



Lay People and Theophostic^{®1}-Based Ministry

Part 2: Promoting Healing, Preventing “Breakage”

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IV. There is risk in training and releasing lay-people to use powerful healing tools such as Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry, but the risk of *not* doing this is much greater.

A. There are a number of ways in which lay-people using Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry can cause harm.

For the lay ministers doing Theophostic[®]-based ministry, the single biggest problem we encounter is discouragement and drop-out.

- Poor overall effectiveness: Some lay ministers are quickly discouraged by a series of disappointing sessions, and eventually conclude that Theophostic[®]-based ministry is just another “new idea” that doesn’t live up to its promises. In our experience, initial discouraging results are most often caused by either unresolved issues in the lay minister² that are hindering their efficacy or inadequate training for the cases they are seeing.
- Specific lies triggered by difficult sessions: Other lay ministers have exciting initial success, but then become intensely triggered by one or several difficult sessions that stir up their lies. For example, a lay minister may be working with one of his children or a close friend, this very important person is in severe emotional pain and looking to the lay minister for help in a time of crisis, and the session becomes stuck for some reason. This situation can stir up miserable lies and emotions from the lay minister’s childhood, such as “I can’t do it” lies, and emotions of intense discouragement, associated with memories of being dyslexic in school; or “God won’t help me when I really need Him” lies, and emotions of deep disappointment, associated with memories of his mother dying of cancer despite their prayers; or “It’s my fault – something’s wrong with me” lies, and an overwhelming sense of failure, associated with memories of not being able to keep his parents from getting divorced. Getting these deep wounds and lies really stirred up is *very* unpleasant, and the enemy works hard to convince the new minister “This Theophostic[®] stuff is for the birds! I don’t know what’s the matter, but I sure don’t need to do this again.” We have seen very gifted and effective lay ministers decide to drop out of Theophostic[®]-based ministry after one or several really miserable sessions that triggered their deep wounds (fortunately, we were able to help them see that they were being triggered, and they were able to resume Theophostic[®]-based ministry after addressing the underlying wounds and lies). The lay minister is especially vulnerable to this kind of “triggering” drop out if they are not in community where someone else can help them identify and resolve the wounds

¹ Theophostic is a trademark of Dr. Ed Smith and Alathia, Inc. We do not claim any endorsement by or connection to the trademark-holder.

² See “Unresolved Issues In the Therapist: One of the Most Important Hindrances to Theophostic[®]-based Ministry” on the Articles and FAQs page of our web site for additional discussion of how unresolved issues in the facilitator can hinder their efficacy in Theophostic[®]-based ministry.

and lies that are being stirred up.

An especially sad long-term cost of these lay ministers who have negative experiences with Theophostic[®] is that they are now “inoculated” against Theophostic[®]-based ministry. “I tried it, but it was a big disappointment – lots of promises but no results,” or “No thank you, I had a bad experience with Theophostic[®].” They will also be a source of growing resistance in the Body, since they will often tell others about their unhappy experiences.

For the client, one of the biggest risks is being blamed by the minister for not getting healed. This risk is not inherent in Theophostic[®]-based ministry itself; a counselor aligned with any number of other schools of thought might do the same inappropriate blaming. There is, however, a particular risk in the Theophostic[®] paradigm, in that Dr. Smith teaches that if all the essential elements are present (lies, original memories, uninhibited emotions from the lies) and all the “clutter” is removed, Jesus will *always* bring his healing truth. A minister who is getting triggered into her *own* issues by something in the prayer session will more easily lose the non-judgmental, non-anxious curiosity and listening to the Holy Spirit which is needed to troubleshoot a stuck process. She is also more likely then to lash out in her own frustration, and say, “I’ve done everything I’m supposed to, and Jesus always wants to heal, so the problem must be you!” It *may* be true that what is blocking the healing is the client’s choice to hold on to some sinful defense rather than repent of it, face the painful memories, and receive the Lord’s healing, but we have found this to be rare. Inadequate training and/or unresolved issues in the minister are much more common causes of the process being stuck. Even if the problem is rooted in the client’s choices, judgmental blaming by the minister will not help the situation, and is a sin in its own right. Many people were blamed for the events that traumatized them, and carry lies about their wounds being their own fault. These people will be re-traumatized by being judged and blamed for “not trying hard enough,” “not really wanting to be healed,” or “blocking” the emotional healing process in some other way.

