

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

Moving *from* Shallow Christianity
to Deep Transformation



Peter Scazzero

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

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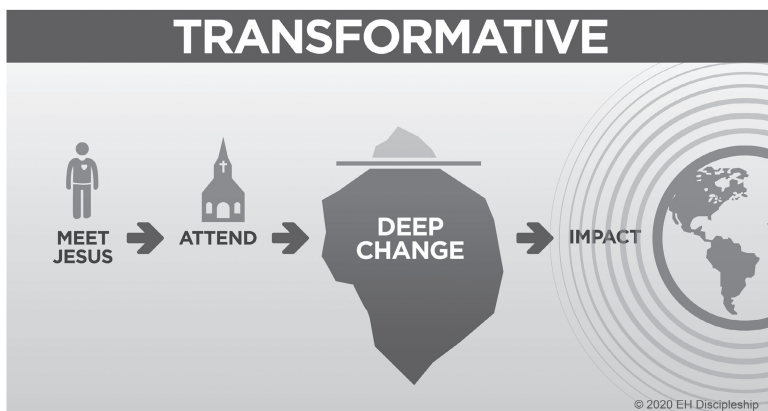
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The Difficult Journey to Move Beyond Shallow Discipleship

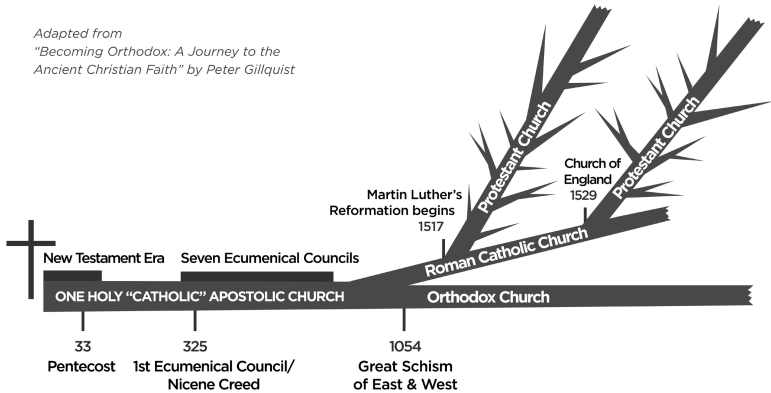


Chapter One

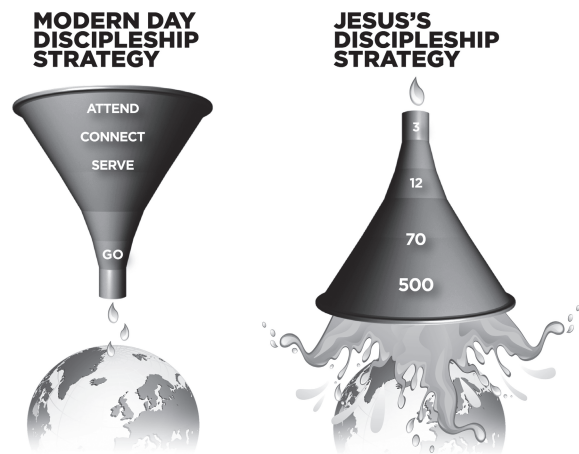
The Four Failures That Undermine Deep Discipleship

The Great Schism

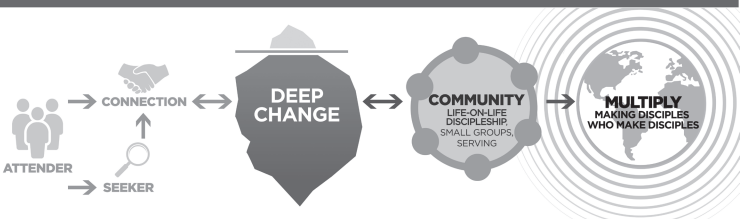
*Adapted from
"Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the
Ancient Christian Faith" by Peter Gillquist*



Discipleship Comparison



A TRANSFORMATIVE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



Chapter Two

The Emotionally Healthy
Discipleship Personal Assessment

Next to each statement below, circle the number that best describes your response.

