

The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World

By Peter Scazzero

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Summary

This rich and wise book explores two key dimensions of every spiritual leader's life: 1) the interior life and how to cultivate it; and 2) how to integrate a rich personal spiritual life with key outward tasks that are the responsibility of every leader. Scazzero explains that cultivating the inner life involves facing one's shadow, leading out of marriage or singleness, slowing down for loving union, and practicing Sabbath delight. After discussing these four areas thoroughly, he provides a self-measurement tool to help each reader identify how they are doing in each.

He then, through a very open description of his own strengths and weaknesses, explains his journey in attempting to integrate a rich spiritual life with four key responsibilities of leadership: planning and decision making; culture and team building; using power and establishing wise boundaries; and successfully navigating endings and new beginnings.

His vulnerability in sharing his own journey is remarkable and one of the great strengths of the book – it serves as a highly useful teaching tool, instructing the reader about the real-world consequences of spiritual/emotional maturity and immaturity. It becomes unmistakably clear that the author is writing out of decades of experience in spiritual and organizational leadership.

Best Illustration

Too long to quote, one of the best illustrations in the book describes the author's transition from being the founding, senior pastor of a thriving church for many years, to becoming a subordinate teaching pastor/pastor at large. He explores at length the identity and emotional struggles that he experienced in relinquishing control of a highly fruitful ministry that he founded and had devoted his adult life to. The description of the process by which this was successfully accomplished is alone worth the price of the book.

Best Idea

What I do matters. Who I am matters much more. A "deep dive" into the hidden heart dynamics of Christian leaders – one cannot read the book without a deeper understanding of how the strengths and weaknesses of the leader's character profoundly shape the culture of the ministry they lead, as well as its breadth and depth.

Best Take Away

If we hope to transform the world with the good news of Jesus, we must begin by embarking on a personal journey, one that will lead us through a deep, beneath-the-surface transformation in our own lives.

Our Recommendation

Highly recommended. One of a handful of books that should be on the shelf of every Christian leader. It can serve as a periodic self "checkup" for the inner life of the leader as well as how to integrate spiritual/emotional maturity into organizational leadership.

Best Quotes

"It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature." Kindle location 202 "I write honestly from the hard lessons of my failures." Kindle location 280

"If you take this book seriously, it will require a lot from you – hard work, perseverance, vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to change." Kindle location 301

"Our church in Queens, New York, represents a lower-middle-class, poorer population with people from more than seventy-three nations around the world." Kindle location 314

"If we hope to transform the world with the good news of Jesus, we must begin by embarking on a personal journey, one that will lead us through a deep, beneath-the-surface transformation in our own lives." Kindle location 318

"Whether you are a senior pastor, executive pastor, church staff person, an elder/deacon board member, a small group or ministry leader, a denominational or para-church staff person, a missionary, or marketplace leader, I pray you will find here truths and guidance that will not only help you to become more effective in your role but also to be personally transformed." Kindle location 321

"In part 1, we'll explore the four core tasks of the inner life every leader must undertake: facing one's shadow, leading out of marriage or singleness, slowing down for loving union, and practicing Sabbath delight. Kindle location 325

"In part 2, we'll build on the foundation of an emotionally healthy inner life by exploring four core outer-life tasks we routinely deal with in the course of leadership. These include planning and decision making, culture and team building, power and wise boundaries, endings and new beginnings." Kindle location 328

"The emotionally unhealthy leader is someone who operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit, lacking emotional maturity and a 'being with God' sufficient to sustain their 'doing for God.'" Kindle location 346-7.

"Unhealthy leaders engage in more activities than their combined spiritual, physical, and emotional reserves can sustain." Kindle location 353

"Four Characteristics of the Emotionally Unhealthy Leader: low self-awareness, prioritizing ministry over marriage/singleness, doing too much for God, and failing to practice a Sabbath rhythm. They remain unaware of how issues from their family of origin have impacted who they are today." Kindle location 394

“Emotionally unhealthy leaders are chronically overextended.” Kindle location 443

“Emotionally unhealthy leaders do not practice Sabbath – a weekly, twenty-four-hour period in which they cease all work and rest, delight in God’s gifts, and enjoy life with him.” Kindle location 470

“Being an emotionally unhealthy leader is not an all-or-nothing condition; it operates on a continuum that ranges from mild to severe and may change from one season of life and ministry to the next.” Kindle location 505

“We lead more out of who we are than out of what we do, strategic or otherwise. If we fail to recognize that who we are on the inside informs every aspect of our leadership, we will do damage to ourselves and to those we lead.” Kindle location 759

“Without the solid foundation of a deep inner life, even the best leadership practices are only marginally effective.” Kindle location 780

“It would take many years of starts and stops, trial and error, and returning to the unfinished drilling before I had the foundation that enabled me to write these pages.” Kindle location 782

“Mature spiritual leadership is forged in the crucible of difficult conversations, the pressure of conflicted relationships, the pain of setbacks, and dark nights of the soul.” Kindle location 784

