical truth to judge and devalue others
 - Make pronouncements like, “The Lord told me I should do this,” when the truth is, “I think the Lord told me to do this”
 - Use Scripture to justify my sinful patterns instead of evaluating them under God’s lordship

2.

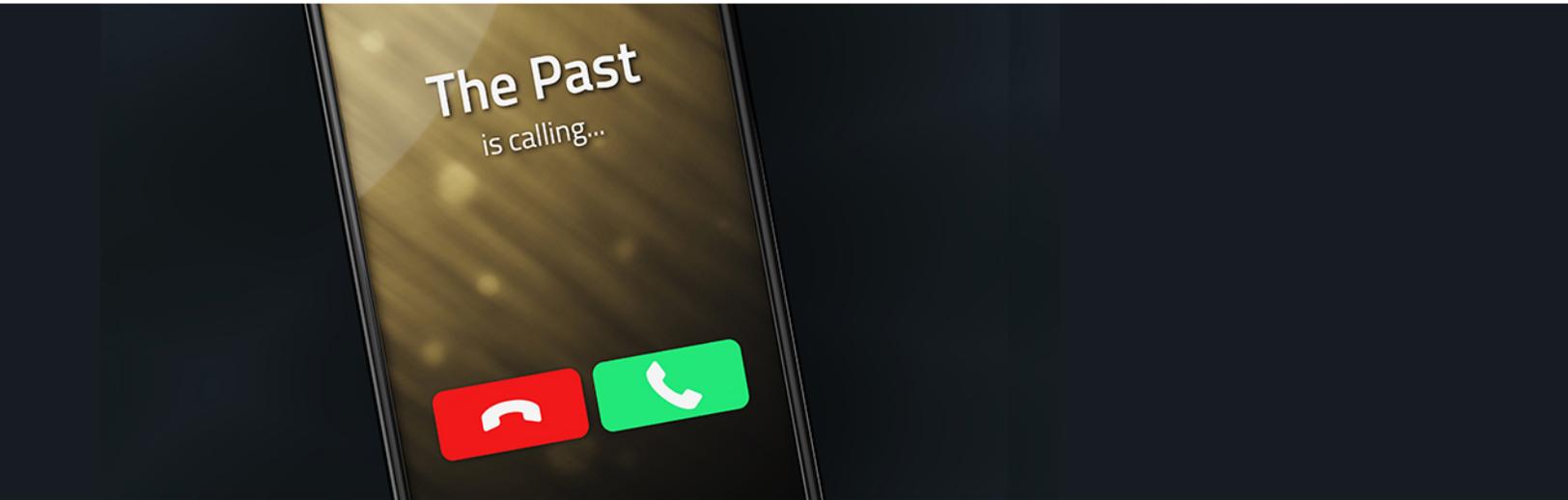
IGNORING ANGER, SADNESS, AND FEAR



Like most Christians, I was taught that almost all feelings are unreliable and not to be trusted. It is true that some Christians follow their feelings in an unhealthy, unbiblical way. It is more common, however, to encounter Christians who do not believe they have permission to admit their feelings or express them openly. This applies especially to such “difficult” feelings as fear, sadness, shame, anger, hurt, and pain. And yet, how can we listen to what God is saying and evaluate what is going on inside when we cut ourselves off from our emotions?

3.

DENYING THE IMPACT OF THE PAST ON THE PRESENT



For years, I was under the delusion that because I accepted Jesus, my old life was no longer in me. My past before Christ was painful. I wanted to forget it. I never wanted to look back. Life was so much better now that Jesus was with me. I thought I was free.

But I will never forget the first time we made a genogram—a diagram outlining some of the patterns of our families. It revealed that our marriage bore a striking resemblance to that of our parents'. Even though we had been committed Christians for almost twenty years, our ways of relating mirrored much more our family of origin than the way God intended for his new family in Christ.

The work of growing in Christ 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.

4.

DOING FOR GOD INSTEAD OF BEING WITH GOD



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 from others, and buying into the wrong ideas of success and the mistaken belief that we can't fail. 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. Our activity for God can only properly flow from a life with God.

5.

SPIRITUALIZING AWAY CONFLICT



Perhaps one of the most destructive myths alive in the Christian community today is the belief that smoothing over disagreements or “sweeping them under the rug” is part of what it means to follow Jesus. 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 conflict avoidance.

