

God morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Before I begin my message for today, I want to take two minutes to talk about the 12 week teaching series we've embarked on.

We've entitled our series, *Becoming Whole*, and the basic premise of the series is that that God created us to be whole, to experience health in every facet of our lives. The challenge is, of course, that we live in a broken world, as broken people, with broken desires, broken relationships, and broken emotions—so if we are going to find wholeness, we're never going to find it in ourselves. We need to find our wholeness in God.

Ephesians 4:11-13 offers us a small picture—I want to summarize it for you. *God is at work in us, as we enter into relationship with one another and serve one another, and His goal is this: that we would be united in our faith and filled with the knowledge of Jesus, so that we might become mature people, fully developed, just like Jesus.*

As we journey towards wholeness, we want to highlight one aspect of growth and maturity this Fall, namely emotional and relational health. I made a declarative statement last week and I stand by it—*we cannot be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally and relationally unhealthy; the two are inseparable.*<sup>1</sup>

As I've been preparing to preach these messages, I have been drawing upon a number of resources; for those of you who would like to read a long with me, I'd like to recommend two books. The

first is, *How People Grow*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, and the second is, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, by Peter Scazzero.

This morning my message is entitled, *The Importance Of Self-Knowledge*, and I want to begin by relating a story to you.

**illus:** this Summer my family joined my younger brother's family and we went camping together in Birch Bay; the weather was hot, the water was warm, and we had a fantastic time together. On one of the afternoons, the kids were busy riding their bikes and that gave the adults some time to talk; my sister-in-law began to tell us about a disturbing trend she saw happening in her friendship group.

Marriages were splitting up, with some of her girlfriends leaving their husbands and children in search of adventure. One wife left her husband for different husband from the broader friendship circle. Another wife up and left, without ever saying why—her husband and kids were shattered. When she was asked why she was leaving a marriage of 15+ years, she wasn't able to articulate an answer—she just wanted out, she wanted something new, someone different.

Have you heard similar stories? Maybe it's already happened in your friendship circle or family. I share this story not to diagnose why spouses leave, but to highlight something important. Sometimes people behave in ways they could never have imagined 5 years earlier. Sometimes people say things that destroy others, or they make decisions that have devastating consequences, but when pressed to explain why, they can do no more than shrug their shoulders—their behaviour even surprised them.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 17.

They may feel an anger under the surface of their lives, but have no idea why it is present or where it came from. A person might feel nervous, anxious, and fearful in their decision making, in their relationships, or as they think about the future, but when pressed they may be unable to articulate why. Do you live with a constant sense of guilt? Do you wear it like a suffocating blanket? Do you even know why it persists? *Where is it coming from?*

Many of our Christian discipleship models have not taken these things into consideration. One of the songs I learned in Sunday school was, “Read your Bible, pray every day, and you’ll grow, grow, grow.” David Benner writes, “We have focussed on knowing God and tended to ignore knowing ourselves. The consequences have been grievous—marriages betrayed, families destroyed, ministries shipwrecked and endless numbers of people damaged...Focussing on God while failing to know ourselves deeply may produce an external form of piety, but it will always leave a gap between appearance and reality.”<sup>2</sup>

What we need is a double knowledge—a knowledge of God and a knowledge of self. In his autobiography, St. Augustine once prayed, “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I might know You.” John Calvin wrote, “Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Many of us are strangers to our own hearts; we think, we feel, but we live an unexamined life. We get stuck in patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving; we don’t know why we think, feel, or behave as we

do—we want to change but we don’t know where to start.

Paradoxically, to be “all about Jesus” will require a careful attention to oneself—the self that God loves and invites into relationship. Your whole life—your thoughts, emotions, actions, and relationships—is the arena in which God makes Himself known.

Coming to know myself as a sinner, opens me to knowing something more about God—He is forgiving, merciful, and loving. In the same way, coming to know God’s love, opens me to knowing something more about myself—I am valuable and precious to God, made in His image, and worth dying for. Knowledge of God and knowledge of self—these two are intertwined—both are required to become mature, whole, people.