Another risk for both lay Theophostic[®]-based ministers and their clients is that of falling into deception. As with the other pitfalls discussed here, the biggest risk factors are the minister’s own unresolved issues³. For example, a minister may have a lot of shame lies himself, and have struggled for years with feeling unworthy. Then he has a few experiences of success in praying for folks and is overjoyed, feeling finally that he is “somebody,” after all. “God *does* answer my prayers! I *am* special!” It can be a heady experience, seeing the power of God gloriously transform people, and being an integral part of it. Gradually, he loses the safety of humility. He begins to think that he doesn’t need any help or supervision or accountability, because “the results prove that I’m doing it right.” The enemy gladly fans the sparks of pride into a flame, and pride, in combination with lack of supervision or accountability, give the enemy space and authority to lead the minister and his clients astray.

Finally, a serious problem can develop when the minister does not realize and take responsibility for her own power and influence in the emotional healing ministry process. While it is true that in Theophostic[®]-based ministry, it is Jesus who guides the overall process and who heals by providing the truth, the minister still plays an important role. The minister contributes leadership and direction by recognizing the Lord’s guidance, asking questions, helping to focus

³ “Unresolved Issues In the Therapist: One of the Most Important Hindrances to Theophostic[®]-based Ministry” on the Articles and FAQs page of our web site includes discussion of how unresolved issues in the facilitator increase the risk of injuring the person receiving ministry.

lies, helping to identify and remove “clutter,” and by helping to discern whether any words received are genuinely from Jesus. Another important part of this picture is that when the person receiving ministry goes back to childhood memories, he often gets triggered back to childhood emotions, and even “child” ego states, making him especially vulnerable. A client who is triggered back to a child ego state will be much less able to protect himself from judgment, anger, or any other errors on the part of the facilitator who is in the adult leadership role. As we have observed many lay people using Theophostic®-based ministry, we have been very encouraged by how safe these lay facilitators have been when they are humble and careful with this position of power. However, we have also heard Theophostic® facilitators disavow any leadership or power in the ministry session, claiming that they don’t influence the prayer time in anyway: “It’s all Jesus, I don’t do anything.” This lack of recognition of the reality of the human vehicle, and his/her powerful position in regard to the client, can make a minister dangerous.

There are indeed risks to lay people practicing Theophostic®-based ministry, although it should be noted that all the potential pitfalls which we’ve described are also possible for pastors and for mental health professionals, though hopefully less likely. Even though pastoral counselors and mental health professionals are trained to watch for and avoid these problems, they are still human and make mistakes. One reason it is so important for pastors and mental health professionals to get their own healing is that their professional training and judgment become impaired when their own wounds and lies get triggered. If they are triggered intensely enough, child-level emotions and agenda can be temporarily “in the driver’s seat,” with the professional training carried in their adult minds being temporarily “offline.” And if pastors or mental health professionals judge and blame the client, or make some other error, they’ll just do it with more sophisticated theological and psychological language.

B. Risks/benefits analysis:

I would like to propose that we approach lay people providing Theophostic®-based emotional healing ministry with the “risk/benefit” approach that we bring to many other situations in life. Many good things have risk (getting pregnant, driving a car, doing any kind of prayer ministry, etc.). It is untenable to avoid anything and everything that has risk. The way we deal with this reality in all other aspects of life is to weigh the risks and benefits in any given situation. Medical care provides an especially good example. In medicine, every treatment decision involves weighing the risk of potential harm against the potential benefits. *Every* treatment option has risks – even the most minor surgical interventions carry the risk of infection, and every medication has possible side effects to consider. Even aspirin, purchased over the counter and used by millions of people every day without medical supervision, can exacerbate stomach ulcers or cause an allergic reaction. The key in every treatment decision is to discern whether the probable benefits outweigh the risk of possible harm.

