

Holy Tension: Leading People Toward the Cycle of Spiritual Movement



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Welcome to the third course in our curriculum in SoulCare. We're dealing with provisions and practice. So far, in our first two courses, we've been studying a variety of things. Things like turning chairs. What does it mean to turn your chairs toward each other so people are explored, discovered, and touched?

The compelling vision of working with someone, chatting with someone, that their appetite for God becomes stronger than any other appetite.

We talked about the ruling passions that are in my soul, that are in your soul, as we engage in some SoulCare. What are the motives? What are we really trying to accomplish—as we're chatting with people—of which we're not even aware? Ruling Passions—a third topic we've chatted about.

We've talked about brokenness. We've talked about the really, the rather, painful recognition, far more self-centered than we dream. And that our self-centeredness does not exhibit itself only in obvious acts of selfishness but in motives within me as I interact with you that really don't have your well being or God's glory in mind at all.

And we've talked about spiritual power. What does it mean for me, as a provider of SoulCare, to speak in a way where more happens than just words going back and forth? Where a reality, a spiritual reality, takes place and is felt and is encountered and does something to the souls of people.

We've talked about all of these topics and I would think, in the middle of all that we've studied together in our first two courses, I would think you're feeling a variety of things. Maybe you've been able to boil down all the material that we've discussed so far to the two central elements. The first element is: What's happening in you as you provide SoulCare? What's happening as you speak

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with some other person? What are the passions that are ruling within your soul as you chat. That's topic number one. What's happening in you?

Topic number two: What's happening in the other as you listen to them? As you seem to enter the battles, as you're longing for the Spirit of God to energize you in the way that, because of your interaction with them, their appetite for God is stirred until their appetite for God literally becomes stronger than their appetite for a clean biopsy report. Their appetite for God literally becomes stronger than their husband stopping his affair. Their appetite for God becomes stronger than any other blessing which they can imagine.

What is happening in the other? Because, you understand, you can maneuver, you can move in ways that actually stir their appetites for God. So, those are really the two key questions we've been addressing; in all of our varied discussions of all the varied topics, we've been talking about two questions really. What's in you? What are your ruling passions? What's in them? What is your wisdom that guides you as you enter their souls?

If you put those two ideas together, then I suppose you do have an understanding of why we call this the passion/wisdom model of SoulCare.

Then, what I'd like us to do now as we begin our third course... I'd like us to take a deep breath and mentally rest for just a few moments before we work hard again to understand, before we put our minds to the exciting task really—maybe difficult, but—exciting task of understanding the supernatural provisions that the Spirit of God has made available, that if we do not draw on, we're not going to be engaging in SoulCare. But the supernatural provisions that are already available to us, that are already in me and in you, that if we draw on we will be engaging in meaningful, rich and effective SoulCare.

Before we get into all of that, which is our topic for this course, I would like you to take a breather for a moment and to pay attention to what's happening inside you right now as we enter our third course.

We've looked at turning chairs and ruling passions and all these different topics, and now we're going to go further and talk about supernatural provisions and the practice of SoulCare. And I'd

like us to pause to be really honest with ourselves as to...what are you feeling? What are you experiencing as you enter this third course? If you're like me, then I would suspect that as you think about providing SoulCare, as I think about my recent conversations with people in just the last couple days, in the last couple weeks, where I've sat and chatted in the SoulCare kind of a way, when I begin to pay attention to what's happening inside of me as I seek to provide SoulCare, I become aware that sometimes, just like you I presume, I tighten up. Something in me gets stiff. I don't know quite what to do. I sometimes feel a pressure. Is this conversation going well? I'm teaching this stuff; do I have a clue how to do it? I feel a pressure sometimes to pull it off, to make it happen, to say something intelligent, to be very discerning, to have my ruling passions just right and my wisdom on target, and I feel this pressure to do it well, and as I feel this pressure—as I tighten up, and as I long to say something sensitive and powerful, and to really have the person leave the hour saying, “Wow, that was quite a conversation”—as I feel those pressures and temptations, what happens is I'm no longer a wise man. I'm no longer free. The things that tighten up are the things that, if they were released, could actually make a difference.