Mark 1. Be Before You Do

	Not very true	Sometimes true	Mostly true	Very true
1. I spend sufficient time alone with God to sustain my work for God so that I live out of a cup that overflows (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12).	1	2	3	4
2. It is easy for me to identify what I am feeling inside (Luke 19:41–44; John 11:33–35).	1	2	3	4
3. When I become anxious or feel like I have too much to do in too little time, I stop and slow down to be with God and myself as a way to recenter (Luke 4:42; Luke 10:38–42).	1	2	3	4
4. I set apart a twenty-four-hour period each week for Sabbath-keeping—to stop, to rest, to delight, and to contemplate God (Exodus 20:8–11).	1	2	3	4
5. People close to me would describe me as content, non-defensive, and free from the approval or disapproval of others (Philippians 4:11–12; John 5:44).	1	2	3	4
6. I regularly spend time in solitude and silence. This enables me to be still and undistracted in God’s presence (Habakkuk 2:1–4; Psalm 46:10).	1	2	3	4
MARK 1 TOTAL				

Mark 2. Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus

Not very true
Sometimes true
Mostly true
Very true

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. I have rejected the world's definition of success (e.g., bigger is better, be popular, attain earthly security) to become the person God has called me to become and to do what God has called me to do (John 4:34; Mark 14:35–39). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I rarely change the way I act so others will think highly of me or to assure a particular outcome (Matthew 6:1–2; Galatians 1:10). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I take a lot of time to carefully discern when my plans and ambitions are legitimately for the glory of God and when they cross the line into my own desire for greatness (Jeremiah 45:5; Mark 10:42–45). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. Listening to Jesus and surrendering my will to his will is more important than any other project, program, or cause (Matthew 17:5; John 16:13). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. People close to me would describe me as patient and calm during failures, disappointments, and setbacks (Isaiah 30:15; John 18:10–11). | 1 2 3 4 |

MARK 2 TOTAL _____

Mark 3. Embrace God's Gift of Limits

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I've never been accused of "trying to do it all" or of biting off more than I could chew (Matthew 4:1–11). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I am regularly able to say no to requests and opportunities rather than risk overextending myself (Mark 6:30–32). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I recognize the different situations where my unique, God-given personality can be either a help or a hindrance in responding appropriately (Psalm 139; Romans 12:3). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. It's easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else's burden and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden (Galatians 6:2, 5). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. I have a good sense of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities, intentionally pulling back to rest and replenish (Mark 1:21–39). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. Those close to me would say that I am good at balancing family, rest, work, and play in a biblical way (Exodus 20:8). | 1 2 3 4 |

MARK 3 TOTAL _____

**Mark 4. Discover the Hidden Treasures
Buried in Grief and Loss**

Not very true
Sometimes true
Mostly true
Very true

1. I openly admit my losses and disappointments (Psalm 3, 5).	1 2 3 4
2. When I go through a disappointment or a loss, I reflect on how I'm feeling rather than pretend that nothing is wrong (2 Samuel 1:4, 17–27; Psalm 51:1–17).	1 2 3 4
3. I take time to grieve my losses as David and Jesus did (Psalm 69; Matthew 26:39; John 11:35; 12:27).	1 2 3 4
4. People who are in great pain and sorrow tend to seek me out because it's clear to them that I am in touch with the losses and sorrows in my own life (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).	1 2 3 4
5. I am able to cry and experience depression or sadness, explore the reasons behind it, and allow God to work in me through it (Psalm 42; Matthew 26:36–46).	1 2 3 4
MARK 4 TOTAL	_____

Mark 5. Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity

1. I am regularly able to enter into the experiences and feelings of other people, connecting deeply with them and taking time to imagine what it feels like to live in their shoes (John 1:1–14; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:3–5).	1 2 3 4
2. People close to me would describe me as a responsive listener (Proverbs 10:19; 29:11; James 1:19).	1 2 3 4
3. When I confront someone who has hurt or wronged me, I speak more in the first person (“I” and “me”) about how I am feeling rather than speak in blaming tones (“you” or “they”) about what was done (Proverbs 25:11; Ephesians 4:29–32).	1 2 3 4
4. I have little interest in making snap judgments about other people (Matthew 7:1–5).	1 2 3 4
5. People would describe me as someone who makes “loving well” my number one aim (John 13:34–35; 1 Corinthians 13).	1 2 3 4
MARK 5 TOTAL	_____