Another important part of thinking clearly is to include consideration of the risks of *not* doing something. Charlotte’s grandfather’s experience provides especially clear examples. Grandpa Stringham was a doctor on the mission field, and in some situations the risk of death from a certain surgical intervention might be 30% or even 50%. OF COURSE he shouldn’t do the procedure...right? One important fact changes the whole picture: The risk of death if he didn’t perform the procedure was 100%. Sometimes, if a person does not receive healing, the person is unable to minister effectively/loses his job/loses his marriage/hurts his child/or even commits suicide. Lay people providing Theophostic®-based ministry is not risk free, but sometimes the risk of no access to affordable effective ministry is even greater.

The current system, in which only mental health professionals and pastors with extensive training can provide care for deep emotional wounds, is more controlled and less risky for the providers and for the few that have access to this care and can afford it, but it is not “safe” for the larger Church. The risk of not training and releasing lay people to use Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry is that conflict and division between Christians, persistent sin, divorce, child abuse, substance abuse, depression, apathy, anxiety, suicide, etc. will continue to cripple the church.

C. Evangelism and discipleship as possible parallels?

Evangelism and discipleship provide an interesting comparison. It would be easy to argue that lay people should not be entrusted with the challenging and important responsibility of evangelizing and mentoring new believers. “Who knows what the average lay person might say? How can they be trusted to represent the complex and nuanced teaching of Scripture? If we allow lay people to evangelize and disciple, many new believers will certainly be confused, mislead, and even traumatized!” And this is true. Many new believers have been confused, mislead, and even traumatized by well meaning lay people who have shared the Gospel and mentored new converts without the benefit of seminary training, licensing, ordination, or formal accountability structure. In spite of all this, who would suggest allowing only ordained pastors with seminary degrees and professional accountability to provide evangelism and discipleship mentoring? Even though the risks and costs are great, we can all perceive that the whole congregation must share in these huge and important responsibilities. Instead of forbidding the average believer from evangelism and mentoring new converts, we accept that all Christians participate in these tasks, and then work hard to provide better training so as to limit the “breakage.” I think emotional healing parallels evangelism and discipleship mentoring, and propose that the church approach it in the same way.

D. Multiple tiers of training and availability:

I think it is accurate and tenable for us to have a structure for emotional healing similar to the structure we all accept regarding medical care. With respect to medical care, we all accept that many lay persons have been trained to provide CPR, that boy scouts with “First Aid” merit badges can provide advanced first aid, that EMTs and nurses can provide intermediate medical care, that family practice physicians can provide general physician medical care, and that physician specialists provide the most complicated and advanced medical care. Lay people with CPR training and boy scouts with first aid training save many lives because they are on the scene when immediate care is needed, and brain surgeons can responsibly remove brain tumors, providing care that nobody else is trained/prepared to perform. We don’t forbid lay people and boy Scouts from practicing first aid just because they aren’t board certified neurosurgeons.

With respect to emotional healing, I think it is reasonable to equip the average church member with basic tools, such as basic Theophostic[®] principles and techniques, so that they can provide care for the HUGE number of minor emotional wounds. We can equip pastors and a smaller number of lay persons with additional training, so they can provide care for intermediate emotional issues, and mental health professionals with advanced training can provide care for especially severe and/or complicated issues.

V. What can be done to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of lay Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry, getting more genuine healing to more people in a

responsible, godly way?