“Your shadow is the accumulation of untamed emotions, less-than-pure motives and thoughts that, while largely unconscious, strongly influence and shape your behaviors. It is the damaged but mostly hidden version of who you are.” Kindle location 875

“Acknowledging, rather than denying the reality and depth of the shadow, is one indication of emotional and spiritual maturity.” Kindle location 1,055

“If you want to lead out of your marriage, then you must make marriage – not leadership – your first ambition, your first passion, and your loudest gospel message.” Kindle location 1,557

“The first ambition for married Christian leaders must shift from leading our church, organization, or team to loving our spouse passionately.” Kindle location 1,565

“We must cultivate a strong desire to make visible the invisible – the love of Jesus for his church – in and through the love we have for our spouse.” Kindle location 1,565

“If marriage, not leadership, is our first passion, then married Christian leaders should be among the most ‘in love’ couples in the church. Kindle location 1,609

“We pray for greater passion. We make cultivating passion an intentional spiritual practice. We intentionally affirm one another. Kindle location 1,639

“Bearing fruit requires slowing down enough to give Jesus direct access to every aspect of our lives and our leadership.” Kindle location 2,037

“Loving union is an act of surrender – giving God complete access – and we can’t do that in a hurry.” Kindle location 2,039

“The only mark of genuine spiritual maturity and ministry effectiveness, Edwards concluded, is the outworking of agape – a self-giving love for God and others.” Kindle location 2,066

"The question we must wrestle with is this: In what ways does my current pace of life and leadership enhance or diminish my ability to allow God's will and presence full scope in my life?" Kindle location 2,093

"In fact, what I am asking you to do is nothing short of a groundbreaking, culture-defying act of rebellion against the contemporary Western way of doing leadership." Kindle location 2,329

"Biblical Sabbath is a twenty-four-hour block of time in which we stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God." Kindle location 2,521

"Sabbath is an invitation to see the invisible in the visible – to recognize the hidden ways God's goodness is at work in our lives." Kindle location 2,580

"Instead of thinking of the Sabbath as an imposition, we need to embrace it as an essential delivery mechanism for God's love." Kindle location 2,762

"Read up on the Sabbath. Identify a twenty-four-hour block of time. Make a list of what brings you delight. Prepare in advance." Kindle location 2,935

"Four critical tasks in the outer life of a leader: • Planning and Decision Making • Culture and Team Building • Power and Wise Boundaries • Endings and New Beginnings. Kindle location 3,076

"Integrating my inner life with these four outer life tasks was nothing short of exhilarating and life-giving – both for me personally and for our church." Kindle location 3,081

"EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING 1. We define success as radically doing God's will. 2. We create a space for heart preparation. 3. We pray for prudence. 4. We look for God in our limits." Kindle location 3,278

"This is how we defined success: Success is when people are transformed deep beneath the surface of their lives. Success is bridging racial, cultural, economic, and gender barriers. Success is serving our community and the world." Kindle location 3,351

"Creating an emotionally healthy culture and building a healthy team are among the primary tasks for every leader – one of the most powerful opportunities we have to impact people's lives and our long-term mission." Kindle location 3,778

"I've identified four core characteristics for emotionally healthy culture and team building. When an organizational culture and team are healthy, these things are true: • Work performance and personal spiritual formation are inseparable. • The elephants in the room are acknowledged and confronted. • Time and energy are invested in the team's personal spiritual development. • The quality of people's marriages and singleness is foundational." Kindle location 3,835

"Emotionally healthy leaders dedicate themselves to their team's personal development, and not just their professional or ministry skills." Kindle location 4,062

"The best test of a leader's character is how they deal with power. If we want to use our power well as Christ-followers, there are three things we must do: • Identify and inventory our power • Carefully steward our power so it comes under others • Acknowledge and monitor dual relationships." Kindle location 4,419

"Emotionally healthy leaders are keenly aware of the sources of their power as well as the nuances in their use of power." Kindle location 4,425

“Embracing endings in order to receive new beginnings is one of the fundamental tasks of the spiritual life – and this is especially true for Christian leaders. Not every problem can or should be solved or overcome; some things just need to be allowed to die.” Kindle location 4,834

“Although the process of navigating endings and new beginnings is almost always complex, we can say we are making a healthy transition when our process takes us through four phases: • We accept that endings are a death. • We recognize that endings and waiting in the confusing ‘in-between’ will often take much longer than we think. • We view endings and waiting as inextricably linked to our personal maturing in Christ. • We affirm that endings and waiting are the gateway to new beginnings.” Kindle location 5,015

“Much of my growth as a leader has come out of these kinds of painful, mysterious, and confusing experiences – the in-between times – over which I have so little control.” Kindle location 5,111

“The central truth that Jesus is risen from the dead is what enables us to affirm that endings are always a gateway to new beginnings. The key is to be willing to wait.” Kindle location 5,129

“The following are the seven stages of the transition process developed by the board and me.

1. Define the founding pastor’s new role.
2. Define the new senior pastor’s role.
3. Establish a task force.
4. Identify potential candidates.
5. Complete a year of “testing.”
6. Affirm a new leader.
7. Communicate the transition publicly.”

Kindle location 5,226