

## Sacred Companions on a Sacred Journey: Three Defining Elements of Supernatural Relating



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*God is at home. It is we who have  
gone out for a walk.*  
—Meister Eckhart

As we begin our final of four courses on the topic of SoulCare, I want to set the stage with you by asking you to reflect on two sentences—on words that were spoken several hundred years ago by a medieval mystic named Meister Eckhart. Listen to what he said: “God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk.”

I want you to listen to those two sentences again. But this time, as you listen, let me ask you to close your eyes. And as I read those two simple, short sentences a second time, pay attention to what you feel. Pay attention to what happens inside of you as you listen to two, I think, profound sentences that really govern all that we’re talking about in SoulCare. People who provide effective SoulCare practice tuning in to what is going on inside of them. It isn’t a question of figuring out what’s happening in somebody else; it’s tuning in to what’s happening inside of you. So practice that just for a moment. Close your eyes and tune in to what happens inside of you as I read these two sentences again, spoken several hundred years ago by a spiritual mystic.

Here are the words: “God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk.” Open your eyes and ask yourselves, “What do you hear? What did you hear? What are you thinking as you hear that? What do you feel?”

Let me share what happens inside of me as I ponder those words. I feel two things. I feel both exposed and enticed. Somewhere, down deep inside of me, I know that I’ve walked away. I don’t know what that means, but I know I’ve walked away. I know that the Bible is true about me when it says that I’m like a sheep that has turned to its own way. I’ve walked away, and I’m not always certain how I’m doing that. I don’t know what that looks like at a moment of interaction with my wife or at a moment of interaction with a son or a good friend or a job decision. But I know that there is something in me that moves away, and I feel, when I hear those sentences, exposed and uncomfortable. I’ve been drawn away

from home, and I've followed my own way.

But maybe more than exposed, I also feel enticed. The enticement is this—and my guess is you're feeling the same thing: I want to come home. There's something in me that just longs to go back to the home, to the fire, to the sitting in the comfortable chair with a hot chocolate. There are all those images that call us into the safety and the rest of being at home. There's something in me that wants to come home. I'm not sure if I know the road that will get me there. I'm not sure if I know what home looks like or how to get there. I do know that in some sense my home is in God, and I want to meet Him, but I'm not sure how to do that. And I do sense—and I think I sense this because I'm a Christian—I do sense that there is a way to get home. I might need encouragement, and I might need a fair amount of help to get there, but there is a way. And I know—and I can say it glibly or I can say it meaningfully—that Jesus Christ Himself is the Way. He says that He has provided us with what He called a new and living way. A way to what? Well, a way to our home. A way to what it means to come back from our straying, into the center of who we truly are. And I find myself longing—and this, perhaps, is the theme of our entire course on SoulCare—I find myself longing, as I walk home, to walk with somebody else.

I find myself longing to find somebody who's a little further ahead of me on the path, who can say, "No, Larry, not quite there. Come this way. Here, take my hand. Walk with me home." I want someone to care for my soul, someone who can support me on the journey home and to shine a light on the path when it's hard for me to see the pathway home.

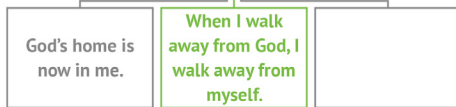
So my reaction to those two sentences is to feel both exposed and enticed. There are different levels of contemplation, different levels of meditation. As I have meditated on those sentences even more, my reaction of being exposed and enticed goes even deeper, and I find three thoughts stirring very deeply within me, thoughts that really sharpen what it means for me to be exposed and enticed. Let me share these three thoughts with you.

Let me tell you what they are and then spend some time commenting on them. Thought number 1—and this is remarkable; let the weight of these words hit you: God's home is now in me. That's my first thought. God's temple, God's sanctuary, the place where He lives, is literally now in me. As surely as I live in my home, God now lives in me. Thought number 1: God's home is

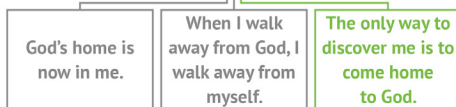
### Three Thoughts

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now in me.

Thought number 2: When I walk away from God, I walk away from me. When I walk away from God, like a sheep going astray, not only do I walk away from God—which is the central disaster—but secondarily, and yet very importantly, I walk away from me. I walk away from who I am. No wonder I feel unfulfilled and empty and not alive and not manly or, if a woman, not feeling womanly. No wonder something goes wrong within me, because when I walk away from God, I'm walking away from me. That's the second thought.

