



Spiritual Disciplines and Emotional Healing Ministry: Choosing Healing

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For most Christian emotional healing ministries, the primary goal of the ministry process is to help the person receiving ministry get into the place where he or she can receive healing from the Lord. Theophostic[®] emotional healing ministry provides possibly the best example. In our assessment, most of the Theophostic[®] training developed by Dr. Ed Smith focuses on teaching the minister to help the person receiving ministry get into the place where he or she can receive healing from the Lord. Many people have asked an understandable complementary question: “What can the person receiving ministry do, especially between ministry sessions, to cooperate with this process?” The focus of this essay is how the person receiving ministry can use spiritual disciplines to cooperate with emotional healing ministry – how he can use spiritual disciplines as aids in getting into the place where he can receive healing from the Lord.

Many people realize intuitively that things that have happened to us in our pasts – especially traumatic things – influence our behavior in the present. But what’s been harder to discern is just how much and how permanently these things influence me. If I am not the fixed, unchangeable product of my past experiences, then how do I change? What part of my present reality is *my* responsibility to change? Can I simply *choose to believe* differently? To *feel* differently? To *do* differently? What do I have to ask and wait on God to do *to me*?

In order to answer these questions, we must first define a particular understanding of emotional symptoms which is common to a number of different approaches to emotional healing. We call this particular understanding the “Symptom-Source-Resolution-Cure”¹ (SSRC) paradigm. SSRC is not a specific procedure or method for emotional healing. It is a description of certain foundational principles. We are not the discoverers of these principles, but we are introducing this term as a convenient way to refer to them. A number of emotional healing methods are built on this foundation, but differ from each other in numerous other ways. “SSRC” gives us a way to refer to this group of foundational principles that they have in common.

Defining the term: We define the “Symptoms-Source-Resolution-Cure” (SSRC) paradigm as the following foundational principles: 1. Emotional *symptoms* in the present always come from an underlying source. 2. The *source* is almost always² unresolved emotional and/or spiritual issues³, and these unresolved issues are almost always (always?) associated with specific past experi-

¹ Emotional healing methods based on the SSRC principles include EMDR, Theophostic[®], emotional inner healing as taught by Francis MacNutt, some newer forms of cognitive and exposure therapy, and various forms of psycho dynamic psychotherapy (not exhaustive list). In our experience, EMDR and Theophostic[®] are the most well-developed and effective.

² The rare exception being purely biological causes of emotional disturbance.

³ In our experience, these unresolved issues can include false negative cognitions (lies), sinful self protective defenses, reactive sin, persistent sin, demonic infection, and truth based pain.

ences (memory anchors). 3. The *resolution* of the problem comes by dealing with the unresolved issues in the context of the memories where they are anchored. 4. Resolution of the underlying source issues results in *cure* – not improvement, not symptom management, but once and for all *cure*.

Our experience with SSRC emotional healing methods, especially EMDR and Theophostic[®], has convinced us that the SSRC understanding of the nature of emotional symptoms is accurate. Over and over again, when we take the time to look carefully, we discover in our own lives and the lives of people with whom we work, that our emotional symptoms in the present always come from a memory source, and that they can be resolved there, resulting in a cure. Living into this perspective has caused us to grow in our appreciation of God's creation of emotion. We have found ourselves paying attention to our emotions (or lack of them at times!) in new and more strategic ways. As we have stated elsewhere in our writings, emotions often are *not* a good measure of absolute truth, but they are a very good measure of something going on inside of us. The SSRC understanding helps provide the interpreter, so we can understand what our emotions are telling us. It helps us to solve emotional issues by working in cooperation with the way God designed our emotions to work, rather than by trying to force them into a box of our own creation. It also gives us hope when we're in the midst of emotional pain that a cure is possible – not just a way to feel a little less bad, but a cure which removes the source of the pain altogether.

So how does the Symptom-Source-Resolution-Cure paradigm for emotional healing illuminate the nature of our choices and responsibility for growth and change in our lives?

First, the core principles of the SSRC paradigm imply that I *cannot* directly choose to not feel the emotions that get stirred up in me when something in my present stirs up unresolved issues (lies, sinful defenses, truth-based pain such as grief, etc.). Oh, I can try to not acknowledge those lies, issues and feelings; I may even claim to not believe the lies, and make a vow to not feel the negative emotions, and succeed in hiding the lies and feelings from myself as well as others. But the lies and feelings are there, though disguised in some fashion, and will remain there until they are resolved at their source.

Second, the SSRC paradigm implies that I *can* choose to take responsibility for my unresolved issues, and for the negative emotions I experience when my unresolved issues get stirred up. I do not have to blame someone else or the circumstances for how I feel.

I cannot free myself from my emotional symptoms or unresolved issues by *directly choosing* them to be gone. I can choose to take responsibility for them, including making choices that will open the way for healing, and that *will* resolve my underlying issues and the emotional symptoms they produce.