- A. Make sure you have the basic spiritual foundation (spiritual/Biblical/theological maturity):
- Salvation, the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and enlighten
 - Grounding in the Word of God, so that you can help the client recognize false words, and
 - Grounding in good Biblically-consistent teaching: Having a clear vision of what being healed would look like will help both the minister and the client recognize woundedness that needs to be healed. What can a healthy family look like? A marriage of two increasingly lie-free partners? What do ministries of service and compassion look like when derived from and motivated by our calling and freedom in Christ rather than our woundedness? We need to recognize the gap between what we're living and what God wants for us; if we don't have good teaching, we might just assume that our lies are reality. For instance, we might think that everyone is supposed to feel unworthy and undeserving of anything good; we might even spiritualize that feeling, calling it humility and a recognition of the greatness of God. When we get good teaching about our identity in Christ, we recognize that feeling unworthy and undeserving of anything good is distortion, and we begin to ask ourselves why we feel that way. This is the first step in the healing process.
- B. Find and/or develop specific ministry accountability and support structures.
- Spiritual oversight – if possible, talk to your pastor, and get his/her blessing. Or, you may become part of a different ministry group that provides a spiritual “covering.”
 - Clinical supervision – debrief with your ministry peers, and connect with a Theophostic®-trained mental health professional every so often.
 - Set up your life and ministry *purposely* so that some trusted others see you in action, and can and will give you their honest feedback. Work on your own heart so that you are open to hear what they say, especially if you disagree at first hearing.
- C. Make a commitment to *regularly* working on your own healing journey:
- Learn to look out for your own triggering – at any time – but particularly while you're ministering to others. Pay attention to your own emotions. Are you feeling anxiety, shame, despair? Anger or judgment? You may not have to stop the session if your own stuff is getting triggered, but you should at least make a mental note of what you were feeling to follow up later.
 - The fewer triggers you have waiting to be pulled, the less stressed and the more effective you will be. The negative results of your wounding are already there. Just because you don't know it, doesn't mean you're not affected. So it's good news when you actually become aware of some area of wounding that needs to receive healing from the Lord; the only way to go is up! This is healthy humility.
 - *If you are getting “triggered” frequently and intensely in sessions, you may need to reassess whether you are ready to do this kind of ministry.* Spending your energy getting more of your own healing first would be wiser, and also very educational for your later ministry.
- D. Keep in mind a realistic assessment of what it takes to become an effective Theophostic®-based emotional healing minister:
- The videos and manual are just the beginning
 - You *must* be willing to deal with your own unresolved issues
 - This approach is better learned by apprenticeship than by book, although some people do get the knack of it from the videos and manual only, and can do basic work successfully right away. Many people are more like us, who didn't do any harm, but were very ineffi-

cient – bumbling along with trying the process until we had actually seen it done successfully. There is a certain faith transfer that happens there, and an internal calibration of how much emotion is enough, what it looks like when Jesus has spoken, etc. It can be likened to medical residents getting used to how much blood is normal in delivering a baby. Having seen the Lord work in this way, people grow in their confidence to try ministering with others.

So be patient with yourself, keep learning and practicing, get your own healing, and pursue opportunities to observe experienced Theophostic®-based facilitators.

- E. Recruit prayer covering for yourself and your ministry, paying careful attention to the confidentiality regarding clients' personal issues. Encourage the people to whom you minister to recruit their own intercessors, who may or may not be present in the prayer session. See the handout on the Ministry Aids page of our website, "Recruiting Intercessory Prayer Support."
- F. Take confidentiality *very seriously*. Have a plan *before* you minister to someone, regarding whom you may want to talk to about the session, for debriefing, supervision, prayer support. Discuss the plan with the client in advance, and get his/her agreement about it. Make sure that the people in your plan with whom you chose to share are trustworthy and have the same understanding about keeping confidentiality that you do. Be especially careful when you are excited about what the Lord has done, and want to tell others about your ministry. It is far too easy to give too many details, even without any names, and have someone you tell be able to figure out whose story you're telling.
- G. Work with a partner.
- It is helpful to discuss places where a session becomes stuck or ambiguous, and it is especially helpful to debrief with a partner who was also in the session. Debriefing immediately after the session is most effective, and working with a partner generally makes this easier to do.
 - It provides additional intercession assistance and discernment
 - It helps to guard against inappropriate intimacy. Going to those deep emotional places with a person can be a very bonding experience. Don't underestimate the potential temptation to get some of your own emotional needs met through inappropriate intimacy with the person you're ministering to. Having another person present in the session can be a useful reality check if your own wounds and needs start to impair your judgment.
 - We recommend working with a partner, but we also recognize that there may be situations, such as praying with a sibling or a same gender close friend, that having a partner may be ideal but not necessary.
- H. Ask a few questions about what kind of support system this person has. If he/she were in a very emotionally stressed state after a prayer session, what resources of support would he/she have?
- I. Consider carefully with whom you work. Listen to your own gut; are you comfortable with this person? Ask yourself, "If this person were highly emotional (e.g., angry, anxious, fearful), would I be able to be relaxed, non-anxious, and continue praying?" How well a lay minister needs to know someone for ministry will vary greatly depending on the context of ministry. If you're ministering as part of a church team, meeting at the church building, and there are other people present in the building in addition to your prayer partner, you can more safely minister to someone not well known to you, than if you're ministering by yourself in your basement, with no one else around. If the church or para-church organization with which

you minister employs someone with qualifications to pre-screen the folks receiving ministry, then risks are also minimized.

