

Brokenness: The Key to Releasing the Power of SoulCare



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supernatural, the **means**
must be supernatural.

A good friend who trained under me in counseling years ago recently asked me, “Larry, are you emphasizing the notion of inadequacy more than you used to? Are you emphasizing that in order to be effective in SoulCare, you must embrace your personal inadequacy? Is that a bigger point than it used to be when you would teach counseling?” I answered “yes,” and I thought about that for a minute. And I believe the reason why I am doing that can be expressed very simply: when the goal is supernatural, the means must be supernatural. If you are really after something that only the Spirit of God can produce, well then, of course you are inadequate. And then your inadequacy becomes a source of delight as opposed to despondency. You begin to celebrate your inadequacy, because you realize with Paul, “who is adequate for such things?” I am not. It takes the pressure off, and allows me to become a conduit of the Spirit of God as opposed to the person who has to make things happen. Let me illustrate that point.

A close friend some time ago called me one night and he said, “Larry do you have a chance to chat?” And I did, and we took in about an hour of chatting, and he gave me an opportunity for SoulCare that I very much valued. What he said to me is this; he said, “Something has come up that I don’t know how to handle, and it is ripping me apart, and I don’t know what to do.” I asked him what it was, of course, and he said, “Well, I just found out that my daughter had an abortion. I didn’t even know that she wasn’t a virgin. I didn’t know that she was pregnant, and now I discover that my daughter had an abortion. And I don’t know how to handle it. I just wanted to talk to you and get your thoughts on it.”

How did I feel? Well, I can recall where I was sitting when the phone call came, and I can recall talking to this good friend of mine and feeling inside, “I wish he had called somebody else.” I do not know what to do. I have two sons. I do not have a daughter. I have never gone through his experience. I’ve never had to face

the reality of a daughter who's had an abortion. The daughter did not know that her dad knew. What does he do? Does he tell her? Does he not tell her? How does he talk about it? How does he bring it up, if he brings it up at all? I am supposed to know all these things? I am inadequate for that. I really do not know. Oh, I have opinions. I have thoughts we can share, we can discuss—and that is legitimate to do—but I remember thinking to myself, "You know what I want more than anything else from my friend? I want my friend to want God. I want my friend to want to honor God in the middle of the situation with his daughter." And I think as we were chatting on the phone, my friend's preoccupation understandably—mine would have been too—was "how do I effectively deal with my daughter? Then when I figure that out, I will ask God to help." Well, that is not all about God. That is all about him and his family and making life work, as opposed to glorifying God. And in the middle of all that, feeling as inadequate as I did, I recall what happened. I thought to myself on the phone, I do not know what to say. I am inadequate for these things. But then I thought, I would love it if the Spirit of God would work in my friend's heart so that what he cared about more than anything else was knowing and enjoying God and revealing the character of God to his daughter. And I believed that if the appetite were stirred up that he would be given wisdom from the Spirit—not from me, because I am inadequate—but wisdom from Spirit and move toward his daughter. I cannot give him all the details of how to do it—I do not know.

So what I did on the phone was chat for some length of time. I said to him, "You know what I would suggest we do is spend the next few minutes on the phone both being quiet and both centering ourselves in the presence of God (many people call this centering prayer). Let us center ourselves in the presence of God and I will do all that I know to do to listen to the Spirit, as I bring you and your family and your precious daughter into the presence of the Trinity. And I want you to do the same thing. Take yourself and your daughter into the presence of God and listen to what the Spirit might be saying. Don't listen just to hear what you ought to do to straighten out your daughter—that isn't the question—but become aware of your relationship with the Father through Christ as the Spirit leads."

Then we spent some time in prayer, and I believe that the results were not life changing in a final sense. They never are. (The only thing that changes our life finally is when we go home to heaven. So if somebody wants me to cure them, I guess I have to kill them

so that they go to heaven. That is not very ethical so I cannot do that. There is always going to be more room for growth.) As we prayed together, what happened was not climactic and changed everything—the man still struggles and his family still struggles—but what happened was that he became aware of what was inside of him.