Before I invite you to open the Scriptures with me, I want to offer to you the **BIG IDEA** for this morning’s message: *we will not grow in spiritual maturity unless we know ourselves—our thoughts, emotions, and relationships.*

Living in a sin-tainted world means, among other things, that we no longer have 20-20 vision; we see as though through a glazed window. Each of us has an amazing capacity for self-deception—we live much of our lives unaware of what is going on around us and within us. Like I said last week, the solution is not to look within—we need God and one another in order to know ourselves.

This morning I want to introduce you to two different characters in the Bible—many of you will know them well, but perhaps you’ve never thought of them in terms of their limited self-knowledge; I

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<sup>2</sup> David G. Benner, *The Gift Of Being Myself*, 20-21.

trust we'll quickly see that this unawareness produced massive consequences in their lives. Let me encourage you to open your Bibles, or fire up your Bible App and turn to 2 Samuel 11; we'll begin by looking at King **David**.

David is a complex historical figure; his life and leadership should command both awe and careful attention. In his early days we come to know him as shepherd, poet, and warrior—his faith in God, his passion in worship, his courage in battle and his integrity in leadership are praiseworthy. God describes David as being a man after His own heart.<sup>3</sup> And yet, there is much about David that is neither praiseworthy or excellent—David had a dark shadow side.

David knew God, but it's clear that he didn't always know himself. For example, did David know that he was conflict-avoidant? Within his own family we see rape, murder, betrayal, treason, and yet when faced with these realities, David turned a blind eye. Was he unaware of this pattern, or, was he so afraid of stepping into the mess that he simply shut down? Either way, the end result was the same—family relationships disintegrated around him.

But if you know David's life, you know there is one incident that acts as a warning for all of us—it cries out about the importance of self-knowledge.

2 Samuel 11:2 says, *“One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the*

*daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her... Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”*

We might say that now David had a problem on his hands, but we would be wrong. David had a problem long before Bathsheba became pregnant; David was unaware that lust was destroying him. He was blind to his own blindness. Lust is like every other vice—greed, pride, envy—when it first appears, it isn't in full-blown form, overwhelming, and impossible to resist. No, it grows slowly over time—like every other vice, we cultivate lust or we starve it. David deliberately cultivated lust by adding multiple sexual partners to his life.

At first, David added new wives to His royal court, but later he started adding concubines—desirable young women—to join the circle of partners for his bed. Can I ask, is it such a leap from there to sleeping with another man's wife? I'm sure David thought to himself, *I can take whatever I want; I need it—I deserve it.* Is it so different for us? We either cultivate lust or we starve it. With the click of a mouse we enter into a virtual reality where multiple new partners can enter the bed chambers of our minds. We can become ruined before we know it, that is, we ruin our ability to commit to one another, to relate to one another as human beings, deserving of honour, respect, and love.

David's problem began long before Bathsheba, but with her pregnancy, he had an immediate problem on his hands. He engaged

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22

in a few cover-up operations but when they failed, David had her husband killed in battle but made it look like an accident—problem solved. David took Bathsheba to be his wife, but they didn't live happily ever after.

God knew what David had done; He saw what was in David's heart—lust, pride, the abuse of power, things that David was evidently blind to. And so, God sent Nathan the prophet to talk with David. Nathan began his conversation by telling the King a disturbing story.

*“There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. 4 “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”*

*5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” 7 Then Nathan said to David, “**You are the man!**”*

In that instant, David's blinders were removed.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:31, 33-35.

<sup>5</sup> Benner, 28.

Let's look at another blind man in the Scriptures—we know him as the apostle **Peter**. Peter had a three year apprenticeship in coming to know Jesus, and in coming to know himself. Our first encounters with Peter tell us that he was a man brimming with confidence—he was cocky, sure of himself, and not afraid to say what he thought before he really thought it through. But over his time spent with Jesus, Peter made many discoveries.