J. Never force anything.

- Recognize that you are in a powerful position with regard to the client. When the person you are praying for is emotionally connected to intense and painful childhood memories, she may feel to some extent like she *is* the age of herself in the memory. You, on the other hand, are an adult. An adult arguing with a child is not a dialogue of peers, and the adult must be sensitive to not overpowering the child emotionally. Similarly, some people have lies about being unable to say “no,” which further complicate their ability to speak up if they disagree with the direction you are suggesting.
- You could be missing a subtle guardian lie. Guardian lies are one of the most common reasons for the process to become stuck. If you feel like you want to force something, check again for subtle guardian lies.
- Remember that it is possible to be coercive verbally, not just physically. Emphasize that the person receiving prayer has choices, and that he/she always has the freedom to choose whether or not to proceed with the ministry time, without being emotionally or otherwise “punished” for stopping. A red flag should go up in your mind if you find yourself angry or judgmental at the person you are praying for. You may disagree with the person’s choices, but you don’t have to be angry, anxious, or judging about that. If you are, you are definitely getting triggered yourself, perhaps with some sort of “I have to fix this” lie. If you get caught up in trying to be the rescuer or savior, you will likely push more than you should, and even get in the way of the client taking appropriate responsibility for his/her own choices and behavior.
- The kind of forcing you want to avoid is different than coaching the person as he “stirs up the darkness.” Personal athletic trainers and labor coaches provide a good analogy – they aren’t forcing, but rather are helping, at the client’s request, to “push” in a very specific and focused way.

K. Don’t make symptom relief into an idol. Remember that our priority as Christians is being in relationship with Jesus. Symptom relief is important, but not as important as walking with Jesus. Both the Theophostic[®] facilitator and the person receiving ministry should continue in all the basic disciplines of discipleship, such as being a vital member of a local body of believers, studying the Word, prayer (of others types besides Theophostic[®]-based ministry), service, fasting, silence/solitude, etc.

L. Test the fruit over time as opposed to making pronouncements. When the session is over, don’t make absolute pronouncements about what has been healed. This can inhibit the person from saying whatever he truly feels, rather than what seems to make the prayer minister feel good about his or her work. Instead, let the fruit of the work speak for itself over time. Coach the person who received prayer to observe his feelings over the coming days and weeks, especially in situations which previously have triggered the emotions and lies worked on in the session. Encourage him to take notes on what is different – where new responses are possible, because the lies are gone – and also to note any situations which still trigger lies. The latter can be addressed in future sessions. There may be “splinter lies” left in the same memories, or there may be entirely different memories and lies that are getting triggered.

- If you pronounce a bigger healing than has actually happened, then later the client is in a bind when evidence of the unhealed parts surfaces. The client either has to essentially renounce your pronouncement, or has to chose to go into denial in that area – which makes healing more difficult there.

- You do not want to give the client any sense of conditional acceptance. You want to give the message that you will be glad to see them and will help them to the same extent you've already agreed upon, regardless of whether the prayer doesn't seem to have brought healing; you may be sad for the client, but not overwrought or angry if things "don't work."
- Rigorously "testing the fruit" is one of the best safety nets for Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry. It is one of the easiest and best ways to identify that something hasn't been fully resolved, and it is one of the easiest and best ways to expose various forms of deception (for example, demonic spirits or internal parts trying to counterfeit healing). If you are uncomfortable with rigorously testing the fruit of your Theophostic[®]-based emotional healing ministry, then you are being triggered, and it is very important that you find and resolve the underlying lies.

M. Be prepared for the possibility of referring people to someone else – someone with more experience and/or a mental health professional.

- This doesn't mean that you've failed. The person's issues may simply be beyond your training or experience to navigate.
- You may also make a "horizontal" referral, asking one of your ministry peers to try leading a session with your client. We use the expression a "different set of eyes, and a different set of lies," meaning that each person brings his or her own, unique perspective and also his or her own, unique set of lies. If one of your lies has been creating a blind spot, causing you to repeatedly miss important clues, a fellow minister with a different set of lies may quickly spot what you have been missing.