I remember recently counseling with someone in my office, where I have a diploma hanging on my wall that announces that I have earned a doctor of philosophy in clinical psychology, and right next to that I have a certificate that says I'm qualified in my state to practice psychotherapy. With all these impressive credentials on the wall behind them, I remember sitting, talking with this person, and they were saying some very difficult, confusing things, and to myself, not out loud of course, but to myself, I remember saying to myself, not to the person, “This person needs professional help. I don't have a clue what I'm doing.”

You're going to feel that. You're going to feel a lot of times, “What am I doing entering the battle for this person's soul? Why has God punished this person by having them chat with me? I don't know what I'm doing. I haven't got a clue.”

You're going to feel like that when you talk meaningfully about another person's life. And what I want you to hear me say—now this is a repeat of what I've said earlier on—when you feel like that, realize that's a good thing. Realize it's a good thing to feel like that. If you don't feel like that, you'll never learn the meaning of the word “dependent” on the Holy Spirit in a meaningful, existential, at-this-moment kind of a way. You'll rather be trusting your own

sense of competence. You'll rather be trusting in "I've got this thing figured out. I have the roadmap down pat. I know what I'm doing and everything is just fine."

There are going to be times when you're simply not going to know the next question to ask. There are going to be many times when you're not going to be clear on the next direction to pursue. There'll be a number of times when you'll say something and, to yourself, you'll wish you could pull it back, and you'll realize that wasn't a good conversation. Folks, we've really got to lighten up just a little bit and understand that training that develops expertise is not what we're about here. Training that eliminates a sense of inadequacy and replaces it with a sense of competence is training which, in my understanding, eliminates the possibility of providing rich and effective soul caring.

If we're going to provide SoulCare, if we're going to understand the provisions God has made for providing SoulCare, and if we're going to practice SoulCare well, then we're going to have to realize that the man or woman who provides the richest kind of SoulCare is not necessarily the one with the degrees on the wall. The man, the woman, who provides the richest kind of SoulCare is the person who is becoming more and more aware of who they already are in Christ, more and more aware of what the Spirit has done, is doing, and is continuing to do in their own souls, and who is aware of what is most deeply alive, and feels freely released to give what is most alive to the other. That's central. Training that provides competence is not the point. Training that helps understand who we are in Christ and frees us to release that in our engagements and in our conversations with people—that's what the course is all about.

We've talked in the past about the importance of not running from our felt inadequacy. We've talked about the fact that we must not run from our feelings of incompetence into training that makes us more confident in ourselves and less dependent on the Holy Spirit. We've talked about embracing our true inadequacy and recognizing that we don't have an inferiority complex; we really are inadequate. There is an inferiority about us. We're desperately dependent on the Spirit for anything of value to happen. And realize this—when something happens that looks valuable that has not been promoted, that has not been energized by the Holy Spirit, it really isn't valuable.

So we've talked about facing our inadequacy and moving into a

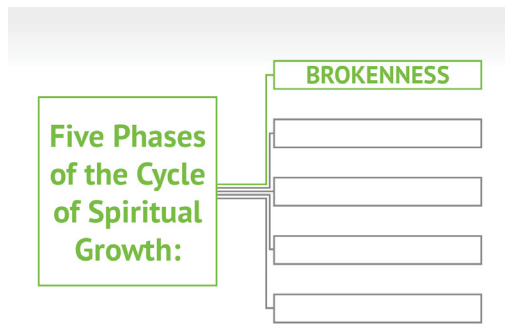
level of brokenness that frees us to give what God has put within us. A brokenness that makes us say, “You know, even as I’m sitting here chatting with you, there’s something in me that so much wants to impress you. There’s something in me that so much wants you to think well of me. There’s something in me that so much wants you to say, ‘I never would have thought of that. I’m so glad I’m chatting with you.’” If my real motivation has nothing to do ultimately with your bringing glory to God and finding your satisfaction in Him, but my real motivation is I want to get some glory out of this, and I’m going to see to it that my soul is blessed because you’re going to react to me in a certain way. When I begin to understand that, there is a brokenness that takes place. That’s in me. That’s in you. Brokenness is part of the deal.