Mark 6. Break the Power of the Past

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I resolve conflict in a clear, direct, and respectful way, avoiding unhealthy behaviors I may have learned growing up in my family, such as painful putdowns, avoidance, escalating tensions, or going to a third party rather than to the person directly (Matthew 18:15–18). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I am intentional at working through the impact of significant “earthquake” events from the past that have shaped my present, such as the death of a family member, an unexpected pregnancy, divorce, addiction, or financial disaster (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 51). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I am able to thank God for all my past experiences, seeing how he has used them to uniquely shape me into who I am (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28–30). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. I can see how certain “generational sins” have been passed down to me through my family history, including character flaws, lies, secrets, ways of coping with pain, and unhealthy tendencies in relating to others (Exodus 20:5; cf. Genesis 20:2; 26:7; 27:19; 37:1–33). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. I don’t need approval from others to feel good about myself (Proverbs 29:25; Galatians 1:10). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. I take responsibility and ownership for my past rather than blame others (John 5:5–7). | 1 2 3 4 |

MARK 6 TOTAL _____

Mark 7. Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I often admit when I’m wrong, readily asking forgiveness from others (Matthew 5:23–24). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes (2 Corinthians 12:7–12). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. Others would readily describe me as approachable, gentle, open, and transparent (Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 13:1–6). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. Those close to me would say that I am not easily offended or hurt (Matthew 5:39–42; 1 Corinthians 13:5). | 1 2 3 4 |

	Not very true	Sometimes true	Mostly true	Very true
5. I am consistently open to hearing and applying constructive criticism and feedback that others might have for me (Proverbs 10:17; 17:10; 25:12).	1	2	3	4
6. I am rarely judgmental or critical of others (Matthew 7:1–5).	1	2	3	4
7. Others would say that I am slow to speak, quick to listen, and good at seeing things from their perspective (James 1:19–20).	1	2	3	4
MARK 7 TOTAL	_____			

TALLY YOUR ASSESSMENT RESULTS

For each group of questions:

- Add your responses to get the total for that group.
- Transfer your totals to the the right column of the chart on the next page.
- Plot your answers and connect the dots to create a graph on the bottom portion of the next page, following the sample at the top of the same page.
- Read the descriptions in this chapter to learn more about your level of emotional health in each area. What patterns do you discern?

SAMPLE

Marks of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship	Totals
Mark 1. Be Before You Do	<u>20</u> / 24
Mark 2. Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus	<u>9</u> / 20
Mark 3. Receive God's Gift of Limits	<u>10</u> / 24
Mark 4. Discover the Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss	<u>13</u> / 20
Mark 5. Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity	<u>16</u> / 20
Mark 6. Break the Power of the Past	<u>14</u> / 24
Mark 7. Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability	<u>21</u> / 28

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
	24	20	24	20	20	24	28
emotional adult	20	17	20	17	17	20	23
emotional adolescent	15	13	15	13	13	15	17
emotional child	10	9	10	9	9	10	12
emotional infant	6	7	6	5	5	6	7

Marks of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

Totals

<i>Mark 1. Be Before You Do</i>	___/24
<i>Mark 2. Follow the Crucified, Not the Americanized, Jesus</i>	___/20
<i>Mark 3. Receive God's Gift of Limits</i>	___/24
<i>Mark 4. Discover the Treasures Buried in Grief and Loss</i>	___/20
<i>Mark 5. Make Love the Measure of Spiritual Maturity</i>	___/20
<i>Mark 6. Break the Power of the Past</i>	___/24
<i>Mark 7. Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability</i>	___/28

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
	24	20	24	20	20	24	28
emotional adult	20	17	20	17	17	20	23
emotional adolescent	15	13	15	13	13	15	17
emotional child	10	9	10	9	9	10	12
emotional infant	6	7	6	5	5	6	7

Chapter Three

Be Before You Do

Mary and Martha's Spiritual Balance



Assessing the False Self

Use the list of statements that follow to get an idea of where you're at right now when it comes to living out of your false self. Next to each statement, circle the number that best describes your response. Use the following scale:

Not very true
Sometimes true
Mostly true
Very true

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I compare myself a lot to other people. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I often say yes when I prefer to say no. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I often don't speak up to avoid the disapproval of others. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. People close to me would describe me as defensive and easily offended. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. I have a hard time laughing at my shortcomings and failures. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. I avoid looking weak or foolish in social situations. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. I am not always the person I appear to be. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. I struggle with taking risks because I could fail or look foolish. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. My sense of worth/well-being comes from what I have (possessions), what I do (accomplishments), or what others think of me (popularity). | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. I often act like a different person when in different situations and with different people. | 1 2 3 4 |

Here are a few observations to help you reflect on your responses.