Do you remember the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples? At one point Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’...Peter replied, “**Even if all [of the other disciples] fall away on account of you, I never will.**” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “**Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.**”<sup>4</sup> And all the other disciples said the same. David Benner writes, “Doubting Jesus was easier than doubting himself.”<sup>5</sup>

After Peter's denial, and Jesus' subsequent death on the cross, he had a more informed understanding of himself. Peter didn't know himself very well; he was blinded to his own capacity for fear and self-preservation—he had thought himself a cut above the other disciples, but like Jesus predicted, he discovered that he was not.

After Jesus' resurrection, John 20:20 tells us that when the disciples saw Jesus alive, they were overjoyed. Peter loved Jesus, and I'm sure

he was genuinely filled with joy to see Him, but I wonder if Peter hung back a little, overwhelmed by guilt and shame. *Jesus is back, but I'm not fit to follow Him, not after what I did. How could He forgive me? I can't forgive myself. How could He trust me? I don't trust myself.*

And, so, Peter took himself off of Jesus' team and decided to go back to his former profession. In Peter's mind, he had failed so badly that all that remained was to go back to his fishing boat—that's where Jesus found him. In John 21 we are told of an intimate encounter between Peter and Jesus that expanded his knowledge of God.

The two of them went for a walk on the beach, and Jesus asked Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" We're not told what Jesus was referring to. Perhaps Jesus pointed to the fishing boats and nets. Perhaps Jesus gestured to the other disciples. *Peter, a few shorts days ago you told Me that even if all the other disciples fall away, you would stand firm—are you still so confident in your self?* We're not told what Jesus was referencing, but Peter responded saying, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

*Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*<sup>6</sup>

Before this conversation, Peter had given up on himself because he assumed that Jesus had already done so—he couldn't have been more wrong. Under the crushing weight of guilt and shame, Peter's knowledge of who he was—weak, fearful, unfaithful, proud—blinded him from seeing who Jesus was: loving, merciful, forgiving.

Before this encounter, Peter might have *believed* that Jesus was forgiving—he had seen Jesus forgive other people—but there on the beach Peter *knew* this truth for the first time; he experienced forgiveness and mercy. There is no tit for tat with God—our unfaithfulness doesn't not lead to His own. How can God be unfaithful? He cannot be other than what He is: compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love—He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

**Application:** As I said earlier, many of us are strangers to our own hearts. Because of our amazing capacity for self-deception, we live much of our lives unaware of what is going on around us and within us. One thing I know, *we will not grow in spiritual maturity unless we know ourselves (thoughts, emotions, relationships).* So how do we walk the path of self-knowledge?

Here's the irony—the path towards self-knowledge is not a solitary one. Self-knowledge requires deep relationships all along the way—we need God and one another. As I draw my sermon to a close, allow me to offer two suggestions by way of application.

**First, if you want to grow in self-knowledge, cultivate relationship with the Holy Spirit.** Jesus said, *when the Holy Spirit*

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<sup>6</sup> John 21:15-17.

*comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He is the Spirit of truth.*<sup>7</sup> We cannot become whole without a true picture of who we really are, and where we are really at. The goal is not to train ourselves to see better, or know more—the goal is to cultivate a dependency on the Holy Spirit, and to keep in step with what He reveals.

The Christian life is a Spirit-filled-life, a supernatural life—we draw upon a strength that surpasses our own. But this doesn't mean that we are passive in any way. We have to listen to the Spirit. We have to open up, confess, repent, and obey—we partner with the Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

What I am about to say is basic but absolutely essential. When the Holy Spirit exposes something in us, we need to take steps to deal with it—this is what it means to “keep in step with the Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> There is no sense in asking for further direction when we aren't following the direction He's already given.

In Psalm 139, King David prayed, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Offer this prayer to the Spirit, and then be silent—allow Him to make you aware of what you cannot see.