It is at this point that the concept of “spiritual disciplines” comes in. Dallas Willard defines a discipline as “an activity in our power that we do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”⁴

Willard was not discussing EMDR or Theophostic[®] Ministry, or any of the other Symptom-Source-Resolution-Cure emotional healing methods, when he gave that definition of spiritual disciplines, but his definition is very helpful for us here nonetheless. Under this definition,

⁴ Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy*. (Harper San Francisco: New York, 1998) p.200.

submitting oneself to emotional healing ministry is a spiritual discipline one may choose to undertake. By practicing this discipline, one will likely become able to do many things one couldn't do by "direct effort." For example, I (Charlotte) previously would not undertake certain kinds of tasks, because my anxiety over possibly failing was too great and immobilizing. Even if I did force myself to try one of these tasks, the presence of a fair amount of anxiety impaired my performance. I couldn't just choose directly to not feel anxious. The anxiety wasn't coming from anything in the present about which I had a choice. The anxiety was coming from childhood experiences of feeling rejected and out of control to which I had reacted by protecting myself from the possibility of failure. When the childhood source of that anxiety was resolved during times of emotional healing ministry, the anxiety was eliminated. Taking on more difficult, risky, or even controversial tasks became something that I could do if the Lord asked it of me.

Note that a spiritual discipline, as I am using the term here, is not a meritorious work done for the purpose of earning forgiveness or other favor with God or people⁵. It is not the taking on of an ascetic lifestyle (here meaning deliberately deprived of physical comforts), as a sort of hunger strike to try to move the heart and hand of God. It is a choice to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in my life.

We are not passive lumps, completely determined by forces outside ourselves. Nor are we completely independent and able to save ourselves or fix ourselves or simply choose to feel better. We are, amazingly, living, unique, free-willed beings, created by and in the image of God, and designed to be in relationship with Him. Perhaps in the most fundamental sense, what *we* must bring to that relationship with God is our right and ability to *surrender*. By that I mean owning our responsibility to be a self with choices, and choosing to humble ourselves before God.

It should be noted that we don't, in and of ourselves, have the capacity to always do the righteous thing in any given situation. If we did, we wouldn't need salvation. We can, however, because of God's love wooing us towards Himself, choose to surrender ourselves to God in some way. That surrender is not so much an action as it is a giving permission, or a willingness to cooperate with the Spirit of God, to welcome God being God in our lives. Surely God will love you and long for you even if you are not willing to receive Him, because those things are part of who *God* is. But will He be able to forgive your sin and take you into intimate fellowship with Himself if you refuse to be forgiven? Will He dwell in you by His Holy Spirit if you are unwilling to receive Him? No. Part of the sobering reality and responsibility of being selves which God created as "other" than Himself is that we have our own wills, and we can choose to surrender to God's love, or we can choose not to.

When we speak of using spiritual disciplines for one's emotional healing, we mean deliberately using our God-given capacity to surrender to God (what we *can do directly*), to get in the position in which we can be healed by God (what we *cannot do directly*). It is helpful for the person seeking healing to have an intuitive understanding of this position. Then, cooperating with the emotional healing process of getting to this position will make more sense and flow more easily.

⁵ I don't know of any particular published source that *would* define a spiritual discipline in that way, but many people's reactions to the term give the impression that this is a pretty good summary of their gut-level understanding of "spiritual disciplines."

What characterizes the position in which we can receive healing from God?

There is quite a lot of overlap from one characteristic to the next, so the distinctions between categories may seem a bit artificial at times. But we have found it helpful to look at the position in which we can receive healing from God from several different angles:

Humility vs. Pride: The humility which characterizes one who can receive from God is not a groveling, self-rejection. In fact, far from self-rejection, humility is an *acceptance* of oneself as one really is, and a giving up of any false images of one's self. It also means giving up false images of one's family as more perfect than they really are.

Pride keeps me in bondage to looking like I "have it all together." Pride fears losing one's reputation. It fears people knowing the truth about oneself, and wants to hold on to appealing parts of one's reputation and image even if they aren't true.

Humility tremendously affects how we see ourselves in relation to other people. The humility that facilitates healing understands that I cannot ultimately judge or rightly evaluate other people's motivations. I may clearly know that something someone has done is wrong, but I don't know what circumstances and motivations led that person to the point of choosing to do whatever he did. I cannot know that I am fundamentally better than that other person – that if I had lived through whatever he had, I would have made a more righteous choice. Humility calls me down from my pedestal of judgments against others – even understandable judgments against those who perpetrated evil against me, when I truly was an innocent victim. My anger at being sinned against is not a sin, but choosing to remain in the place of bitterness and judgment will block my healing.

Humility is a recognition that I am the creature, and God is the Creator. My very existence is a gift from God, not something to which I am entitled apart from His love. Only in humility can I begin to surrender my bitter convictions that "My life shouldn't have been like this – God, you made a mistake, fell down on the job, didn't do right by me, etc." A position of humility gives us the freedom to entertain thoughts of God's greatness and sovereignty to work beyond our understanding.