If you scored mostly threes and fours, you have a strong attachment with your false self. Most likely, this may have been a difficult, even scary, assessment for you. If so, don't worry. Just taking this short assessment was a great first step. Ask yourself, "What invitation might God be offering me through this new awareness?"

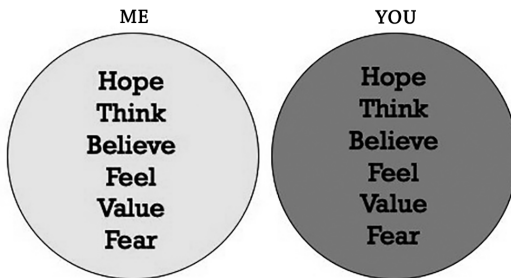
If you scored mostly twos and threes, you have likely already begun to dismantle your false self and God is inviting you to the next level of awareness and growth. Your challenge now will be to truly get beneath the surface of your interior life.

If you scored mostly ones and twos, you likely have a healthy awareness of your true self and notice when you are slipping into a false self. That is wonderful. You can expect new levels of discovery as you continue through the seven marks of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship.

Chapter Five

Embrace God's Gift of Limits

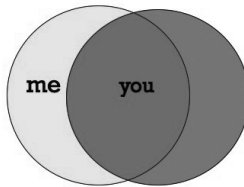
Healthy Boundaries



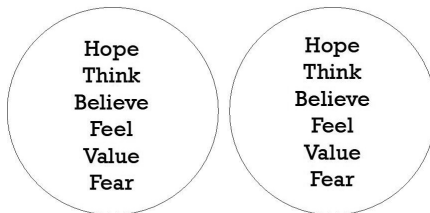
Chapter Seven

Make Love the Measure of Maturity

Unhealthy Togetherness

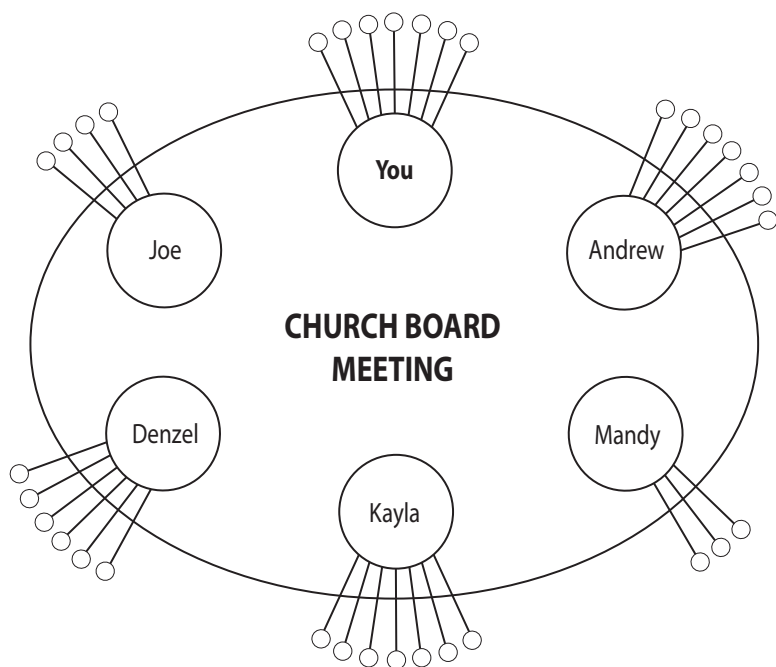


Healthy Togetherness



Chapter Eight

Break the Power of the Past

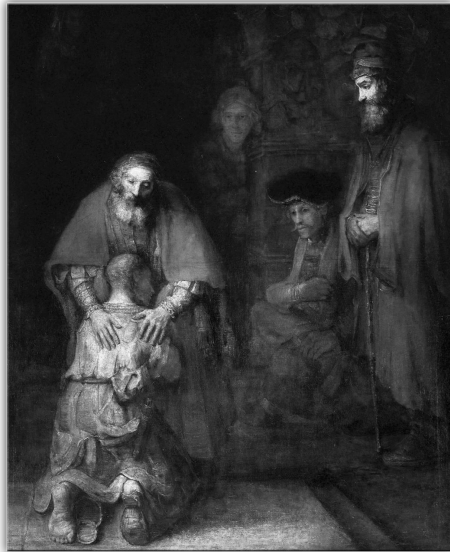


Experiences from each person's family relationships

Chapter Nine

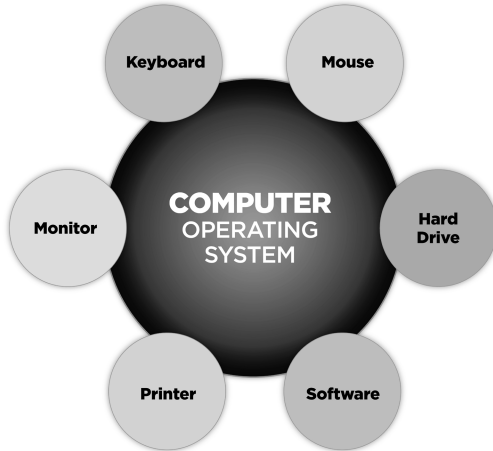
Lead Out of Weakness
and Vulnerability

The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt



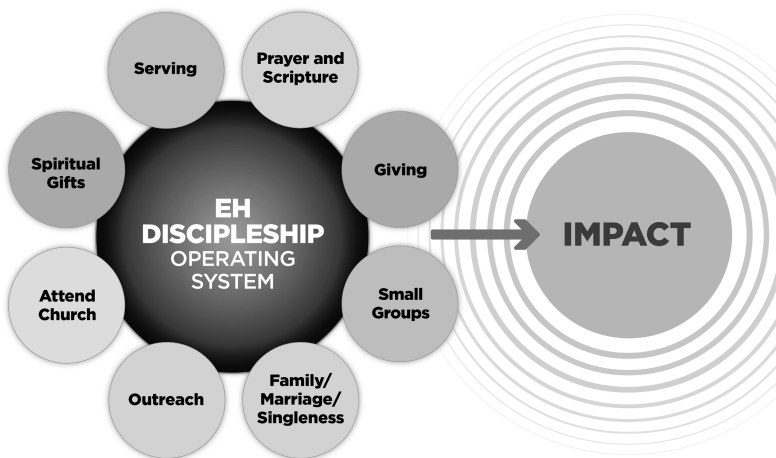
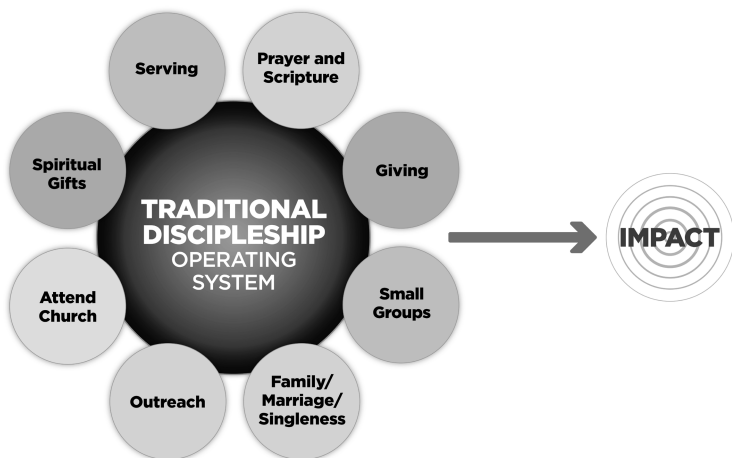
Implementing Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

Discipleship as an Operating System



Discipleship as an Operating System

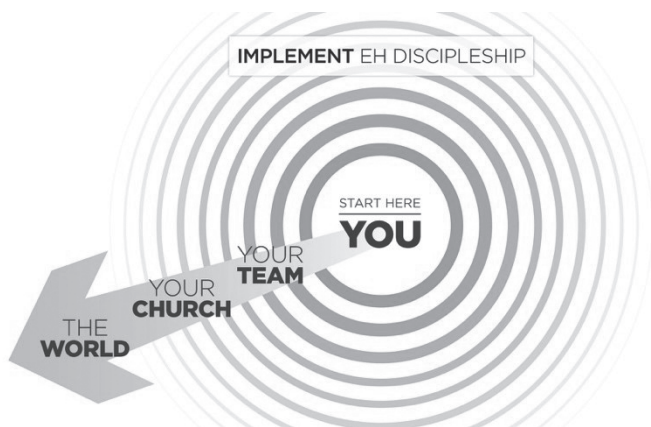
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A TRADITIONAL DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



