

**Pray**

Today we are continuing our series in **emotionally healthy spirituality**  
Which is about getting our **Spiritual relationship with God healthy**  
And our **emotional relationships with one another healthy**

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Last week

Alison spoke powerfully about our experience of hitting the wall  
And thank you to all of you who have been in touch to encourage her

Today by way of introduction I want to say

**We will all hit the wall**

Pete Scazzero uses a model for the stages of faith  
Which comes from this book

By **Hagberg and Guelich called The Critical Journey**

And it was the basis of my MA dissertation

And the whole book is summarised in this image

**Stage 1 = life changing awareness of God**

And since we are in church - we have all reached this stage

**Stage 2 = The life of discipleship**

And this is about learning

So you have reached this stage if you are in a home group

Or you are reading the EHS Day by day book

**Stage 3 = The life of active service**

And you have reached this stage if you lead a group of people

So the home group leaders and the service team leaders are at this stage

Then comes **Stage 4 = The Wall and The Journey Inward**

And this is so common that society has a name for it

It is called a **“midlife crisis”** and there are very few causes including

A parent dies OR you or your spouse have a life threatening illness

OR you are divorced OR your child has a life threatening illness

And it is important to notice it is God who brings us to the wall

And God Who allows the circumstances of life to deepen our faith

I would prefer to call this The Chrysalis

Because although it feels like hitting a wall great good comes from it

**Stage 5 = The Journey Outward** and I call this **A New Freedom**

On the surface this looks a lot like **stage 3 = the life of active service**

But there is a new reason why we act

**Before** we were active in order to be successful

**now we are seeking to be significant**

**Before** we said yes to too many things and struggled to fit everything in

**Now we know what is important and find it easy to say no**

And I would prefer to call this **A New Freedom**

**Stage 6 = The Life of Love**

Here God sends great opportunities our way

God is working on making us more loving

And as we grow in love so fear is driven out

So that we simply do what God wants us to do

Now today - I want us to use **the book of Job** as our guide  
and you will find **Job on page 507**  
so please turn with me to **Job 1**

and the first three verse introduce us to Job

**Read Job 1.1-3**

Job was the Bill Gates of his time and was ridiculously wealthy

But then God allows Satan to test Job's faith in God

And **Job hits the wall**

**Read Job 1.13-19**

Job has hit the wall big time

It is not that one of his children was seriously ill

But rather all of his 10 children have died

How would you feel?

How would you respond?

The book of Job is about - **How to grieve well**

**Step 1 = Pay attention to how we are feeling**

And this is what Job does

**Job 1.20,21**

<sup>20</sup> **At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup> and said:**

**'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart.'**<sup>[c]</sup>

**The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;**

**may the name of the LORD be praised.'**

<sup>22</sup> **In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.**

And things continue to go wrong for Job and he gets

**painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head**

and in **Job 3**

Job is completely real with God about how he feels

**3 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.**

<sup>2</sup> **He said:**

<sup>3</sup> **'May the day of my birth perish,**

**and the night that said, "A boy is conceived!"**

<sup>4</sup> **That day – may it turn to darkness;**

**may God above not care about it;**

**may no light shine on it.**

And this is the main thing I want you to take away today

**Our Soul is like a balloon**

and

**When we embrace our grief and loss - then our soul grows**

Let me illustrate

**Gerry Sittser** lost his mother, his wife and his daughter  
in a horrific car accident  
And he wrote a book about it called **A Grace Disguised**

Here are some of the ideas from that book  
**Read Quote EHS day by day page 99**

And we teach this in **The Bereavement Journey**

Our grief can feel like it will overwhelm us  
And is more than we can bear

We imagine that the task ahead is to reduce our grief to a manageable size

BUT the bereavement journey actually enlarges us  
**When we embrace our grief and loss - our soul grows**  
**Our soul is elastic like a balloon**  
And we grow to incorporate our loss

The main thing I want you to take away today is

**Our Soul is like a balloon**

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So **Step 1** in good grieving = **Pay attention to how we are feeling**

**Step 2 = Waiting in the confusing in between**

And in the book of **Job** this comes in **Job chapters 4 – 37**  
Here Jobs friends often called Jobs comforters are kind of “try to fix him”

And this is a real danger for us too  
When someone is bereaved or suffering a loss  
**Please do not try to fix them**

By all means sit with them – and listen to them  
And help them to find the word to express their feelings  
But **they need to wait in the confusing in between**

And although I would love this to be over more quickly  
Experience teaches me this takes ages  
Probably more like 2 years than 1

And it reminds me of the story of Israel  
It took God a very short time to get the Israelites out of Egypt  
But **it took 40 years to get Egyptian thinking out of the Israelites**  
Some things just do take a long time  
And grief and loss is one of those things  
It just takes a long time

**Step 2 = Wait in the confusing in between**

### Step 3 = Accept our limits

And in the story of Job

This comes in **Job 38 – 41 on Page 538**

Finally after 35 chapters of Jobs comforters being unhelpful

When we get to **Job 38 God speaks to Job**

And when God speaks it is to **help Job to accept his limits**

**Job 38.4,5** are typical

<sup>4</sup> *‘Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?*

*Tell me, if you understand.*

<sup>5</sup> *Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!*

*Who stretched a measuring line across it?*

And at risk of repeating myself

**Having a Sabbath each week** has helped me to learn this

I don’t do any work on a Thursday

And yet I find every Friday – the world is still turning

And God has managed perfectly well without me

**The Sabbath has taught me that – God is God and I am not**

### Step 3 = Accept our limits

### Step 4 = Climb the Ladder of Humility

And in Job this comes in Jobs reply to God

In **Job 40.3-5**

<sup>3</sup> **Then Job answered the LORD:**

<sup>4</sup> **‘I am unworthy – how can I reply to you?**

**I put my hand over my mouth.**

<sup>5</sup> **I spoke once, but I have no answer –**

**twice, but I will say no more.’**

Jobs comforters had done a terrible job of looking after their friend

And yet Job forgave them and prayed for forgiveness

And in a way

**Humility is the flip side of knowing God is all powerful  
and we are not**

Humility is having a realistic self assessment

**Humility is not thinking less of yourself**

**– it is think about yourself less**

**Humility comes from the same root as humus**

It is being grounded – it is have a down to earth view of ourselves

**And humility comes from the same root as humour**

It is being able to laugh at ourselves

And since I started laughing at myself I have never run out of material!

And the phrase **Climb the Ladder of humility**

Comes from the rule of St Benedict

Who uses Jacobs Ladder as an illustration

And says we climb the ladder towards God by humbling ourselves

And when we are proud

Then we descend the ladder away from God

And **one of the results of Hitting the Wall is a new humility**

### Step 4 = Climb the Ladder of humility

And finally

**Step 5 = Let the old give birth to the new**

And in Job this comes in *Job 42.12-17*

And there are some great illustrations of this in EHS day by Day

So for example – **John Milton's - Compost heap**

**Quote EHS day by day – page 88**

Jesus summarises this step well when he says (*John 12.24*)

<sup>24</sup> ***Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.***

And the truth is – even when it does not feel like it –

That the loss of one opportunity

very often gives rise to new opportunities

the final step of how to grieve well is

**Step 5 = Let the old give birth to the new**

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So - what I would like you to take away from today is

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And

**When we embrace our grief and loss - then our soul grows**

**Let's Pray**