Humility enables us to ask God for help: There's quite a lot in Scripture to demonstrate that God likes to have his children ask him for what they need. I don't think that's because he's a legalistic bureaucrat who won't authorize disbursements without the proper forms. I think it's because asking helps *us* get oriented in the right position to God. We're turned toward him, we're seeking him, we're stepping out in faith, even if it's not much, just by asking Him for something and then waiting to see how He responds. We're listening for what God will say. We're sharing our hearts with Him. We're taking a risk on Him. We're humbly admitting that we can't fix ourselves or our circumstances ourselves; we need God. If I am still trying to hang on to the notion that I am self-sufficient, then I am blocking myself from receiving. Self-sufficiency and receiving help are mutually exclusive.

Honesty vs. Deception: Honesty goes hand in hand with humility, each one enabling more of the other. If I am humble, then I'll have an easier time giving up my self-deception and false images of myself and my family. If I am honest, then I'll have an easier time seeing and confronting my pride. In our experience, honesty happens progressively, though not without deliberate effort. We choose to ask God to help us be more deeply honest about what's going on inside of us, and He reveals as much as we're willing to see. We embrace that much, experience greater freedom in humility, get rid of some more lie-based pain or other unresolved issues, and then our capacity to be honest increases.

What does honesty look like in the position in which one can receive healing? It may be simply admitting to oneself that one is really disappointed that one's friend forgot one's birthday.

It may mean choosing to really recognize and question the amount of time you spend playing computer games, or shopping for things you don't need and shouldn't spend money on, or watching television instead of being with your children. It definitely means learning to notice and own what one actually feels, even when there is a significant gap between that and what one thinks one should feel.

Acceptance vs. Denial (refusal to accept reality): Another "lens" through which to look at the position from which one can be healed is that of acceptance vs. denial (refusal to accept reality). As with the other characteristics described here, living in an attitude of acceptance grows the more healing one gets. The more healed we are, the more we can withstand the pain of accepting the truth about the good and the bad in our lives. And, the more one cultivates and chooses acceptance, the more one can access one's painful wounds, and let God heal them. Healing is facilitated by our acceptance of reality. Acceptance may be needed regarding the reality that I could not protect myself from my mother's rages, or that I was ashamed of my alcoholic father, or that the culture in which I grew up devalued me because of my gender/race/economic status/birth status, etc. Much as I would like to make things a certain way in my life – or make them *have been* a certain way in my past – I may not be able to have it the way I want it. I do need to honestly face any feelings I have about "It shouldn't have happened," or "It was wrong that it happened." But allowing our minds to focus on those thoughts as a way to try to avoid the pain that "It did happen" is a dead end, and doesn't lead to healing. I need to accept, ultimately, that what happened, happened.

Another variation on acceptance vs. denial is minimizing the pain: "It didn't really hurt anyway," or "It's so petty to even remember those things." Or, many of us say to ourselves "Others have had it so much worse" – which may indeed be true, but usually we're using such an assertion to try to convince ourselves not to feel our own pain. Acceptance means acknowledging reality – that even if someone else suffered something worse, I still have pain over what happened to me.

It's important to note that the position of acceptance which facilitates healing is *not* accepting that "It was OK that this bad thing happened." Acceptance which leads to healing means saying, in essence "I accept the reality that this bad thing did happen, despite the fact that _____ (*no one should have to be abused like this, God doesn't want children to suffer, it was wrong, etc.*)"

My (Karl's) own experience provides a good example of the importance of acceptance in getting to the place where I can receive healing. I find that I sometimes try to protect myself, especially from the pain of vulnerability and helplessness, by refusing to accept some aspect of this broken world. Instead of accepting that the Lord *does* allow certain bad things to happen, and standing straight in the pain of these traumatic events, I demand that He change the rules. This seems ridiculous and outrageous to my adult mind, but when I am connected to the child ego states associated with certain painful memories, I feel completely justified in a position along the lines of: "Lord, I *refuse* to accept that You allowed the bullies on my playground to frighten and humiliate me, and that You continue to allow angry, violent people to frighten and humiliate innocent victims. I *demand* that You acknowledge (publicly) that You are wrong to allow this, I *demand* that You apologize to me for allowing it, I *demand* that You go back in time and make it not have happened, and I *demand* that You promise to never allow it to happen in the future."

In contrast to this is the place of acceptance: "Lord, I accept that you *did* allow these painful events to occur in my life, and that You continue to allow people to hurt each other in this way. I even accept that you might allow me to be hurt in this way again. Help me to stand straight in the pain – the pain of vulnerability and helplessness (You allow this kind of thing to happen, and I

can't protect myself), the pain of...(whatever else applies to the specific situation).” When I accept that the Lord *did* allow the painful events to occur, and that He *doesn't* guarantee freedom from injury and pain in this broken world – when I let go of my defense of refusing to accept the painful truth – then I can stand straight in the pain *and be healed*.