A TRANSFORMATIVE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



Appendix A

Church Culture Revolution

A Six-Part Vision for a Culture That Deeply Changes Lives

One of the greatest insights I've gained from working with thousands of churches around the world is that creating a healthy culture is a powerful strategy for impacting people's lives as well as the long-term mission of the church. If our goal is to multiply deeply transformed disciples and leaders for the sake of the world, a healthy culture is profoundly important. We have to be intentional about taking the chaos of what people bring with them—from their very different backgrounds, cultures, and families of origin—and shaping it into a radically different culture that operates as the new family of Jesus.

So, what precisely is this thing called culture? Defining it can be challenging because culture consists primarily of unspoken rules about “the way we do things around here.”

Culture is that imprecise something, the invisible presence or personality of a place that can be difficult to describe without actually experiencing it. It is often more readily felt than articulated. Perhaps the simplest and best definitions I've come across describe culture as “the sumtotal of the learned patterns of thought and behavior” of any given group, and “what human beings make of the world.”

Multinational companies such as Google, Apple, and IBM have very distinct cultures. Ethnic communities, political groups, and countries have cultures. Denominations and parachurch organizations have

cultures. Every church, ministry, task force, and team has a certain style that constitutes the spirit or ethos of that particular community. But that doesn't mean culture just "happens." Culture needs to be created, shaped, and maintained. And the responsibility for doing so resides with the leader.

To help you begin thinking about what this might look like in your own church, I've identified six characteristics or qualities of an emotionally healthy church *culture*:

1. Slowed-Down Spirituality
2. Integrity in Leadership
3. Beneath-the-Surface Discipleship
4. Healthy Community
5. Passionate Marriages and Singleness
6. Every Person in Full-Time Ministry

Each characteristic is summarized on the pages that follow. After the description of each characteristic, you will find a brief assessment tool and then questions for personal reflection and team discussion. My prayer is that this process will give you the vision and courage to transform the culture of your ministry so profoundly that its impact will be felt for generations.

QUALITY 1: SLOWED-DOWN SPIRITUALITY

We slow down our pace in order to be with Jesus, and this is the source from which our activity flows.

In a church culture that changes lives, people refuse to allow a hurried world to set the pace for their lives. They choose instead to live by rhythms that are slower and more deliberate. They set aside time each day to immerse themselves in Scripture, silence, and solitude, which are foundational practices for communion with Jesus. Their doing for God flows out of their being with God.

As a result, they consistently embrace other spiritual practices, such as Sabbath-keeping and discernment, in order to cultivate their personal relationship with Jesus and avoid living off of the spirituality

of others. They willingly learn about the practices of slowed-down spirituality from two thousand years of church history and the global church. They remain profoundly aware that, apart from abiding in Jesus, it is impossible to bear lasting fruit—both as individuals and as a community.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by slowed-down spirituality?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- In what ways is your current culture an asset that helps people to slow down and cultivate oneness with Jesus? In what ways is it a liability that makes slowing down harder?
- Briefly reflect on your work and leadership over the last month or so. In what ways were the characteristics of slowed-down spirituality most notably evident? For example, in your attitudes, behaviors, demeanor, pace of life, etc. In what ways were these characteristics most notably absent?

QUALITY 2: INTEGRITY IN LEADERSHIP

We do not pretend to be something on the outside that we are not on the inside.

In a church culture that changes lives, leaders—staff and volunteer—are intentional about living out of vulnerability and brokenness.

They refuse to engage in pretense or impression management. They endeavor to be the same person onstage in public as they are offstage in private. They recognize that their first and most difficult task is to lead themselves so that their work for God is nourished by a deep inner life with God.