And the third thought that follows from the first two: The only way to discover me, the only way to find my true self, is to come home and to come home to God.

Let me elaborate on these three thoughts, three key ideas that, as we begin to think about our last course on SoulCare and what it means to move into somebody else's life and to care for their souls, three key thoughts that will give us a framework for our last considerations on what it means to provide SoulCare.

Thought number 1: God's home is now in me. God once spoke—if you know your biblical history, you'll know this—God once spoke from outside me. Once He thundered from Mount Sinai, and He talked about the law outside of me. He said, “Larry, here's what you need to do. Let Me give you My standards. Shape up. Do what you're told. Don't do this. Do do this.” He's outside of me, and He's talking, and then I have to sit there and listen to someone outside of me talking. But the fact is that, because of the New Covenant, He's no longer speaking from Mount Sinai. Now He's literally speaking from inside my soul, and if I'm to hear God as I spend time in the Scriptures, I'm not hearing Him speak through the Scriptures from outside of me into me. I'm hearing Him speak from within me, because He whispers now to my spirit within the sanctuary that He now calls home, which is my soul. If that's true, if God's home is now literally in me, then that has some radical implications. The first of which is this: that the journey to experiencing God, which is what my soul wants more than anything else, the journey to experiencing God is a journey into my own interior world. Now think about that for a minute. One of the implications of that thought is that we're not going to find God merely by studying our Bibles. It's possible to know the Bible well. It's possible to know the theme of all sixty-six books and not to know God and not to know yourself. The journey to finding

God is not limited to just distancing yourself from the Bible and studying it as an academic document. The only time the Bible becomes real is when you realize God is whispering through His Word from within, as the Bible stirs the reality of God's life within you.

It's also true that we're not going to find God by simply trying to figure out what God wants us to do. "Okay, I'm not getting along with my husband; what am I supposed to do? Okay, my kids are a mess. Okay, I'm depressed; I'm full of anxiety. What am I supposed to do?" That approach to making life work will never lead us to experiencing God.

That approach will lead us to a sense of pressure. And if things work, it will lead us to an experience of pride: "Well, I guess I got it right." Or, if it doesn't work, to discouragement: "I guess I didn't get it right."

The journey to God, though clearly directed by the inerrant Word of God, the journey to God, though clearly directed by the Bible and accompanied by a desire to do what's right, is a journey into my own soul, and it's a journey into your soul, because that's where God is present. That's the temple He lives in.

And when I contemplate, when I ponder myself, when I look inside of my own heart and when I do it prayerfully, meditatively, contemplatively, then maybe there's the possibility that I will actually hear the whisper of the Spirit from within His sanctuary, in the very center of my being.

That's the first thing I notice—that God's home is now in me and the implications of that fact are radical.

The second thing that I notice is this: that when I walk away from God, I walk away from me. To put it differently—I walk away from who I really am. I walk away from my true self when I walk away from God.

Now a question occurs. Why would anybody do that? Do we not want to be our true selves? Do we not want to know the God of the universe who loves us, who sent His Son to die for us? Why do we walk away from ourselves, and walk away from God, and take off from home, and experience all the consequences of being distant from God? Surely nobody—I can't imagine anybody—would ever walk away from God if they thought it would result in losing their

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sense of identity, if they thought it would result in losing their sense of joy. Why would anybody walk away from their home? Why would anybody walk away from God?

But because we do—the Bible says it, and our lives are a testimony to how often and regularly and reliably we do so—because we do walk away from God, then it must mean that somehow we’re very, very deceived in at least two ways.

First, we think we need something other than God to be whole. Something in my mind says, “Having God is good, but it’s not enough. I need a loving spouse. I need the right kind of family. I need a certain kind of health. I need a certain kind of ministry,” and so I walk away from God, thinking perhaps I’m pursuing Him. I walk away from God to get what it is I really need, and the center of my life becomes something other than God, because I’m deceived into thinking that I need something other than God in order to be whole. That’s how we’re deceived.

