

SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT: SPIRITUAL HEALTH -

by Lori Quick

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I grew up with the story of Madeline, a picture book and animated TV show that I watched with my sister growing up and there is a repeated phrase that has stuck with me that has echoed over the past year or so. “Something is not right”. My physical symptoms point to this, something is not right. It has taken time to unwrap, dig up and sort through what exactly it is that isn’t right. It is an archaeological dig, there are layers upon layers to sort through and identify. And because of it’s very nature it is deep, hard, muddy, painful work that takes a lot of time. This is not exhaustive, but I have tried to point out a few things that I hope will better explain what I’ve been trying so hard to articulate.

Some of the Symptoms of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality, I borrowed the following list from *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero http://www.willowcreek.com/free/download/EHS_chapter2.pdf

THE TOP TEN SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONALLY UNHEALTHY SPIRITUALITY (Chapter 2)

1. Using God to run from God
2. Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear
3. Dying to the wrong things
4. Denying the past’s impact on the present
5. Dividing our lives into “secular” and “sacred” compartments
6. Doing for God instead of being with God
7. Spiritualizing away conflict
8. Covering over brokenness, weakness, and failure
9. Living without limits
10. Judging other people’s spiritual journey



This next excerpt illustrates what I view as a very core issue that has been one of my largest concerns related to spiritual and soul health that has been in place since 2012.

Part 3. Dying to the wrong things:

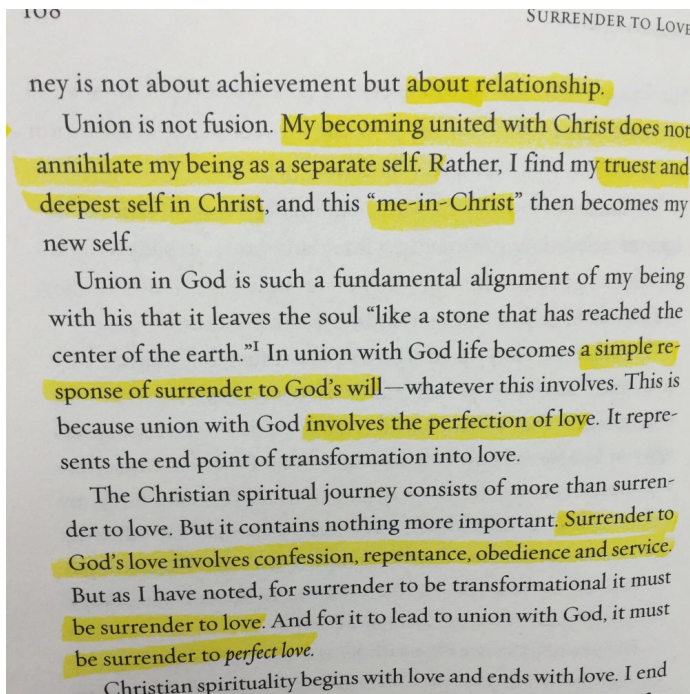
As Iraneus said many centuries ago, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” True, Jesus did say, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). But when we apply this verse rigidly, without qualification from the rest of Scripture, 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 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. When I ask people, “Tell me about your wishes, hopes, and dreams,” they are often speechless.*

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 (see Exodus 20:13–16 and Ephesians 4:25).

“Why do you ask?” they respond. “Isn’t my only wish, hope, and dream supposed to be to serve Jesus?”

*Not exactly. **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. God has endowed each of us with certain essential qualities that reflect and express him in a unique way. Part of the sanctification process of the Holy Spirit is to strip away the false constructs we have accumulated and **enable our true selves to emerge.***



It wasn't until I read David G. Benner's book, *Surrender to Love* that he makes this statement, echoing that previous paragraph. I had been led to believe that *dying to self* involved annihilating the self, totally losing who I was. I was caught in a confusion of this tension that I was somehow inadequate, insufficient, not good enough, not vulnerable enough, and feeling guilty for resisting this tension, and yet deep down I knew there was something about it that wasn't right. And because of the topics and conversations I was having were so much about this “self” and self-awareness and growth it was getting confusing until I saw it here and breathed a sigh of relief. Because I believe this to be true of God's intention for me. Not to shape me into some unrecognizable whisp of a person.