Vulnerability vs. Self-Protection: The position from which one can be healed is most definitely an emotionally vulnerable position. In describing vulnerability as a characteristic that one can choose to cultivate, I am NOT saying that one must have it mastered before emotional healing ministry will do any good. In fact, much of a typical emotional healing ministry session may be spent on helping a person get his or her mind to be willing to be vulnerable around some specific memory and the lies and lie-based pain rooted there. Rather, I am saying that when one realizes how essential and important it is to be vulnerable emotionally in order to get healed, one can make choices in one's everyday life to learn to do it. Then, when one does have a ministry session, one's will is accustomed to recognizing the choice to be vulnerable, and has some practice in going in that direction. Also, by cultivating vulnerability in one's everyday experience, one is more likely to find the true roots to one's present pain – which can then be focused on at the next available ministry time.

The characteristic of vulnerability can be described as a specific dimension of honesty pertaining to one's emotions. Choosing vulnerability means staying present to one's actual pain, and not retreating into numbness or a facade of not caring. Choosing vulnerability means accepting the reality of one's suffering, instead of “solving” the pain with self-protections such as vows not to feel, “running away” into substance abuse, or nursing bitterness or revenge.⁶ Vulnerability will let other people see my brokenness, or my areas of sin. Vulnerability will admit to weakness or woundedness or sin even when everyone else in a situation won't admit *their* stuff first.

Spiritual disciplines, connection, and community. Choosing humility, honesty, acceptance, and vulnerability fosters authentic connection and community, which also help put one in a position to receive healing. We have found that deliberately exercising our choices to cultivate the qualities described above has greatly blessed the sense of true connection in our marriage and our closest friendship community. Choosing to seek out and acknowledge my own unresolved issues nurtures trust in relationships. The people closest to me will trust me more when they see evidence that I will respond to my own negative emotions in a productive, constructive, responsible way. More trust encourages more honesty. More trust establishes a more safe-feeling relationship, and encourages more humility and vulnerability. More and more, we sense that wonderful safety of being truly known and also loved. The joy found in such relationships then becomes a significant additional resource for being able to face our pain. Without going in to the detail here of *how* we see this working, we have found that some of the earliest wounds, which have a profound, yet often unrecognized impact on our sense of identity and ability to form healthy, joy-filled, trusting relationships with others, are most effectively identified, accessed, and healed in the context of truly loving and authentic connections in community. One can get a certain amount

⁶ Since much harm has been done, especially to wives, in not supporting those who are suffering from physical abuse by their spouses, and their very real need of protection, perhaps a special clarification is needed here: cultivating emotional vulnerability in the case of a wife who is being battered may be better accomplished by her choosing to separate from her husband while his abusive behavior persists. Choosing to separate from her husband may disable patterns of self protection that have been invisibly embedded in staying with him, and actually expose her underlying issues. For example, staying with the abusive husband, focusing on him, and trying to manage his emotions and behavior can also be part of avoiding her fear of abandonment, fear of failure, shame, etc. Choosing separation will quickly bring these important issues to the surface, where they can then be addressed.

of healing going to an emotional healing minister as one would go to a surgeon – where there is very little if any personal connection or relationship between the doctor and the patient – but some unresolved issues you'll probably never be able to even acknowledge, let alone get healing for, outside of loving and authentic connections with others. It is still God who does the healing in the latter case; we are not talking about us healing one another, trying to fix in the present pain which is really coming from memories of the past. We are simply saying that another dimension of the position in which we can receive healing from the Lord goes beyond our individual relationships with God. God's commands that His children be a family to one another, and function as one body with Jesus as the Head, are not unrelated to our healing needs. God knows how He created us to function best, and that involves taking the risks involved in being connected to one another, letting ourselves truly be known.

So how can I use these Spiritual Disciplines to get in the position in which I can receive healing from God? What specific steps can I take?

The spiritual disciplines for emotional healing, then, are exercises in surrender, choices which cultivate humility, honesty, acceptance, vulnerability and ultimately authentic connection with others. We have found that in any emotional situation, there is some opportunity to surrender to God – there is at least one choice which is within our capacity, which will help us get in that place of receiving healing from God. The exercises described below grow out of our own experience, both with our own healing, and with others. Some of the exercises may be used in the context of a ministry session; all apply to spontaneous situations in life. We have found a certain synergistic effect between the practice of these disciplines and the receiving of emotional healing in ministry times: the more healing we get in specific ministry times, the easier it gets to practice these Disciplines all the time, and the more we choose to practice these disciplines, the more smoothly our specific ministry times flow.

Read and reflect on the preceding section to get a clearer picture of where you want to be: As the adage says, you never get there if you don't know where you're going. Knowing what this place looks like helps us to spot the opportunities to choose to be there. Knowing what this place looks like also helps us see the gap between where we are and where we need to be, and this helps us focus the opportunities to choose differently.