A second way that we’re deceived—you’ve all experienced this in your own life and you know people of whom this is true. You know that we sometimes actually convince ourselves that we’re walking toward God. We’re doing His will. We’re living as good Christians. We’re following His plan for our lives—when, in fact, we’re moving away from Him. The man who tries hard to get his life together, the woman who works hard at keeping her family together, the adolescent who thinks hard about what career to pursue, and who places total emphasis on getting life together, getting family together, getting career together—each may think that they’re pursuing the spiritual path. Each may think that they’re walking the spiritual journey, but, in fact, they may be looking for themselves someplace other than in God.

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis writes about people who prefer to be away from home, with themselves at the center, than to be home with God at the center. He describes folks who tenaciously cling to a favorite pleasure—in one case intellectual debate, in another mothering an only child—a pleasure that the person thinks they need to fill their souls with joy. This is what I need. This is the pleasure that is required for my soul to be whole. And Lewis goes on to describe how, when we hug a favorite pleasure close to our chests—whether that pleasure is obviously a bad thing (like sexual addiction) or something which looks wonderfully important (like parenting)—when we hug any pleasure to our chests closely, other than God, we never find our way home to the



glorious freedom of living adventurously and meaningfully out of our true center.

At one point Lewis observes about these people who fail to come home: There is always something they'd prefer to joy. We walk away from home.

A close look at our backgrounds—and in SoulCare you get to know each other, you explore and discover what is happening in people's hearts—and when you get ahold of a person's background and come to know what's happening in a person's life, you begin to understand that there's something that we have learned has more value to our soul's well-being than a deeper relationship with God.

One man told me that his father once said to him, "I know you're mad at me. I can see it in your face. You're trying to hide it. You tell me you're not angry. (The boy was about sixteen or seventeen years old, and the father was a mean kind of a guy.) I know you're mad at me. I will not stand for disrespect. You are wrong to be angry with me. I can see it in your face, even though you deny it." As a result, that boy got into significant trouble. And at that particular moment in a SoulCare conversation, he made clear to me that he made what I choose to call a defining decision. He made a defining decision, and the decision could be expressed this way: "If I can't hide what I feel, then I won't feel anything. When I feel things that get me in trouble, and I can't hide them, and I get whacked in the head by my dad for showing anger that I was trying to hide—if I can't hide what I feel, then I simply will make the choice to shut down my interior world, and I will choose to feel nothing."

I can recall a woman I chatted with who, at age eleven, after a moment of terrible abuse, made a decision that she would never cry again. It wasn't until she was in her late 40s, in an extended SoulCare conversation, where she broke down in tears, and that's when a new sense of her life began.

This man who made a decision that "I will never feel anything, because I can't hide what I feel and that kind of vulnerability gets me in trouble"—he said to me with his head buried in his hands and weeping: "I just can't find me. I have no idea who I am." Well, of course. Why? Well, he left home. He left home to find what he preferred to God.

In this particular man's case, what he preferred to God was the safety of feeling nothing that might get him in trouble, and the goal of feeling nothing that might get him in trouble, that became his home, his false home, and so he left his true home to find his false home, and as a result, he lost himself.

God is at home in our hearts. It is we who have left the center of our hearts, the center of who we truly are in Christ, and have gone out for a walk in search of something that we believe is far more valuable for our soul's health than knowing God—something that we think will bring us more joy and will protect us from more pain than if we abandon ourselves to God.

There is nothing that the sighted person sees that is more attractive than Christ. Why? It doesn't exist. But we think it does. That means we're blind. We're deceived. We're hallucinating. Nothing better than God exists, but we think that having a godly child, having a godly marriage, having a healthy bank account, having an experience in our hearts—we think something is better than having God, so we leave home to find it. That's the second thing I notice in Meister Eckhart's words—when I walk away from God, I walk away from me.

The third observation that I draw from Meister Eckhart's words—the only way to find me, the only way to discover who I really am, my true self, is to come home to God. But that presents a problem.

Sometimes I don't know how to do that. Sometimes in the middle of a crisis, in the middle of a battle, in the middle of discouragement, I don't know what it means to come home to God. It's even the case that sometimes I don't know that I have walked away from Him. I don't recognize the flesh dynamics that are ruling within my soul. I don't recognize that there is a strategy, and a determination within me, to find some way to make my life work without God, and I don't see when I'm doing that. My flesh dynamics are oblivious to me. I don't see it. I need help.