“You know, this situation is really hard. I wish it never would have happened. I’m worried. I’m scared. But there’s something more in me than worry and fear and a pressure to handle my daughter right. I really love my Lord, and I really trust Him. And I actually worshiped Him in the middle of this.” And as that centering prayer stirred up his appetite, then together, we had a profitable conversation about how he might move toward his daughter and toward the rest of his family in dealing with this real crisis.

I would like to think that for just a few minutes in my conversation with my friend, that my inadequacy was not an obstacle to SoulCare; it became the opportunity for real SoulCare to take place. The story is told that during the Crimean War that Florence Nightingale, the well-known heroic nurse, was passing down a hospital corridor among all the wounded soldiers. Her heart was bleeding as she saw the men physically bleeding. The story is told that she was drawn to one particular soldier who was lying there so sad and so full of despair with major wounds. As she looked down into his face, apparently something alive within her came out of her, an energy, a passion, a reality, that was deep within her came out and poured into this young soldier, and as she looked down at him he looked up at her and he said these words, “You’re Christ to me.”

What would it mean for you and I to become the kind of people that could talk to our friends when they discover their daughters have had an abortion, who could talk to our friends who are not getting along with their spouses who just realized their spouse is going to divorce them, who could talk to our friends when they are struggling with depression or panic attacks or obsessive compulsive disorders, all these things that we quickly refer to psychologists. What would happen if we became the kind of people that, as we interacted with them, that something came out of us and into them where they said, “You know, right now you are Christ to me”?

What is SoulCare all about? How do we become the kind of people that can do that? Paul, in Ephesians 4:11-16, a few excerpts

“You’re Christ to me.”

God gave a variety of people

“...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

— Ephesians 4:11-13

As we in love speak truth,

“...we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body,...grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

— Ephesians 4:15-16

from that passage said this. He said that God gave a variety of people, apostles and teachers, to the church of Jesus Christ, to the community of believers in order for the purpose of preparing God’s people for service so that the body of Christ may be built up. In other words, their souls can be cared for and cured and changed and transformed until we all become mature. There is the compelling vision. He gave people to the church to care for souls so that we can be built up until we all become mature, like Jesus, whose central preoccupation was to honor the Father, whose appetite for God was stronger than His appetite to avoid pain. That is why He went to the cross—not because it felt good, it felt bad. It was the worst suffering any man ever endured. But He was willing to do that because His appetite for the Father was stronger than His appetite for personal comfort. God says that He gave to the church people who, when they move into other peoples lives, can be prepared to move toward maturity, to become mature. Then he uses this remarkable phrase, “obtaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Well again, there is the compelling vision: becoming like Christ. Paul goes on and he says, “as we in love, speak truth, SoulCare will happen.” As we in love, speak truth, we will grow up into Christ because of Him—it all depends on Him. I did not help my friend that night. I was simply a facilitator of God’s helping. As we depend on Him, as we in love, speak truth, then from Him—He is the source—the whole body grows and builds itself up in love. And hear the phrase “as each part does its work.” You are a part of the body of Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are a part of the community of God. And if you are taking this course, that tells me that you long to be involved in SoulCare. You long to be one of the people that God has sent into the body of Christ to in love, speak truth.

God has raised up people to care for souls. He always does. But I think we can say with sad accuracy that true shepherds of the soul are in short supply these days. How many people do you know who are struggling alone? Probably, you are. To some degree, I am. I have a few people that are very meaningful to me—they mean the world to me—who care for my soul. But there are not many. You want to become a carer of souls; you want to be one of the people that God has provided to move into other people’s lives so that becoming like Christ is something that actually happens in the interior world of who they are. In love—there is the passion—speak truth—there is the wisdom. Recall, we are developing a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare. That is what we are after.

**“In Love”
=
Passion**

**“Speak Truth”
=
Wisdom**

What are the passions inside of you? Are you speaking in love, or are you speaking to prove you are adequate? Are you speaking to impress somebody with how spiritual you are? Are you speaking to prove that you know what you are talking about? Or are you in love, speaking truth? Do you have wisdom about what is going on in people's lives who are struggling? Or have you been caught up in a worldview that opposes the Scripture, and you have come to understand that what is going on beneath the surface of people's lives really is different than what the Bible teaches? Do you have an understanding of fancy things like psychopathology, where you look at a person who injures himself or herself, or who is anorexic, and you come up with a secular understanding, as opposed to a biblical understanding of the soul? Do you have wisdom for knowing how to enter the soul? That is what we are all about—passion and wisdom.