This ensures that their leadership is not driven by other motives, such as the need for power, approval from others, or success as the world defines and measures it. Through their lives and their leadership, they seek to create an environment in which their people are encouraged to ask questions and give helpful feedback. They also enjoy the freedom to say a healthy “no” as they discern God’s will and set appropriate limits.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by integrity in leadership?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How would you complete the following sentences?
 - Some of the ways our culture directly and indirectly affirms pretense and subtly encourages impression management are . . .
 - Some of the ways our culture affirms transparency and encourages people to live out of vulnerability and brokenness are . . .
- In what aspect of your life or leadership are you most tempted to skim over truth, to be less than honest about your struggles, to deny negative emotions, or to pretend to be more or better than you are?

QUALITY 3: BENEATH-THE-SURFACE DISCIPLESHIP

We grow in self-awareness because we cannot change that of which we remain unaware.

In a church culture that changes lives, no one assumes people are maturing on the basis of activities such as church attendance, small group participation, and serving. Instead, they understand that maturity results when people engage in the slow, hard work of following the crucified Jesus. Leaders carefully teach people how to break free from unhealthy or destructive patterns in their families and culture of origin, and how to live differently in the new family of Jesus. People understand that their past impacts their present, and they are intentional about identifying and facing their beneath-the-surface issues (such as sinful tendencies, unresolved wounds, triggers, etc.).

They apply the gospel of grace and the truth of Scripture to every area of life, meeting Jesus in their losses and limits and learning how to love other people as Jesus did. They understand they need to die to the less obvious sins—such as defensiveness, detachment from others, and a lack of vulnerability—as well as the more obvious sins, such as lying or coveting. They also pursue the healthy desires God places in their hearts and celebrate God’s good gifts, such as beauty, nature, laughter, music, and friendships.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by beneath-the-surface discipleship?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- In what ways, if any, does your culture tend to equate increased levels of participation (in programs, events, or serving) with growth and transformation in Christ?
- What beneath-the-surface issues—a sinful tendency, a weakness, a wound, a past failure, or self-protection—have most impacted your leadership in the past recently?

QUALITY 4: HEALTHY COMMUNITY

We are committed to learning tools and practices in order to love others like Jesus.

In a church culture that changes lives, people recognize that there is a disconnect when those who claim to love Jesus are experienced by others as defensive, judgmental, unapproachable, and unsafe. Thus, leaders teach and train people in how to do relationships as Jesus did. This includes how to speak clearly, respectfully, and honestly; how to listen; and how to clarify expectations. It also includes confronting the elephants in the room, such as “dirty fighting,” and equipping people to master “clean fighting” to negotiate conflicts.

As part of living in community, people learn to respect individual viewpoints, choices, and spiritual journeys, allowing each one to take responsibility for his or her own life without blaming or shaming. By sharing and connecting with each other out of their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, they offer a gift of God’s grace to one another and to the world.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by healthy community?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Every culture has a default mode for negotiating conflict and navigating differing viewpoints. What three words or phrases would you use to describe the default mode of your ministry culture when it comes to conflict and differing viewpoints? In what ways are these words/phrases indicative of a healthy culture? An unhealthy culture?
- What three words or phrases would you use to describe your personal default mode when it comes to conflict and differing viewpoints? What similarities and differences are there between your default mode and that of the larger culture?

QUALITY 5: PASSIONATE MARRIAGES AND SINGLENESS

We model God's passionate love for the world by living out of our marriages or singleness.

In a church culture that changes lives, the maturity of each person's marriage or singleness is measured not simply by stability or commitment to Christ, but by the degree to which each is becoming a living sign and wonder of God's love for the world. People live out a vision of love that is passionate, intimate, free, and life-giving, recognizing their oneness with Christ is closely connected to their oneness with their spouses or to their close community.

They talk openly about sexuality, recognizing the intimate relationship between Christ and his church is to be reflected in the sexual relationship between a husband and wife, or in the chastity of those who are single. They carefully differentiate between "using" people and "loving" people by monitoring the movements of their hearts and treating others as unrepeatable and invaluable beings made in the image of God.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by passionate marriage and singleness?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- In what ways does your culture affirm marriages and singleness as vocations—as two ways of modeling God’s passionate love for the world? What, if any, differences are there in the ways your culture equips married adults and single adults to live out their respective vocations?
- Overall, how would you describe the role your vocation (marriage or singleness) plays in your leadership? To what degree does the way you spend your time and energy reflect that your marriage/singleness—not ministry—is your first priority as a leader?

QUALITY 6: EVERY PERSON IN FULL-TIME MINISTRY

We commission every believer to walk in the authority of Jesus at work and in daily life.