We’ve talked about the excitement of release. We’ve talked about what it means, out of brokenness, for us to be able to release what the Spirit of God has already put most deeply within me, that when it comes out of me, when the literal life of Jesus Christ that is in me comes out and—by some mystical means that we’ll never understand comes out of me—and travels from my soul into yours and activates, touches, stirs something in you, then SoulCare takes place.

How does all this happen? How do I become a person who can provide effective SoulCare? And how does the person I’m speaking with move in the direction that God has established for them? Well, I want to suggest to you, as we start moving into our third topic now of provisions and practice, that there is a cycle that I want to introduce to you now. A cycle that has five phases. I don’t want this to be a formula. I don’t know of any formulas in the spiritual journey that work reliably; they just don’t. Because the Spirit of God is not reducible to our pragmatic understanding. But there are ways of talking about—if I can give some clarity to—the process. And I want to talk about the cycle of spiritual growth that will perhaps crystallize all that we’ve said so far and will bring us up to speed so we’re ready to move on into our next topic.

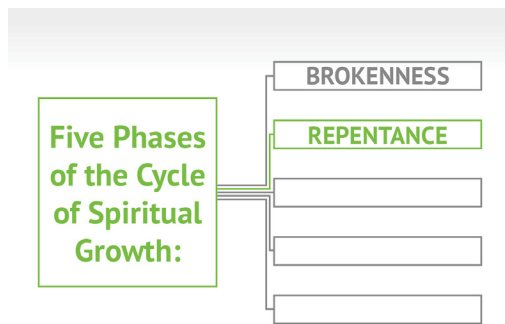
I want to talk about five phases, and let me put them to you very, very simply. The first phase can be talked about as brokenness. If there’s going to be movement toward the vision that God has for us, if there’s going to be movement towards the vision of having an appetite for God that is stronger and more powerful than any other appetite, then the first topic has to be **brokenness**.

Brokenness is the crucial first step in spiritual release. A

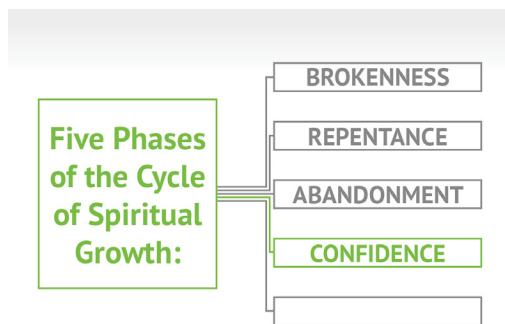


brokenness which says, “I really am self-centered, and even more important than realizing I’m self-centered, I am so deeply self-centered, there’s nothing I can do about it. If God doesn’t provide something, I will be hopelessly stuck in self-centeredness every moment of my existence for the rest of eternity. Only God can change that.” Brokenness is step number one.

Phase number two—a better word than step—phase number two is **repentance**. A word that we’re all familiar with which maybe can be defined very, very simply. It’s a momentum which comes out of brokenness, which releases a desire within me to say, “I long to be other-centered. Self-centeredness is not where life is. Other-centeredness is something which I long to be. It fits my soul better. I know it’s what God wants and it’s what I long for. It’s what I believe is the avenue to life.” Brokenness and repentance, which then leads to the third phase, which I choose to call **abandonment**.



If, in fact, I really am repentant, and long to be other-centered, my only hope for ever developing Christ-like character is absolute abandonment to God. It’s got to be abandonment to His provisions, to His work in my heart, otherwise it isn’t going to happen because there is no way a therapist, there’s no way a pastor, there’s no way a friend, is ever going to change my self-centeredness to other-centeredness. That’s going to be a work of God and I must be abandoned completely to Him. That’s phase number three. And as you abandon yourself to God, what develops over time, not always immediately, is a deep and growing sense of **confidence**. This God that I’m abandoning myself to is a God that has the power and has provided all that is necessary for me to move in the directions that my soul most longs to move. There’s brokenness, repentance, abandonment, confidence, and out of that confidence, which helps me to believe that the Spirit really is present at this moment, in the middle of this conversation, the Spirit is doing something, and when I believe that that’s true of me as I chat, of you as I chat with you, then what happens is this last phase which I choose to call **release**.



