



Doing Life Well – The Life of Saul

Date: Sunday 7th January 2018

Speakers: Andrew & Rosie McNeil

Key Verses: 1 Samuel 15, Psalm 23, Luke 10:27

Summary

- The pressures of life in 21st Century are intense. The reality is that emotional demands and stresses are ever present. So the ability to read regulate and renew our lives in the presence of God is crucial if we are to thrive - to do life well.
- We all know that we are made up of many different parts which all work together to make us who we are. To love and follow God encompasses all of us (Luke 10:27) so emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It's not possible to be spiritually mature whilst remaining emotionally immature. Emotional health (our ability to be self-aware and love well) combined with contemplative spirituality (slowing down to cultivate our relationship with Jesus), can be catalyst for real change in our lives.
- We are made in God's image and that image includes many dimensions. God thinks, you think. God wills, you will, God feels, you feel. Jesus demonstrated anger, love, compassion, joy, and sadness. We too have been created with the gift of being able to feel and experience emotions. Our emotional life includes our attitudes and responses. It impacts our ability to love, show empathy and compassion, to face our fears and live with courage. So the call to discipleship includes experiencing our feelings, reflecting on them and thoughtfully responding to those feelings under the lordship of Jesus.

What might emotionally unhealthy spirituality look like?

1. **Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness and fear because I think they are ungodly:** Some Christians believe that anger, sadness, and fear are things to be avoided and that if we feel them then something is wrong with our spiritual life. We can miss many ways God is actually speaking and drawing close to us and we miss moments that He wants to encounter us and restore us.
 2. **Denying the past's impact on the present:** Maturing in Christ actually requires that we go back in order for us to go forward to what God has for us! We often we have inherited patterns of responding and coping that have not been reflected upon.
 3. **Doing for God instead of being with God:** I can immerse myself in "God-activity" and ignore difficult areas in my life that God wants to change. Our activity for God can only properly flow from a life with God.
 4. **Hiding our weakness:** The pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and "together" hovers over most of us. This can leave us in fear of being real, or worse still isolated and trying to cope alone not letting God, or people, in to help...
 5. **Living without limits:** A life without limits forgets that God is God. If we neglect rest, renewal and Sabbath it has significant consequences for our emotional physical and mental wellbeing.
 6. **Avoiding conflict:** Nobody likes conflict. Yet conflict is an inevitable part of relationships. We smooth it over, "we can sweep it under the rug," we pray it goes away or we avoid people or situations that could be moments for growth.
- The story of Saul in 1 Sam 15: On the surface Saul looks like he is serving God, doing well. He's an impressive leader, successful in battle, listening to prophetic words, doing some of God's will. But beneath the surface, he craves approval (v30 and v12), He's insecure and threatened by other people's gifting and popularity and he's unaware of his own fears (v.24). He misrepresents the truth (v13) and is quick to make excuses (v15) and avoids responsibility. The harsh reality is he is unaware of his interior life, not really paying attention to God. He's not listening to or following God and that's his biggest omission (v22).
 - We can live one appearance above the surface but another whole reality exists underneath, whether we're aware of it or not.
 - We're invited to get to know ourselves so we might Get to know God. In AD 500, Augustine wrote in his Confessions, "How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?"
 - Our emotions have a purpose. They get our attention. Spiritual formation includes experiencing our feelings, reflecting on them in God's presence, and then thoughtfully responding to our feelings under the lordship of Jesus, acknowledging them as a way that God can communicate with us. If we neglect our most intense emotions, we are not being true to ourselves and we shut a door through which we can encounter God. Emotionally healthy spirituality is the ability to read, regulate and renew our emotions in the presence of God (Psalm 23).

Questions for Small Groups

- "We change our behaviour when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change." Dr Henry Cloud - 'Changes That Heal'. Have you ever known that to be true in your own life?
- Saul was externally impressive but under the surface much was unhealthy. His insecurity, the need for approval, his rationalising of problems and blame shifting all had big consequences for his life and leadership. Do you find it hard to read what is going on underneath the surface in your own life? What might help you gain more insight?

- Of the 6 things mentioned (about emotionally unhealthy spirituality) do any catch your attention?
 - Ignoring certain emotions (like anger, sadness and fear)
 - Denying the past's impact on the present
 - Doing for God instead of being with God
 - Hiding our weakness
 - Living without limits
 - Avoiding conflict
- Silence and solitude. What has been your experience of those practices? What's the most challenging thing about being silent or being alone?

Resources for Reflection

- [Use this guide to try out the daily examen for yourself](#)
- [In this short youtube video Dan Wilt explains the daily examen in 5 steps](#)
- [To get a feel for one of the emotionally healthy spirituality PDF](#)

Questions for Personal Reflection

At the end of Sundays talk Andrew & Rosie extended an invitation to:

- Commit to the journey of discipleship with Jesus that integrates emotionally healthy spirituality.
- Slow down to make space to listen to God.
- Give Jesus access to your own "iceberg".

What steps might I take to respond to that invitation?