When you notice the gap between where you are, even at times, and the position in which you can receive healing from God, ask yourself some questions. If possible, take a mental step back, and cultivate curiosity about yourself rather than condemnation. If you are tempted to flog yourself because you are so prideful, for instance, stop instead and ask yourself why you need that pride. Ask yourself, "What job is my pride doing for me?" Ask the Lord to give you insight. It may be protecting you from feeling the worthlessness or inferiority that is emanating from unhealed wounds. It may be protecting you from fear of rejection. Note that being curious doesn't mean that you're not taking responsibility for your sin. The plan isn't to explain why it's OK for you to be prideful. In fact, by noticing the pride and asking the Lord to show you the roots of the emotions *in you* that are driving it, you are taking responsibility for it, rather than blaming someone else for "making" you feel or act that way. You are agreeing with God that the pride isn't good, and are working at changing that sinful pattern in a strategic and effective manner. You could try to eliminate your pride (or at least the outward appearance of it) by willing it away, but why not fight smart?

Next, look for the opportunities to surrender to the Lord. If you recognize that your pride is protecting you from feelings of shame, then surrender any self-deception about your true feelings. We have found it helpful to pray those thoughts directly back to God, such as, "Lord, I confess

that I'm protecting myself by being prideful; really I feel so worthless, and I am afraid that everyone else sees and thinks that too. At this place in my heart, I really feel shame." Ask the Lord to help you deal with your true, vulnerable feelings directly. At some point, you may surrender the avoidance of "seeing" and feeling memories from which those feelings of worthlessness and shame are coming. Then you're in the position in which you can receive healing from the Lord, and remove the pain and consequently one of the driving forces behind the pride.

Choose to acknowledge and own what one is actually feeling, thinking, and/or experiencing. Since honesty is one of the essential characteristics of the position which allows one to receive healing, a simple discipline to practice is the exercise of one's choice to acknowledge, at least to oneself, what one is actually feeling, thinking, and/or experiencing. Choosing in the direction of healing means making an ongoing commitment to learning to recognize when one is turning away from, disguising, or hiding what one is actually feeling, thinking, and/or experiencing – and then taking steps to *not* turn away, disguise, hide, etc. This can be a lot harder than it sounds. It also takes practice, because our habits of self-protection often have a *dis*-honest component to them, and we don't at first realize what we are doing when we simply act on a long-standing habit.

What's really bothering me? Some people are aware of pain in their present lives, but have no conscious connection between that present pain and lies lodged in their memories. If you are one of these folks, it is quite possible as you set out to practice this discipline, that you are *not* consciously aware of any turning away from, disguising, or hiding what you are actually feeling, thinking, and/or experiencing. So, try this: any time you are upset about *anything*, no matter how convinced you are that it's really all about the present situation, pause and ask the Lord to help you see the full picture of what's going on in you. Reaffirm to the Lord and to yourself that you choose honesty, and are willing to see/feel/remember whatever may be connected to what you're feeling in the present moment. Reaffirm to the Lord and to yourself that you want to take responsibility for whatever is getting triggered in you, regardless of whether other people in the present situation take responsibility for their triggering that's complicating the situation (an exercise in vulnerability). Ask God for grace to be in that place of honesty. Then listen. In our experience, insights about connections to our own unresolved issues usually come to mind. There often isn't time right at that moment to do ministry around those issues, but just seeing the connections serves several good purposes: 1) It often helps reduce my emotional reactivity in the present. Suddenly there's less "noise" in my head, and I can think more clearly. 2) Being more honest with myself and with others in the situation is often helpful to the others as well; they can pick up my more humble stance, and may be less defensive themselves. 3) It gives me a good place to come back to later when I do have a chance to pray about what has come up.

The more we practice the above process, the easier it becomes to recognize our own triggering. As we continue to practice, triggering that used to be confusing and hard to acknowledge has become increasingly easy to identify and own. And that skill – recognizing and owning when one is triggered – will definitely help one get to healing faster when one does sit down and take time to receive ministry.

Some other people may seem to hardly ever get upset at all. Of course, the more one gets free of one's lies, the more one generally lives in a state of peace – a state in which one's emotional experience actually matches the truth of God's presence with us, His love for us, and His promise to care for us, even if He allows suffering in our lives. We would encourage folks, however, not to run away from doing their own healing work by hiding behind tightly held defenses that mas-

querade as the peace of Christ. God's heart of love for you means so much more joy than that. Furthermore, we'd say "You're only hurting yourself" except that that's not true! Locked down emotions and pain hidden behind defended walls, do not make for a person who walks in and exudes the love of Christ. Your family (especially spouse and children) and friends are suffering for a lack of deeper connection with you.⁷ And whatever lies are in you are negatively affecting you and the way you interact with God, people, and the world around you, whether you come across as a very emotional person or not.