In a church culture that changes lives, people reject cultural values that view human beings as spectators and consumers. They affirm that every believer is called to full-time ministry for Jesus. Every sphere of daily activity—paid or unpaid work, or retirement—constitutes a field of ministry. They refuse to compartmentalize work and spirituality, viewing work as an act of worship that brings order out of chaos and builds God’s kingdom.

They seek to create community within their spheres of influence, integrating new skills for loving well, and reflecting the generosity of God. In the context of their work and daily activities, they practice Jesus’s presence and engage in the slow work of making disciples.

Drawing on the foundation of the gospel, they are active in naming and combating language, attitudes, and behaviors resulting from such evils as racism, classism, sexism, and any other ideology that demeans human beings.

Assessment

To what degree is your culture characterized by every person in full-time ministry?

Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response. Then briefly describe the reasons for the number you circled.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all true of our culture					Completely true of our culture				

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- If you were to ask the people in your church to name their ministry, what percentage would name their volunteer service to the church? What percentage would name their sphere of daily activity? Overall, how would you characterize the degree to which your people tend to compartmentalize work and spirituality?
- In what ways does the truth that every person is in full-time ministry challenge you as a leader? In what ways does it encourage you?

Appendix B

The Nicene Creed (with Notations)

For the first three centuries of its existence, the church found itself in a hostile environment, threatened from without by persecution and from within by ideas that were in conflict with Scripture. In the New Testament, for example, we observe Paul exhorting Timothy to “keep the pattern of sound teaching” he had received (2 Timothy 1:13) and to protect the truth from error. Over the course of three centuries, what the church considered sound teaching was codified into a variety of creeds, the most well known being *The Apostles’ Creed*.

When Constantine legalized Christianity in AD 313, he discovered that the empire was fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicts over the nature of Jesus Christ. Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, had argued that Jesus was created by God, and not fully God. This began to split the church and thus, the empire. As a result, Constantine summoned a council of bishops from all over the empire to settle doctrine for the entire church. This resulted in the Nicene Creed of AD 325. A second council of bishops met to revise and expand the creed at a second council that met in Constantinople (present day Istanbul) in AD 381 to affirm what we now know as the final version of the Nicene Creed.

What makes the Nicene Creed so important is that it has defined orthodox Christian faith for over 1600 years. The three main branches of the Christian Church—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant—agree that this “rule of faith” provides the boundaries of Christian belief and provides a measure, or rule, for the proper reading of Scripture.

Every day, millions of Christians recite this compressed creed in which each word was intentionally chosen and packed with meaning. The Nicene Creed invites us to reflect on the radical nature of what we truly believe about God and the large vision of what he is doing in human history.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe¹ in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,²
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father.³
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.⁴

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son].⁵
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.⁶

He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.⁷
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.⁸
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

Notations

1. "*We believe*": We profess the convictions that bind us together as a community. We stand together and recite them. We are a people defined by these words and truths.
2. "*Eternally begotten of the Father*": From this point, the language about Jesus is directed to clarify that he was, in the fullest sense of the word, God. They piled phrase upon phrase, most drawn from Scripture, but some not, to assert a simple, but infinitely difficult truth: Jesus is the "only-begotten Son of God." This language and understanding comes from John 1:1, 2, 14, that Jesus was not made by the Father as part of creation, but is rather an extension of the Father's own existence. This is not a making by God but a sharing by the Father out of himself.
3. "*One in being*": asserting the unity of the Father and the Son
4. This is the heart of the creed. The all-powerful creator of the universe entered our humanity and our history—for our salvation.
5. "*Who proceeds from the Father and the Son*": This short statement continues to be a source of tension between the Eastern and Western church. It was one of the explicit causes of the schism between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians in AD 1054.
6. "*The Holy Spirit*" is also worshiped and glorified. He is not only a power but a person and is to be thought of in the same manner as the Father and the Son.
7. "*One holy catholic and apostolic church*": The word *catholic* means *universal* (not the Roman Catholic church). It refers to the reality that the church of Jesus exists around the world and not simply in one denomination or local church.
8. "*One baptism for the forgiveness of sins*": Ephesians 4:5 states there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." While salvation is by grace through faith alone, all agree baptism is an essential mark of our leaving of the world, receiving of forgiveness, and becoming part of the church of Jesus Christ.