Now at this point in our presentation, we are still talking about the first element. We are talking about passions. And I hope you are understanding what I mean by the word “passions.” Now I know the word “passion” can mean a variety of things. All I am talking about are what are the things that stir meaningfully within you as you are interacting with somebody else, that stirs so deeply, that in fact they rule within you as you talk, as you think, as you exchange conversation with a friend. What are the ruling passions? That is what I want to think about with you a little more carefully.

I want to suggest to you that you want, just like me, to have a passion within you that is holy. You want to have a passion within you that is rooted in Christ, rooted in the Spirit of Christ, a passion that says that “I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in truth. I have no greater joy than to see you honor God in dealing with your daughter who has just gone through this moral struggle. I have no greater joy than seeing you become a godly man or a godly woman. I have no greater joy, son or daughter, than seeing you become a godly person, whether you are rich or poor, whether you are successful in your job, or you get fired. My deepest goal for you is that you become godly.” Is that the passion that is within you as you care for other people's souls? You want it, and I want it. You want Paul to be able to say I am in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you—that is what I want. How do we get to the point that that becomes our ruling passion?

A couple of observations: passion, the holy passions of God, the spiritual energy of Christ that Paul said was powerfully working

**Passion is released
through brokenness,
not choice.**

in him when he cared for souls, the passion that you and I want that is required for being effective in SoulCare— that passion is released, not through choice but through brokenness. You cannot sit down with somebody who is hurting and say, “I will choose to be filled with love.” You cannot do that. If the real essence of who you are in Christ is to come out of you, and you are to become Florence Nightingale to that wounded soldier to where he looks up and says, that “you’re Christ to me,” if that is going to happen and is going to come about, not because you made a deliberate choice and you have done the right things—you had devotions this morning, you memorized ten verses, you went to church last Sunday—that is not it. The issue is, is there a brokenness over all the other passions that are interfering with the release of love’s passion?

I want to develop that thought with you, because if you and I are to become effective in SoulCare then we have to grasp the reality that the root to becoming effective in SoulCare is not pleasant. It is brokenness, and brokenness is not a pleasant experience. To make sense of what I am talking about, it seems to me that we need to understand two things.

First, we need to articulate the difference between selfishness and self-centeredness. (Keep that in your head for a minute, and we will discuss it in a moment.) The first thing we need to understand is, if we are to become broken people, out of whom the perfume of Jesus flows as the box of perfume is broken and the true fragrance of Christ comes out, if that is going to happen, we are going to have to be broken people; to understand that, we are going to have to realize the difference between how our culture thinks of selfishness versus what the Bible talks about in terms of self-centeredness.

The second thing that we are going to have to understand to realize that brokenness is required to become effective providers of SoulCare, is that the passion of love exists in each of us, if we are followers of Jesus, beneath the passion of self-centeredness. Two points that you have heard me say—let me develop them with you and see if I can make some sense out of it.

Again what we are talking about here, we are talking about releasing the passion of Christ within us and that requires brokenness. To understand that, first a distinction between selfishness versus self-centeredness needs to be made. Again, visualize the image of an iceberg. You have seen that several times now, where the



iceberg has the exterior world visible above the waterline that anybody can see who happens to be in the area versus the massive structure of ice beneath the waterline that nobody can see that is there, but nobody can see it. The invisible world, the interior world—keep that image in your mind, as I present an illustration to you.

I want you to visualize in your mind a husband coming home after work, and he has had a tough day at work. He feels exhausted, and things have not gone all that well, and he is kind of frustrated and discouraged. And he walks in the door, and there is his wife in the kitchen making dinner—sounds like a ‘50s television show—and he goes right to the television. Does not even stop by and say, “Hi Honey, how are you doing,” not even, “What’s for dinner?” He is just tired, and all he can think about is what a lousy day he had at work. And so he goes to the television and turns it on. From the couch, he barks, “What’s for dinner? I’m hungry!”

How do you feel about that man as you observe that man? Well, I think we would all agree that is pretty selfish. That is selfishness. That is “above the waterline behavior” that any honest observer would say that he did not think at all about his wife. He was so preoccupied with himself—yeah, he is hurting and he is discouraged, but all he is thinking about is himself—and that is selfishness. Maybe it is kind of justified in some sense, some of us would say because he is discouraged, the day at work was bad—all those things are there. But whatever the reasons, he is behaving selfishly. There was nothing visible that moved toward his wife.