If the above description seems to apply to you, your habits of self-protection – your defenses – are strongly in place, and functioning to keep you from noticing any of your lie-based pain that gets triggered in the present. Practicing the Discipline of Honesty for you begins with asking the Lord to reveal to you the ways in which you're hiding your pain and unresolved issues. It reminds me of a dental hygiene kit I was given in elementary school, after a related lesson. The instructions were to brush your teeth well, and then chew the special colored tablet, and swirl it around in your mouth. The dissolved tablet would stick to any plaque in one's mouth, staining it a sort of dark pink color, and exposing it for the eye to see. Likewise, when practicing the Discipline of Honesty, we ask the Lord to deliberately expose the defenses which are keeping us from getting to the true roots of our pain. Remember, the Lord is on your side! This is not an adversarial relationship in which you need to keep all your cards close to your chest, and not let the other guy take advantage of you. You are voluntarily seeking the Lord's help in exposing you. You are exercising your God-given ability to surrender, because you are choosing healing, and that means life, love, joy, and generally knowing God and His love and His being, more and more.

Take note of pain-numbing behaviors: A specific variant on turning away from, disguising, or hiding our pain is the use of pain-numbing behaviors, such as comfort eating,⁸ compulsive shopping, pornography, hours of television-watching, computer games, alcohol, workaholism, etc. Whether you are the type of person who is aware of feeling pain, or the type who tends to not feel at all, or to only feel anger (which is a common pattern), choosing to notice that your behavior is driven by some painful emotion is an essential first step of honesty. For instance, practicing the discipline of honesty for me sometimes means recognizing to myself that I am *not* truly hungry right now, my body does not need nourishment, I just want to eat! If I get that far, then I can ask the Lord to give me the grace to stay with whatever emotion I'm feeling that I'm reacting to by wanting to eat. If I can let myself stay *un-numbed* long enough, I usually become aware of some unpleasant emotion, such as anxiety, emptiness, rejection, etc. I can then ask the Lord to show me where that emotion is coming from, and I'm on my way to getting healing. Practicing pain-numbing behaviors is dishonest in the sense that we usually don't want to consider the fact that we're not addressing the real problem in our lives. We're trying to avoid the real pain at some level by numbing it or distracting ourselves from it instead. Practicing the discipline

⁷ And yes, your spouse can use your lack of warmth as a trigger for healing, and your children can eventually be healed of the lies they pick up from it, but surely we all want to be more to our families than trigger "opportunities"!

⁸ We use the phrase "comfort eating" to refer to the eating of especially palatable food, for the primary purpose of pleasure/comfort (as opposed to "hunger eating," which is eating in response to hunger in order to supply calories that the body actually needs to survive). Recent brain research indicates there are actually two separate areas in the brain for regulation of eating: one that motivates and responds to "hunger eating" (the dorsal striatum), and a separate, different area that motivates and responds to "comfort eating" (the nucleus accumbens). The nucleus accumbens is also the brain region associated with the reinforcing effects of drugs of abuse.

of honesty means making the little choices along the way that allow us to face our real pain directly.

There are many different perspectives on the benefits of the classical discipline of fasting, which I won't try to enumerate here. But one benefit can be the interrupting of our usual pain-numbing behaviors, and the discovering of the emotions driving them, as described above. From this perspective, fasting is a specific tool/technique to be used in the service of the spiritual discipline of honesty. If one is fasting from food, not only will one experience true hunger, but one will also have to confront any emotions one was keeping in check by eating. The same is true for other kinds of fasts, such as the giving up of alcohol, computer games, chocolate, masturbation, or even having the last word in an argument.

Ask God to expose your judgements, and to give you the grace to surrender them to Him. One specific defense which is so common deserves particular mention. It is the tendency of all of us to respond to pain with judgment. By judgment here I mean an attitude of self-righteous condemnation of someone or something else; I am not referring to judgment meaning discernment. We've written more extensively about the dynamics of judgment in our essay "Judgments and Bitterness as Clutter that Hinders Prayer for Emotional Healing" on the Ministry Aids page of our website. Karl and I have found surrendering our judgments toward one another to be life-giving to our marriage, and tremendously helpful in turning our unproductive conflicts into healing opportunities!

Common Hindrances to Practicing the Disciplines of Honesty & Surrender

Blocking beliefs/Guardian lies that hinder the discipline of honesty: Some people have specific lies which make it harder for them to be honest with themselves or others. Those lies then function as "blocking beliefs" or "guardian lies"⁹ – beliefs/lies which block healing of other issues as well. For example, some people grew up in families in which expressing emotion was cause for punishment, whether physical or verbal. Naturally, people from that kind of environment often develop patterns of not expressing themselves emotionally! In some families, "You have to obey me and you have to like it" was the rule laid down by one or both parents. We have worked with people who were punished for expressing anger, frowning, or even for not smiling (for not "liking it"). Addressing these types of lies can be particularly strategic in one's overall healing, since they not only generate their own lie-based pain in the present, but they tend to hinder the practice of the Discipline of Honesty and the overall emotional healing process.