“My becoming united with Christ does not annihilate my being as a separate self. Rather, I find my truest and deepest self in Christ, and this “me-in-Christ” then becomes my new self.”

~David G. Benner

I've also heard it put this way, by Kris Vallotton, to surround yourself with those who pour gasoline on your flame, instead of water. Well, it's felt like I've been drowning and damp and my little flame is not doing so well. I

knew my soul was not well and this became a concern for me, and I've dug in and done some deep work to remedy this. "A healthy soul is an integrated soul," John Ortberg defines it in *Soul Keeping*, and it is a holistic thing - mind+body+spirit+emotions+will.

Symptoms / Effects of Spiritual Abuse:

<http://www.soulation.org/freetatlast/2014/08/the-ugly-effects-of-spiritual-abuse.html>

Some Symptoms I have experienced at one point or another (taken from this list, linked here^)

- **Religion becomes a trap, suffocating, shame**
- **The repeated message of die to yourself or take up your cross was sucking the life out of me that I had left.**

My body is breaking down.

- **I'm anxious**
- **I'm burned out, exhausted.**
- **I have anxiety attacks.**
- **I have physical digestive issues, occasionally, sporadic.**
- **My ears trigger anxiety in certain settings.**

My soul is dead

- **My conscience is shut down from over stimulation**
- **I am owned by the pastoral leadership.**
- **I have no friends outside of our bubble.**
- **I am always angry.**
- **I'm cynical.**

I live with perpetual doubt in myself.

- **should this make me guilty?**
- **Do other people feel this ashamed?**
- **How can I expect to ever be good enough?**
- **I cannot decide.**
- **I never stand up for myself.**
- **I cannot hear my own voice anymore.**

Scripture & Spiritual Abuse, the following excerpt is from *Healing Spiritual Abuse and Religious Addiction* by Matthew Linn, Sheila Linn, Dennis Linn.

Scripture is still often interpreted in ways that are abusive to women. For example, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lk 9:23) is often used to support the idea that our greatest sin is a prideful refusal to surrender ourselves. However, as Ann Ulanov points out, "for a woman sin is not pride, the exaltation of self, but a refusal to claim the self God has given."³ Developmentally, if a woman (or a man) has not yet been affirmed in her right to claim and assert herself, she should not be pressured to deny the self she does not yet possess. In our culture women are taught to be codependent, i.e., to deny their reality and their needs, and scripture has often been used to reinforce this.

Besides cultural blinders, we have blinders that come from Church doctrine. Two of us (Dennis and Matt) grew up in a Vatican I Church where we never questioned institutional authority. Even today, when someone asks us what the Church thinks about a given issue, we are likely to respond with what the Pope or hierarchy think. That's because, as Matthew 16 says, we are to submit to Peter's successors who have the "power of the keys."

And I tell you, you are *Peter*, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you (singular) the keys of the kingdom of heaven

Other Related Sources:

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality by Peter Scazzero

Soulation.org, Dale Fincher and Jonalyn Fincher, Freedom Builders:

- <http://soulation.org/freedombuilders/community/>
- <http://www.soulation.org/freetatlast/2013/02/what-is-spiritual-abuse.html>
- <http://www.soulation.org/freetatlast/2015/08/10-biblical-beliefs-that-poison-christians.html>
- <http://www.soulation.org/freetatlast/2014/06/six-rules-for-talking-to-spiritual-abuse-survivors.html>
- <http://www.soulation.org/freetatlast/2015/04/22-ways-to-appear-spiritually-mature.html>

Dr. Caroline Leaf on the Brain, Soul, and Body Connection and Mental Health.

<http://drleaf.com/about/the-perfect-you/>

“We are thinking beings made in the image of a thinking God, Who is perfect and Who is Love. But we have to think and choose to follow God and His way of thinking. This is free will. Einstein so accurately once said: “I want to know God’s thoughts, the rest are details.”