What do you do with that gentleman? Do you say to him, “You shouldn’t be like that. When you come home at night, I am going to be your SoulCarer, I’m your counselor, and when you walk in the door I don’t care how tired you are; you can at least walk by your wife and say to her, ‘Honey I am just tired and discouraged. I had a lousy day at work. I don’t want to ignore you, and I know you have had a long day, too, and I love you a bunch, I am just too tired to help with dinner, but I promise that I will clear the table after dinner’”? So you exhort the man to do that.

Tell me how effective exhortation can be in changing people? How effective has it been when God from Mount Sinai thundered and said, “Shape up. Here are the Ten Commandments”? Remember, Israel responded by saying, “We’ll do it all.” Did they do it all? No. The next night they came home, and they went right to the television and barked at their wife, “What’s for dinner?” There

was no change in selfish behavior based on exhortation.

You know, from an unlikely source we get some insight into that. Sigmund Freud, no great friend of Christianity, began his whole system of psychoanalysis on one particular observation he made early in his career. And the observation he made early in his career was this: that when people were behaving above the waterline in ways that were ineffective, maladaptive, that were not working for them, that he would say, “You know, you really should not do this; I have a better plan. Do this.” But they would not change. He found himself saying, you know advice, accountability, pressure, exhortation, they do not seem to change people. “I wonder,” Freud said as a very young man, “if there are not things below the waterline that have a lot of important power in the things that we do above the waterline.” Now Freud was wrong about a lot of things, but he was not wrong about the importance of what is going on in our interior worlds. What he thought was there and how to deal with it, he made a lot of mistakes. But he said, “know what is happening inside.” Selfish behavior, selfishness, behavior that is visible and takes into account nobody else, is the first illustration from that gentleman.

Picture a second husband, picture a husband coming home after work, and he has had an equally difficult day. Life has not gone well for him that day. He is discouraged. He is unhappy. He feels like a failure. He is down on himself. He is insecure. But suppose as he drives in his driveway, and as he walks in the door into his home, to himself he says—maybe without even hearing it; maybe it is part of his interior world that he denies—but suppose what is stirring within him in his interior world is a sentence like this: “I’m sure not much of a success at work. I didn’t sell a thing today, and we are not going to meet our bills this month, and I don’t know what I am doing. But you know what? At least I can be a good husband. I am going to come in and at least show my wife that I can be a pretty good husband and be kind to her. I can be a good Christian husband, even.” Suppose he is saying that to himself. And so he comes in and walks up to his wife and greets her very warmly and gives her a big kiss. And she says, “How was your day?” And he says, “You know, it really wasn’t very good, but I’m concerned about yours, too. How was your day?” And she shares her day. And they communicate about it. And he says, “Honey, you have had a long day, look, let me help you set the table—and you’ve made dinner already. I really appreciate that.” They have a good dinner. They talk about their days. They commiserate together. They encourage each other. He helps clear the table. We

watch that and we say, fantastic, that man is not selfish.

Now, here is my question. Go below the waterline and what do you see? What I suggest you see, in the way I told the story, is self-centeredness. Why was the man nice to his wife? Above the waterline, selfish? No. Below the waterline, self-centered? Yes. What does that mean? Was his primary ruling passion as he went to his wife to bless her soul? Was his primary ruling passion as he went to his wife and helped with the dishes to honor God and to please God? Or was his central ruling passion, “I got to feel good about myself somehow. I guess this will work.” Whose soul is he taking care of? He is taking care of his own. That is self-centeredness. That is a problem.