Mistaking reporting for choosing allegiance: This is another specific example of a guardian lie which hinders people from being honest. People so often confuse the reporting of how things are inside themselves – such as what they're feeling – with choosing their allegiance. They mistakenly assume that saying "This is how I feel" or "This is what I'm experiencing" is the same as taking a stand that says "I'm proud of the fact that I feel that way, and it must be 'right' and 'rational' and 'good'." When people are thinking this way, it's not surprising that they don't describe all the different feelings and thoughts and sensations that come to them. They may even fear that naming that thought or feeling out loud will somehow make it more real and unmove-

⁹ Francine Shapiro developed this concept under the term "Blocking belief," and Dr. Ed Smith has developed this same concept under the term "Guardian lie." See *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Basic Principles, Protocols, and Procedures*, Francine Shapiro (Guilford Press, New York, NY: 1995) p. 188-189 and *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th Edition, Ed M. Smith. (Alathia Publishing, Campbellsville, KY: 2000) p.81-83 for their respective material regarding these terms.

able. So, if it is a thought I know I'm not proud of, or that makes me feel crazy, then I'll likely not even want to acknowledge it to myself, let alone to others. This kind of confusion may or may not be anchored in a specific memory. It may be simply the result of poor teaching and general cultural misunderstanding of emotions.

Understanding the SSRC paradigm of emotions helps to untangle this problem. Simply having a feeling doesn't mean that one's conscious choices are aligned with that feeling. Having a feeling that seems to be "irrational," or even abhorrent to your consciously chosen values, simply means that something in the present situation is associated by your brain with some situation in your past, and what you believed or learned in that past situation is shaping your feelings now. Simply having different thoughts, or even the sense of voices in one's mind, doesn't make a person bad or prove he or she is crazy. Conflicting thoughts in one's mind may be coming from the lies in memories that are being triggered in the present, such as a parent's constant corrections of "You're not good enough," which may echo in one's mind along with feelings of inadequacy or anger or shame. Or, one may have some amount of dissociation, even mild, which can manifest as a sort of committee discussion in one's mind. It is easier to acknowledge my true thoughts and feelings when I understand that everything I'm feeling comes from somewhere inside of me, but does not necessarily reflect my consciously chosen values, *and does not have to determine my outward behavior.*

Pay attention to what feelings emerge when you recognize an opportunity to surrender to God. You may discover additional strategic lies which hinder your being able to receive healing. For instance, if you have memories about always being blamed for the problems in a relationship, it may be particularly hard for you to admit your part in a problem for fear of being blamed for everything. Focus on those feelings of being inappropriately blamed, seek the Lord's truth for those lies in the original memories, and then return to your present challenge of surrendering, which might be owning up to your triggering in a conflictual situation, even if the other person isn't owning up to his/hers.

Using Spiritual Disciplines in the Ministry Session

During any given emotion healing ministry session, opportunities to surrender abound. In fact, I would argue that one will not get healed of anything without exercising this God-given capacity. For example, in order to be healed one must acknowledge one's pain and fully accept into one's conscious mind the memories which contain the lies or truth-based issues causing that pain. These are specific choices toward vulnerability, honesty, and acceptance. In addition, one must be willing to give up one's self-protections, such as anger, vows, or judgments, and accept instead God's solution for one's pain. These are specific instances of surrender. Even if one feels unable (meaning it's *not* within one's capacity at that moment) to give up one's anger, because at a deep level one is convinced that one needs that anger to be safe, one can still confess the reality that one can't let go of the anger, and choose to surrender by asking God to show you *why* you feel you need to keep your anger.

Furthermore, in working out this perspective in our lives and ministry, we've come to see that one of the key roles of the minister is in helping a person to identify what opportunity to surrender lies before him, and non-judgmentally inviting him to choose. This is often more difficult than it sounds. In our experience, when a person seems "stuck" in his healing process, the problem often turns out to be that neither the person nor the minister has correctly identified the choice before them. For instance, a person may feel stuck because he thinks the choice before him is to forgive his mother or not – and that to get to healing he must forgive – but he just can't

make himself willing to do it. Having a minister exhort or blame or shame this person to “forgive” is not what he needs. Even having someone fast and intercede for this person is probably not the most strategic intervention. More clearly identifying the opportunity to surrender which lies before him, and giving him space to choose will certainly help. The next choice before him may be whether or not he is willing to surrender the protection of the anger, and feel the vulnerable feelings underneath his anger, rather than try to “fix” his pain by remaining angry. Or the choice may be surrendering self-deception about what his mind knows are the reasons why he is angry at his mother in the first place – “seeing” and feeling the memories in which he felt hurt by her. Another example of a minister helping to identify choices may be observing that whenever a certain person receiving ministry starts doing deep breathing, that her emotional intensity decreases. The person receiving can then choose to surrender that pain-management habit (benign though it may be when not trying to get to the source of one’s pain) and experience the pain more fully, which then leads to its memory source, and the opportunity for healing.