Out of brokenness and repentance, abandonment and confidence, comes a release where I begin to offer what is most alive in me to the other person. When you walk this little path, I suggest SoulCare happens. And as you walk this path, you begin to discover a spiritual power. You begin to experience Christ’s energy as the passion that rules within us as we seek to provide SoulCare. And all that is about what’s happening inside of you as the provider of

Five Phases of the Cycle of Spiritual Growth:



Three Mistakes to Avoid in SoulCare:

1. RETREAT

SoulCare. And there is the first question: “Am I aware of my own interior world as I speak with somebody else? What passion rules in me?”

The second question is equally important: “This matter of wisdom—what is happening in the other person that I need to understand well enough to move in certain directions as we chat? Do I bring up this? Do I ask about their father? Do I bring up a Bible verse? Do I say, ‘It’s time to pray’?” Wisdom guides me in the direction that I go. I need to answer the second question—not only, “What is happening inside of me? Am I going through the process of brokenness and repentance, abandonment and confidence and release?”—but, “Do I know what it means to lead the other person in this direction and do I know what’s happening inside of them that might be getting in the way of this direction?” If you’re like me, you’re regularly tempted, as you engage in SoulCare, to make three mistakes. The three mistakes that you’re most tempted to make—and there’s a dozen others, a hundred others—but the three that you’re most tempted to make—I would suggest, if you’re like me—is number one: to retreat. I want to back away from what confuses me. I want to back away from what puzzles me or disgusts me. And when I hear you say something that I can’t handle or I feel a certain disdain for, something in me wants to back away from who you are and I want to redefine your struggle in terms that I can handle. That’s retreat. And when you retreat, you’re really moving into your own comfort zone and you’re away from moving toward SoulCare. Retreat—one common mistake.

Second common mistake, and maybe the most common of all in providing SoulCare, is the mistake of advising, of giving solutions, of fixing people, of coming up with something the person can do that will make things better for them. We think of the biblical principle, we come up with a spiritual discipline, and we say, “If you’ll follow this principle in Ephesians 5, if you will follow this spiritual discipline, if you will do this, if you will do that, then here’s what’s going to happen, and I’m telling you what to do, and this is the result of what’s going to happen as a result of your doing these particular things.”

Remember, you’re not doing SoulCare when all you’re doing is rearranging behavior. You’re not doing SoulCare when all you’re saying is, “This principle would suggest you do this. Follow this particular discipline and that will happen.” You’re not doing SoulCare. You’re not depending on the Spirit when all you’re doing

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1. RETREAT
2. ADVISE

is moving people in directions that they can accomplish with or without God's Spirit. A third mistake that is terribly common is to merely empathize. Empathy is a good thing. Feeling what people feel, letting people know that you feel with them, that's obviously a good thing. To say to a wife, "That must have hurt to realize that your husband is involved in pornography and doesn't seem to be finding you very desirable; that's got to be a very difficult thing to feel." And is that a good thing to do? Well, sure it is. But it's merely, at best, opening the door to far more important topics. It's not the substance of SoulCare.

As you've studied our second course in particular, you're now thinking about doing more than retreating, than redefining problems into things you can handle. You're thinking about doing more than advising and coming up with solutions to fix where people are. You're thinking about doing more than merely being with people at the level of emotion, empathizing with them. You're developing wisdom. You're thinking about things like journeying reality. What is the person experiencing right now? Do you know what it means to be present for them in a safe way so they're willing to discuss all that's involved in the reality of their journey, where they are right now? You're thinking about journeying reality. That's a part of wisdom. You're thinking about vision; we've talked about that. What is the Spirit up to right now in this person's life? Here's where they are. Where might the Spirit be moving that person? Are you excited about...the Spirit is present and doing something right now? He takes His time, if you've noticed. And you might need to wait weeks, months, years. Parents need to wait decades sometimes to see God work in their child's life the way they long. But you have the vision for what could be and the excitement sustains because you believe the Spirit is active. The second topic: vision.