In the midst of confusion about what to think, I began to feel like I didn’t have free will; forced to choose the ways that were presented to me as advice, wisdom, suggestion, and warning. They were presented in a cautionary way, *if you do x, then y*. I was made to feel guilty for trusting my gut or intuition, or my own personal relationship with the Lord. The tension became a mental turmoil wrestling match, who would I listen to, my God or my pastor? For most if not all conversations, they were not moral decisions. They were practical real life, work, finance, relational, friendships, relationship interests, roommates, and also personal spiritual and church related. The hardest issues were some of the following:

November 2, 2012 - I initiated a conversation with Nathan, handing him my diploma as I told him I thought I was supposed to give it to him, but I had no other details: I only heard one word, diploma. In the conversation that followed I was accused of pride, arrogance and entitlement and that those things disqualified me from leading worship. These were all very new things that had never been brought to my attention before, and I was stunned. I was not given time to “test these things” or spend time praying about these ideas. I was just raw and attentive and very likely co-dependent.

(Most of the feedback I received in college from my music teachers was about being more confident, so this didn’t make a lot of sense to me. I didn’t really understand what that meant, and was not given examples of times when I may have displayed those areas, pride, arrogance and entitlement).

He told me to be grateful that God hadn’t taken away my voice. (As if God was trying to punish me?)

This conversation ended with writing a letter of repentance that was taped on the back of my diploma, I was to repent for any hopes of any ambitions or dreams relating to music, and while I still hoped to write songs, I was very much wounded and many interactions with music became like those with an ex-relationship, wounded, broken hearted, empty. I knew something was wrong, I felt like an empty carcass. I had given up the one dream that I believed God had planted inside my very soul, my very being, my purpose; gone.

My concern about this continued to grow with each passing year. I still felt lifeless, where was I supposed to find life again? I began intentionally pursuing and pouring into my soul with soul nourishing practices, self care, soul care, and practicing the examen: identifying those things, activities, practices and encounters that are life-giving and what was life-taking. It became more and more obvious that music was very life-giving, and I could no longer accept that music was not to be a part of my life, of healing and of a life-giving, piece of my soul, a passion I couldn't help but get excited about. And the very place I hoped I could re-engage with that was denied. There was no room for my gift, so I reasoned, this is not the place for me. For, how could I stay in a place that encouraged death, and not life-giving. How could I just shut off my God-instilled-purpose for, born for such a time as this - how could I just put a lid on it and not expect it to explode, one way or another.

*Many serious conversations with Nathan ended or included a lot of tears. (this is what I mean when I say emotionally vulnerable.)

*The authority level and words like obedience and submission and die to self, over and over and over again. I was vulnerable to this language, susceptible to be shamed into doing what I was told to do, the best, wisest, sometimes most pragmatic, practical option, whether it was work or financial advice. The trouble with advice, is I was made to feel terrible if I didn't choose or agree with their / his advice. That's not freedom. That's manipulation.

Somewhere along the line I came to believe that my pastor was infallible. He heard God and spoke for God so who was I to hear differently? Right? Because of the system and structure of power and authority that was established, I had very little space or voice or courage to speak up and question, or at least disagree, or take more time to discern if God was indeed asking me to give up on my dreams of music ministry in the church, specifically worship ministry as a vocation. (Dreams that I believed with all my being that God had planted). There was no dignity in that. Humility was explained as something that was humiliating, except, the missing piece of humility, of giving dignity and voice in order to empower me to be all that God had created me to be, had all been stripped away from me, in the name of needing humility and being prideful, arrogant and entitled. (which were only words, and not explained or examples given.) I was made to feel / believe that I was not gifted the way I thought I had been, and had invested much of my life to that direction, and was made to feel and believe that I was less than. And so I became very small, lifeless, anxious, and lost without a purpose, without a passion, and without a reason to live really.

I don't know what place music or church music or music and worship will look for me in the future, but to be told matter of fact that there was no place for me to nurture that gift or offering at my church home was very defeating. I truly believed for a large part of my life that it was my calling. A way of bringing hope and healing to others. A way of bringing healing through prayer via music and worship. A way of coming alongside others by equipping them with good theology to sing. A way of reaching people in a way only music can.

I don't believe music is limited to the church by any means, but it was the music I loved the most, and felt most called to. In fact I have very strong opinions on good art outside the church as well as inside, and will talk your ear off about that very subject and how I see these artists navigating that in unique ways: Brooke Fraser, Gungor, Sara Groves, Johnnyswim, Hillsong United, Natasha Bedingfield, Tori Kelly, Andrew Peterson, Andrew Belle, Jon Foreman, Joy Williams, Kari Jobe, and Cindy Morgan just to name a few.