6.

COVERING OVER BROKENNESS, WEAKNESS, & 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.

The Bible does not spin the flaws and weaknesses of its heroes. Moses was a murderer. Hosea’s wife was a prostitute. Peter rebuked God! Noah got drunk. Jonah was a racist. Jacob was a liar. John Mark deserted Paul. Elijah burned out. Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. Thomas doubted. Moses had a temper. Timothy had ulcers. And all these people send the same message: that every human being on earth, regardless of their gifts and strengths, is weak, vulnerable, and dependent on God and others.

7.

LIVING WITHOUT LIMITS

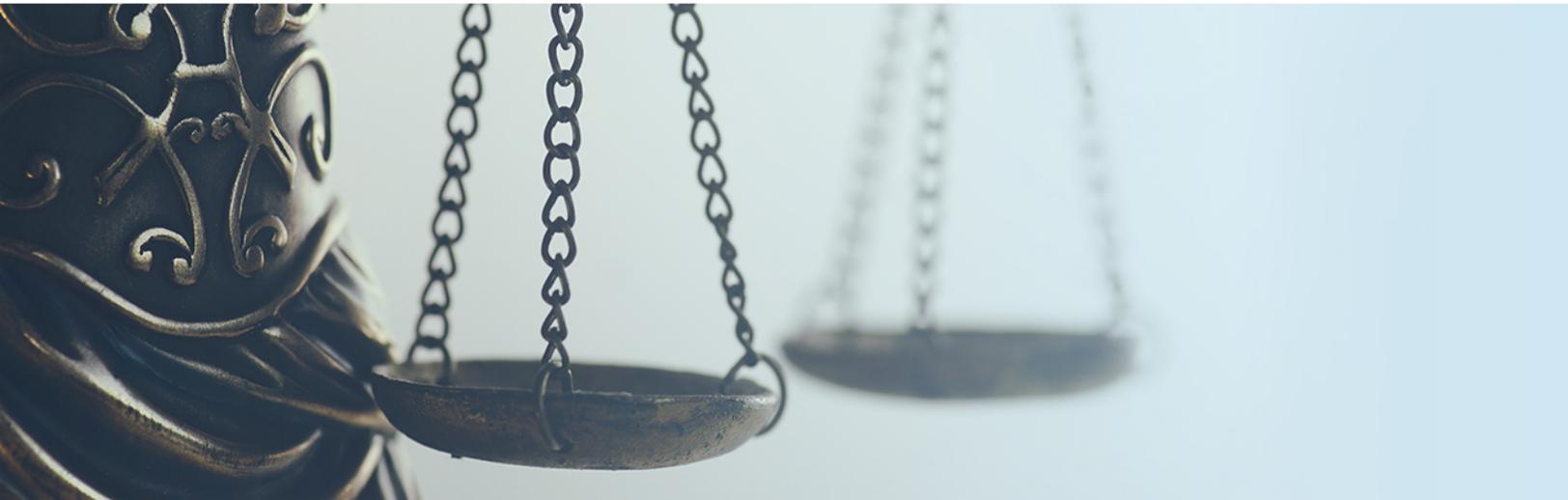


I was taught that good Christians constantly give and tend to the needs of others. I wasn't supposed to say no to requests for help because that would be selfish. The core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We are not God. We cannot serve everyone in need.

Why don't we take appropriate care of ourselves? Why are so many Christians, frantic, exhausted, overloaded, and hurried? Few Christians make the connection between love of self and love of others. 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."

8.

JUDGING OTHER PEOPLE'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



This has always been one of the greatest dangers in Christianity. Sadly, we often turn our differences into moral superiority or virtues. By failing to let others be themselves before God and move at their own pace, we inevitably project onto them our own discomfort with their choice to live life differently than we do. 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 the eye of another (Matthew 7:1–5).

God, as I look over this list, the only thing I can say is, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Thank you that I stand before you in the righteousness of Jesus, in his perfect record and performance, not my own.

I ask that you would not simply heal the symptoms of what is not right in my life, but that you would surgically remove all that is in me that does not belong to you. As I think about what I have read, Lord, pour light over the things that are hidden. May I see clearly as you hold me tenderly.

In Jesus’ name, amen.