N. **This is really important.** In order to defeat the enemy's plans for strife and division in the Body, everyone in your ministry grouping must *covenant* to release judgments and to apply the Theophostic[®] principles to any conflict that arises among yourselves. Our experience of observing and consulting in many situations has led us to the conclusion that *almost every* significant conflict involves one or more of the people involved being triggered and/or judging. When this is the case, it is almost impossible to truly resolve the conflict without addressing the triggering and judgments. It is remarkably easy to resolve the conflict after the triggering has been resolved and judgments have been released.

- Look for triggering and judgments behind every significant conflict. Summarized in another way, look for judgments and triggering behind every significant conflict.
- Agree to "zero tolerance" for judgments against each other. Judgments are one of the enemy's most effective weapons for causing division in ministry teams, and they increase the toxic power of any wounds and lies that are being triggered. Charlotte and I have been amazed by how judgments make it difficult to resolve our conflicts with each other, even when we are already trying to resolve the conflict from the Theophostic[®] perspective of each addressing our own triggering. We have been equally amazed by how easily these same "stuck" conflicts resolve once we have released our judgments against each other.
- Start with yourself regarding judgments. As we discuss at length in our essay on judgments, it is much easier to see judgments in others, but we can't do much about them. While it is very difficult to see judgments in ourselves, those are the ones we have complete authority to release.
- Start with yourself regarding triggering: Just as with judgments, it is much easier to see triggering in others, but we can't do much about it. It is much more difficult to see triggering in ourselves, but that's what we have complete authority to acknowledge and address. When you have a big reaction to something, when you get very anxious, angry, or upset – in all likelihood, you are experiencing triggered emotions along with the truth-based emotions

appropriate to the present situation. You won't solve the triggered part of the problem by having a long talk with whoever precipitated your feeling upset and trying to get him or her to change or understand. Each person involved in the conflict needs to deal with his or her own issues. Then productive discussion of real disagreements in the present will be fruitful.

- Watch out for transference issues in your organizational relationships, such as projecting your issues with your parents onto your pastor or supervisor or team leader, and therefore erroneously interpreting their actions or words. Note when you yourself are in an "HTL" (High Transference Liability)⁴ position. Don't judge someone who may be transferring his issues onto you, but find a time to calmly name that possibility, and suggest that each of you receive Theophostic®-based ministry separately for whatever negative emotions are stirring.

VI. Conclusion: It should be clear by now that this kind of ministry is not to be undertaken by oneself! It should be no surprise that powerful healing is best carried out in the context of the body of Christ, in community. Theophostic® principles are simply a new level of understanding and equipping which God has opened to His Church – both for the healing and growth of believers, and ultimately for the healing, deliverance, and salvation of the nations.

Regarding our place in the Theophostic® community: We and Dr. Ed Smith, developer of Theophostic® Prayer Ministry, are concerned about the increasing number of people who seem to be confused about our place in the Theophostic® community. We respect Dr. Smith tremendously and value our friendship with him, however, we are not in any way officially connected with or endorsed by Dr. Smith and Theophostic® Prayer Ministry. We want to share our reflections, experiences, and discoveries regarding the Christian ministry of emotional healing, and many of the thoughts we share have arisen as we have integrated Theophostic® principles and process into our professional psychiatric and lay pastoral counseling practices. But we want to be clear that the material on our web site does not *define* Theophostic® ministry. "Theophostic®" is a trademarked name, and Dr. Ed Smith, the founder and developer of Theophostic® ministry, is the only one who has the right to define Theophostic® ministry.

We have studied many sources, including medical psychiatry and neurology, psychological research, various secular psychotherapies, and various Christian emotional healing ministries. Our emotional healing ministry includes the core Theophostic® principles and techniques, but we also include "non-Theophostic®" material. For example, our material on medical psychiatry and the biological brain, our material on EMDR, our material on dealing with curses, our material on dealing with spiritual strongholds, our material on dealing with generational problems, our material on journaling, our material on spiritual disciplines, our material on community, and our material on dealing with suicide-related phenomena are not a part of what we understand Dr. Smith to define as Theophostic® Prayer Ministry.

⁴ We heard this catchy phrase from the ministry of Leanne Payne, at one of her Pastoral Care Ministry Schools.