A Word of Caution and Clarification

Venting Anger and Hurting Others In the Name of “Honesty”: Practicing the discipline of honesty does not mean that I must indiscriminately say out loud every thought and/or feeling which comes into my head, especially in the heat of anger. Acknowledging what I’m thinking and feeling to God and to myself doesn’t mean I have to tell everyone else around me. Also, simply acknowledging thoughts and feelings does not determine what I should *do* next. How open I am with others about the exact nature of my thoughts and feelings depends on various factors in the situation and the relationship I have with those others. Here are some guidelines that we have developed through our own experience:

- 1) Ask yourself, “Am I feeling judgmental, contemptuous, self-righteous, or condescending?” If you are, then confess and renounce those sinful attitudes before God before trying to communicate your feelings to the person you feel that way about.¹⁰ Many words spoken in the heat of anger, ironically, are not a true, honest expression of our underlying feelings. They’re often a tool of defense in the moment, an attempt to protect ourselves from feeling other, more vulnerable feelings, such as rejection, shame, powerlessness, or fear. Ask God for the grace and strength to recognize the vulnerable feelings underlying your anger, and then come back to this trigger later when you have a chance to receive emotional healing ministry.
- 2) Consider your responsibilities in the situation. If the person or people you are angry at are children (and you are an adult), remember that you are not peers. It is your responsibility as the adult (especially if you are the parent, or other responsible authority such as Sunday School teacher) to care for the child, and not the other way around. If the situation causing your anger occurs on the job, perhaps with a customer or client or co-worker, remember that you are being paid to do a job. This is not a peer friendship situation, with all parties agreeing to care for each other and help each other work out personal difficulties. In these types of

¹⁰ If these feelings come up in the context of a Theophostic®-type of ministry time, then it is right and appropriate to express out loud what one is feeling. The minister will have a much easier time helping the person who shares what he is thinking. A particular challenge, however, occurs when the feelings of anger, judgment, contempt, etc. are directed toward the minister him- or herself. An important part of the minister’s role and challenge is to help the person receiving ministry to process her thoughts and feelings from the symptom-source-resolution-cure perspective, even when the negative thoughts and emotions are directed at the minister. If the minister doesn’t get triggered, he should be able to do this. Note: This is one of the special challenges in working with friends or family, because it is easier for both the person receiving ministry and the minister to confuse which negative thoughts and feelings really are about the minister in the present.

situations, we believe it is better to acknowledge your feelings internally to God and oneself, but to save the work of processing them – naming all the vehement details out loud, figuring out which memories and lies they're attached to, etc. – to do with someone else, or alone with God.

- 3) Is there any intention to hurt? If you perceive in yourself any bitterness, desire for revenge, or desire to hurt the person you are talking to, then you are being triggered towards that person and/or are in a place of reactive sin. Start with describing your anger towards them and your desire to say hurtful things to them. Unless you are receiving ministry from a mature facilitator who is able to non-anxiously hold the perspective of "It's not about me," don't speak the thoughts and feelings until the desire to hurt the other person is resolved.

Conclusions:

We recognize that there's a certain risk in trying to delineate choices that we can make which help to facilitate our healing work. The risk is that people will snap back to a more familiar grid, and begin trying to *will* their feelings different again. And, worse yet, they may then turn towards others and blame them for not getting healed, because they're obviously not *choosing* to get healed! But those would be grave distortions of what we're trying to explain here.

What we are trying to say, is "Listen to your emotions. They are an important part of God's creation of you, and they're giving you essential information for your well-being and spiritual growth. Emotions are an important part of God's design for us to be whole, authentic people. Understanding your emotions will greatly increase your discernment, speed your healing, and open your heart to greater joy and satisfaction in this life."

Perhaps part of the challenge in becoming more attuned to one's emotions (or those of someone you're ministering to) is the realization that there is so much more to oneself than meets the eye. It can be very unsettling and feel somewhat out of control to entertain the thought that I feel things, and then as a result may act certain ways, for reasons other than what I consciously think! But here is where the grace of Jesus Christ comes in. Once we have made that essential surrender of our wills to God through Jesus Christ, everything is covered by His blood. Whatever we may discover when we start listening to our emotions, Jesus' love and power are sufficient to heal the wounds, forgive the sin, and restore us. We don't have to see the specific end to the journey before we embark on it, because we can trust the One who guides us. This is grace.

The spiritual disciplines described here are attitudes of heart and mind, not results of great talent and ambition. On the one hand, anyone can practice them, regardless of education or IQ or muscle mass. However, they don't just happen. One must cultivate them. And the evil in the world, and our lie-based pain work against them. The good news of course, is that God is for us, so who can stand against us? When we respond to God's grace and love with welcome, He gives more grace and strength, and takes us higher and deeper into Himself. Let us celebrate the ongoing work of God in our hearts and minds, and give God the praise He is due!