Here's the **Second** suggestion: **if you want to grow in self-knowledge, cultivate spiritual friendships with others.** The

journey towards self-knowledge requires submission to the Holy Spirit and vulnerability with others—we *cannot become all that God intends on our own.*

*The Blind Self* is the part of your self that you cannot see, but others can. You might think of yourself as patient, but others know better. You might think of yourself as a team player while others see you as unbending and demanding. All of us are blind to our own blind spots. Growing emotionally and relationally is not an individual exercise.

You will not grow if you wall yourself off from others. To grow in self-knowledge, God uses the people in your life as His instruments—to bless and to expose, to love and to challenge. Many people feel disconnected from God, the reason being, they have lost a meaningful connection with His Body (His people).

**illus:** one of the things I've tried to do on our staff team is to cultivate an atmosphere of love, respect, and authenticity. Practically speaking, this means speaking the truth in love is one of our highest values. A team that cannot bless one another's strengths, and, come along side one another's weaknesses is a team without real relationship—a team without a foundation, a team without the ability to weather difficulty when it comes.

I've told my team, particularly Dave and Mardi, that I need them to tell me what they see in me—I know that I'm flying blind without

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<sup>7</sup> Paraphrase of John 16:13.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow*, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Cloud and Townsend, 108.

this kind of feedback. Dave and Mardi have stepped up and given me feedback that hasn't been easy for them, or for me.

For instance, this past year Dave challenged me to stop being so guarded with my heart—*Mark, I know you are experiencing some pain these days, but you're isolating yourself from others; let us carry your burdens—don't pretend you are fine, when you are feeling weak and discouraged.* You may not struggle with this broken relational pattern, but I do, Dave has seen it, named it, and called me out of my isolation. I'm grateful for a friendship like Dave's.

This past year, Mardi challenged me on some of my leadership tendencies. When I am in a complex situation, with multiple paths, and lots of information to digest, I get stuck in my own head, don't let others in, and ultimately drag my feet in decision-making. Not only is it not good for my peace of mind, but it hinders movement towards our vision. Mardi has seen this tendency, named it, and has raised the red flag when I begin to drag my feet. I'm grateful for a friendship like Mardi's.

It takes humility to recognize that we need others in order to grow in Christ. John Calvin once said, *"If God is our Father, then the Church is our Mother;"* our faith/maturity/wholeness in Jesus is nurtured in the company of others.

Proverbs 27:6 says, *"Wounds from a friend can be trusted"*. It takes trust to open yourself to others, to listen to what they see in you; this kind of trust involves risk, but far less risk than going it alone.

But ultimately, inviting others to reflect back to you, what they see in you, is an act of wisdom; only a fool thinks they have 20/20 vision.

Proverbs 15:32 says, *"Those who disregard discipline sabotage themselves, but those who are open to correction gain understanding."* David listened to Nathan. Peter listened to Jesus. We all need to listen to someone other than ourselves. *Who is your Nathan?*

May the Lord bless you with the courage and vulnerability to open yourself to the Holy Spirit and to others, that we might grow spiritual maturity.

**Song of Response:** *Search Me O God*

### The Lord's Supper

On the night Jesus was betrayed by His closest friends, He shared a last meal with them. He told them that He loved them; He washed their like a common servant would have done. Later on He prayed with them, and then shared His burden with them—*"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."* Jesus needed others too. Not long afterwards, Jesus went to the cross and died.

During His Last Supper, Jesus took a piece of bread, he broke it and said, *"Take and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

We gather around this table, remembering, celebrating, the love He demonstrated in death. Jesus took upon Himself the sin and brokenness of the world—the power of sin was broken at the cross,

## **The Importance of Self-Knowledge**

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and a way was made for healing and reconciliation. If you come to this table, confessing your need for His forgiveness, mercy, and love, you will find it today. So come as you are, with all of your need, all of your brokenness—come to Jesus and find life.

At this time I'd like to ask the communion servers to come and take their place up front (and in the balcony).

**Baptism Announcement:** on September 28th, we are providing time in the morning service for all who would like to be baptized; a few have already indicated their desire. If you haven't been baptized yet and would like to take this step, please contact Dave Sattler or Anne Thicke this week.

**Prayer ministry announcement**

**Benediction**