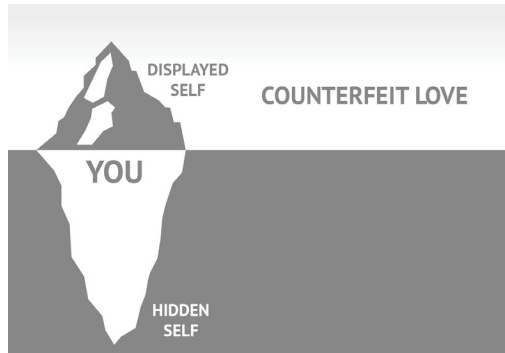
The ruling passion of self-centeredness is in all of us. It can express itself in all sorts of ways, sometimes in ugly ways. Out of self-centeredness we do ugly things. People have affairs. People make fun of others. People are sarcastic. People are critical. Out of our self-centeredness, we become ugly people. But out of our self-centeredness, we can also become socially appealing people. And God looks at that and says you know, “All of your righteous deeds are no more attractive to me than filthy rags because in the core of your being, there is a radical self-centeredness.” That is bad news.

There is good news. The good news is the Gospel. I am going to tell you what the good news is: The good news is not only am I forgiven for all of my self-centeredness—not just my selfish behavior—not only am I forgiven for all of my self-centeredness because Jesus took all the punishment that my self-centeredness deserves, not only am I forgiven for that, but there is a whole new life beneath my self-centeredness that was planted there by the Spirit the day that I became a Christian.

Let me sketch it for you very simply. Back to the iceberg. You are the person who is providing SoulCare. You are the person who wants to engage in somebody else’s life—to talk to your friend whose daughter just had an abortion, to talk to your friend whose wife just left him, to talk to your friend who is depressed and discouraged with life. You want to provide effective SoulCare.

Understand, if all you do is learn interpersonal techniques of empathy and good advice giving and learn how to pray with people, if that is all you do, let me suggest that what you could be offering that person is what I am going to call “counterfeit love.”





It is going to be like that husband who came home and helped with the dishes. The wife liked it. You might get a good practice of SoulCare, if that is what you are doing. But you are not going to be achieving spiritual purposes. You are not going to be advancing the Kingdom. You are not going to be revealing God, living in His power, not living a supernatural life.

I recall a pastor friend of mine. I was preaching at his church. We were praying together before we preached, and in his prayer he said, "Lord, I'm so longing to lead a supernatural life." Well, you long for that too. You will not lead a supernatural life if all you offer is counterfeit love. Understand, that your counterfeit love, even when it looks good, may be coming out of a deep, passionate self-centeredness. It may not be selfish. There is a distinction. It may not be selfish. It may not be bad behavior, where people would look at it and say, "Isn't that awful," but, in fact, what is happening inside of you spoils whatever good deeds you do. There is a passion of self-centeredness. There is a mess that we are going to look at much more carefully in the next presentation to make sure we understand it.

Now, here is the good news. The good news, and this is the second point I made earlier, is first to discover selfishness versus self-centeredness and the meaning of that, but now to realize that because of the Gospel God has put in the core of our being, beneath our self-centered passions, He has put (can I call them) Holy passions—passions that reflect the heart of God, passions that keep the Trinity relating so well for all these years—that is inside of me. Those passions are there.

In the depths of our soul (this is very good news), not only are we forgiven for all the ugliness that is there, but in the very deepest center of our being—so deep below the waterline that no person can go there unaided—lies the treasure of Holy passions that the Spirit of God put there at our conversion; and the Spirit of God can invigorate and release it.

Do you see? That is what happened with my friend. "Larry, my daughter had an abortion. I am troubled." And something inside of him wanted to make his family life better. Do you blame him for that? Well, be a little bit careful here. Because if he is saying, I do not care about God's glory; but I care about how my family works, then God blames him. He has got to be able to say, "God's glory matters more than my family working. My family working matters a huge amount, but something matters more." That

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capacity is deep within his soul. That capacity is deep within my soul. And I am able, as I listen to him tell his story, to not just give counterfeit love and not just respond by trying to be helpful so I can prove that I am a good counselor and he can say, “Wow, what a good friend you are, Larry”—that is self-centered motivation like the husband I talked about—but maybe there is something inside of me that is alive because of the Spirit of Christ that can be released.

In the next presentation, which will be the last one that will deal with the issue of passions before we start talking about the issue of wisdom—the other half of this model—I want to look one more time at the mess and put some substance to this idea that there is a mess inside of us. I want to put some substance to it and explore our self-centeredness. I want to explore it enough to give us reason for brokenness. Only when we see how awful this is, and we are broken by it, we will begin to discover the passions that are beneath. We will look at that more carefully in the next presentation.