Third topic of reframing. You want to move from journeying reality, from the specifics of, "I just found out my husband's involved in pornography," to reframe the specific topic into the larger topic of the story of their soul, the story of their relationships. You want to begin thinking about how they are relating to, not only their husband, but to their children, their friends, how they are relating to their past in terms of what their mother and dad happen to be like in their history, how they are relating to you right now as the two of you interact, how they are relating to God. You reframe into the story of the soul.

You talk next about flesh dynamics. Wisdom is developing as you

Three Mistakes to Avoid in SoulCare:

1. RETREAT
2. ADVISE
3. EMPATHIZE

think about the topic of flesh dynamics. I know this relational image-bearer is fallen. I know this person has journeyed through early childhood and on up to the present with a fist clenched in the face of God, and you know that this person you're chatting with, at some level is saying, "I don't like the way my life is going. I will make my life work because, frankly, God, You've been a bit of a disappointment. You've not come through the way I think you should, and I'm going to take over, and nothing matters more than my soul developing a certain kind of health or a certain kind of internal experience, and I'm going to arrange for that."

You've thought about various categories for understanding. You've thought about, as people have listened to their story, as you've listened to people's story, you've thought about the kinds of categories that will begin to help you make sense out of the story that they tell. This person does bear the image of God. They have the capacities for relationship. They are thirsty, but because they are depraved, they are not aware of their thirst for God.

You've thought about the fact that these people think, that because there's depravity, they're fallen people, their thinking has become foolish and they have a wrong understanding of how life works. And you're thinking about this as they tell their story. You're thinking about the fact that they're volitional people who choose and all that they're doing is a choice and when the wife loses her temper with her husband because of this pornography problem, somehow there's a choice involved in pursuit of a goal. What's her goal? What's she after? You're thinking about all this. You're thinking about...the person bears the image of God and, therefore, has the capacity to feel. They long and thirst. They think. They choose. They feel. And with their feelings, they sometimes, when the feelings hurt, they run away from their feelings and they are not willing to take their feelings as an indication that maybe they are on the wrong track. And the feelings that are negative, they simply want to suppress and get rid of.

You become aware of these kinds of things. You've begun to understand the topic of wisdom. Now, with all of that in your minds, as we're taking our breather here, with all of that in your minds, as we're thinking about journeying realities and vision for what God can do and with refarming and flesh dynamics and categories for understanding people, as we're thinking about all of that and putting it into our two central pillars on which we're building our model of SoulCare—of what's happening in me as I provide SoulCare—what are my ruling passions? How do I, how

am I thirsty, and how am I foolish, and all of that and what's going on inside of my interior world? What passions are ruling in me? As we're thinking about that, and thinking about the other person and what's happening in them, and wanting to develop wisdom—with all of that in our minds—I think we've come to a point where maybe with me you're saying, "So, this all looks kind of bad. Things are kind of a mess. I'm not sure where to go from here. Will this course tell me what to do?"

Before we can even begin to think about what to do, you've got to think about God's provisions. What I'm sincerely hoping is that all of the training so far has brought you to a position that you're saying, "Things really are a mess. I'm in desperate need of God. Yes, we're image-bearers, but we're fallen. We need God. What has God provided?"

I want to end this presentation by introducing one simple phrase that will be a thread throughout the rest of our lectures in course three. And the phrase is this: holy tension. What I want to do as we provide SoulCare together is I want to be talking about where a person is that violates where they long to be and leaves them with their tongue hanging out saying, "I want to be somewhere else, but I can't make it happen." That produces a tension between where I am and where I long to be, which then leads to a dependence on the provisions of God. And we'll begin talking about the provisions that God has made for SoulCare in our next presentation.

HOLY TENSION