Secondly, I may have lost hope. Not only do I not see my own flesh dynamics, but there are times that I lose hope. And you can relate to this, I imagine. When we get so tangled in our own efforts to make our lives work, and we're trying so hard to get closer to a spouse or work through a conflict with a friend or deal with a child's situation—we're trying so hard to make life work that we've lost sight of who we could become. We lose sight of who we are in Christ and who we could become in Christ. I may

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have no idea at all of my true self, of who I was uniquely created to be, and who I will become when Christ is formed in me. I may have no clear categories for understanding my own story. And as I think back on all of the things that have happened in my life—as you think back on all the things that have happened in your life—not only do we lose sight of our flesh dynamics, not only do we lose a sense of hope that we could become somebody real, but we have no categories for thinking through all the things that have happened in our past. And I may have no one in my life—and this is the tragedy that this whole SoulCare curriculum is attempting to do something about—I may have no one in my life (and for most Christians this is true) with the passion of curiosity, who will listen to me tell my story, and with the wisdom of discernment, who can recognize how my flesh is in holy tension with my spirit so that I can. As a result, I never tell my story. There's no one who is listening with wisdom, and so, I live alone.

I believe that describes the experience of most Christians in the world today. Many people are sitting in churches, coffee shops, restaurants, and sporting events, all across the world, and these people desperately need SoulCare. They need to engage in conversations over a period of time with someone who knows that God is at home in their hearts—somebody who has the confidence in the New Covenant to believe that now the Spirit has taken up residence in the soul of this Christian person. And as they talk about their life, and talk about their struggles, and talk about their backgrounds, and talk about all the things that are going wrong, that the person has a confidence that, in the center of their being, the living God exists. God is at home in their hearts.

They need to engage in conversation with someone who knows that, but who also knows that they've walked away from God and that they are literally in danger of losing themselves. They need to be talking with somebody who knows also that there is a way back home. Wouldn't it be something if we could talk with somebody who has found that way, the way that is opened up through Christ, and is finding their way back through all of the difficult realities of life—historical and present, all the tangled emotions inside the soul, all the frustration—and they've found the path from where they are back home, and they can lead another person home to find God?

These people, all of us, need a sacred companion—a sacred companion to join them on the journey home. The sad reality is that there are only a few people, a very few people, who are able



## Becoming a SACRED COMPANION

to provide SoulCare. And I say it with great regret, there are very few churches that regard SoulCare as the center of their mission. This course comes out of a passion, a passion that God placed within me, to see a revolution in how we relate to each other, to see a revolution develop in how a church is released to become a community where SoulCare conversations are the norm, how a church can become a community of Jesus-seekers who journey together, openly, vulnerably, and honestly, and who journey together to God in relationships, first, of SoulCare and then, in relationships that involve evangelism.

As we prepare for this last series of lectures, let me review very simply and suggest to you what you already know—that, in course number 1, we talked about ten key foundations—each one rooted in biblical theology, not in tradition—ten key foundations for developing the passion and wisdom that we need to provide effective SoulCare. We introduced the idea of the passion-wisdom model of SoulCare and laid out ten key foundations for developing that model. That was course number 1.

In course number 2, I presented a basic model, a basic model to follow as we engage in SoulCare

conversations, a kind of roadmap, so that when you're sitting and talking with people, and you're feeling inadequate, and they're confused, and you get annoyed with them, and they're telling stories that you can't relate to, and you're just confused, and you want to get out of there and go watch television, that maybe if you have a basic model that can anchor you a bit—a basic model to keep in mind as we enter the messy interior world of people's lives as we're faced with our own inadequacy and our own confusion, and as we seek to engage people deeply with the passion of Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit—I presented a basic model in course number 2.

In course number 3, we spent our time thinking about provisions and practice. What has God made available? What are the provisions that God has given to us through the New Covenant that makes SoulCare possible? You see, SoulCare is not possible in the secular community in anything close to the same way that it is possible in the spiritual community. What is SoulCare dependent on? What are the provisions that God has made available that makes true SoulCare possible? And how will we relate to people, how will we practice SoulCare, if we're depending on those provisions?

Well, with all that in place, with all the material from courses 1, 2, and 3 in our minds, I want to devote this fourth course to thinking through how SoulCare could actually become a reality in your life—that you could meet a friend at a coffee shop; that you could go out for lunch after church on Sunday morning; that you could sit down with a group of people and find yourself engaging in meaningful SoulCare conversations. Can SoulCare become a supernaturally routine reality in our community? How can you join another person on their journey home? That’s the question we discuss in our last course.