



Misunderstandings We Have Seen

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A friend, Kitty Wilder, sent us the following e-mail:

“Jane Willard (wife of Dallas Willard) had been listening to Christian radio KKLA 99.5 FM 2 p.m. to [name of person answering questions that day]. Someone had called in to ask what he thought about Theophostic. The response he gave was that there were some good things and some bad things about it. He explained that the counselor does not want the client to tell them anything so that the counselor can discern the problem. He said that there is some “hocus pocus” with this and that the counselors have very little training. He said he’d rather the person go and get someone more trained to do the counseling. Jane thought this sounded inaccurate and thought we should let him know to set the record straight.”

This e-mail has prompted us to begin “misunderstandings we have seen.” We are starting with answers to the misunderstandings in this e-mail, and will add to the collection as we encounter and answer other misunderstandings about Theophostic. Feel free to share these notes with anyone who expresses the misunderstandings addressed here.

Note regarding the appropriate use of this document: These notes are especially intended as a resource when interacting with people who are making negative comments about Theophostic but do not accurately understand the foundational principles and basic process. A *very* brief summary of the principles and process is obviously needed in this situation, since those making negative comments about Theophostic are usually not interested in watching the videos or reading either of the books written by Dr. Smith. These notes are *not* intended to be a stand-alone introduction to Theophostic for those who know nothing about it, nor are they intended as instruction regarding how to do Theophostic. See Ed Smith’s *Genuine Recovery* (2001) for an 80 page presentation of Theophostic ministry (written for clients receiving Theophostic ministry), and *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* (2000) for a 400 page presentation of Theophostic ministry (written for Theophostic facilitators).

1. Foundational principles and basic process of Theophostic: So many misunderstandings have to do with confusion about the foundational principles and basic process of Theophostic ministry that we wanted to start with a very short summary of them:

Foundational Principles:

- Unresolved traumatic memories are the true source of many current negative emotions, problematic reactions, etc.
- Jesus guides the client and Theophostic facilitator from the current symptoms to the underlying traumatic memories.
- The lies/negative cognitions carried in traumatic memories are an especially important source of pain and toxic power in the memories.
- Healing needs to take place in the traumatic memory, where the painful emotions and the lies/negative cognitions are carried.
- An especially important “active ingredient” in the healing process is Jesus’ replacing the lies/negative cognitions in the traumatic memories with His healing truth.

- The living Jesus Christ is uniquely effective in providing the healing truth
- Profound, immediate, and permanent healing of a given traumatic memory occurs when the living Jesus Christ comes to the memory with His healing presence and healing truth.
- Many things (bitterness, psychological defenses, unconfessed sin, demonic interference, etc.) can hinder the Theophostic process.
- It is possible to address these hindrances with the Lord's direction and assistance.
- The Lord always comes with healing once the interfering problems are removed/resolved.
- The Lord is able to and wants to resolve each wound to the point that the "traumatic" memory is completely peaceful and calm – to the point that all toxic power has been removed from the memory.

Basic Components of Theophostic Ministry:

- Identify a "target" present distressing emotion. If the presenting problem is a behavior, identify the present distressing emotion that comes immediately before the behavior. For example, a person may feel intense loneliness coming immediately before bulimic binging.
- Have the client focus on and stir up the present distressing emotion. Ask Jesus to lead him to the true source and origin of the problem. Ask the client to describe any thoughts, images, memories, emotions, and body sensations that come as he focuses on the present distressing emotion.
- Jesus guides the thoughts, images, memories, etc. that come into the client's mind, and these lead the client and therapist to memories with the same emotion as the presenting problem.
- As the client comes to these memories, the facilitator helps him identify the negative cognitions/lies that are attached to these memories and that produce the negative emotions.
- The client and therapist/**facilitator** continue to follow Jesus until the client has found the deepest memories with this same pattern of negative emotions and lies/negative cognitions (the memories where the negative emotions and lies/negative cognitions are anchored).
- "Stir up the darkness." The facilitator then helps the client focus on the memory, negative cognitions, and negative emotions – the client must put his mental cursor on the memory, lies/negative cognitions, and negative emotions.
- Ask the living Jesus Christ to come to this place of darkness with His healing presence and truth.
- Jesus reveals His healing truth directly to the client. This healing truth from Jesus permanently replaces the lies/negative cognitions previously anchored in these memories. Jesus also comes with healing to address any toxic power that is not coming from lies/negative cognitions. The "traumatic" memories lose their toxic power as the lies/negative cognitions are replaced with truth and as Jesus provides any other necessary healing.
- Trouble shooting. Bitterness, psychological defenses, unconfessed sin, demonic interference, and other problems can hinder the healing work. If the process gets stuck at any point, the facilitator helps to identify and resolve the problems that are in the way. The therapist/**facilitator** and client ask Jesus for guidance and assistance frequently during the troubleshooting work.

2. "The counselor does not want the client to tell them anything so that the counselor can discern the problem."

Gathering information: The therapist/facilitator does not gather history with the usual process of asking a lot of questions, but rather encourages the client to focus on the presenting negative emotion and asks Jesus to lead them to the source and origin, as described above. The client describes what comes to them in this context, as also described above. The therapist/facilitator often eventually gathers much of the usual clinical information, but does not use the usual

“gather history in the beginning” approach. My experience is that this approach takes less time, since Jesus is an excellent guide with respect to what information is actually needed for the healing process. Some churches, ministries, and counselors do an initial screening by written form or by interview, to determine whether the person’s presenting need is appropriately addressed by Theophostic ministry.

“Discerning the problem:” The primary source of “discerning the problem” is asking Jesus to lead the way to the true source and origin, and then following whatever comes into the client’s mind. The overall attitude is that both the therapist/facilitator and the client need to follow Jesus. If there is lack of clarity or confusion at any point in the process, the therapist/facilitator and the client work together as a team to discern the meaning of whatever the client has experienced. To my assessment, “the counselor does not want the client to tell them anything so that the counselor can discern the problem” is completely inaccurate.

3. **“The counselors have very little training. He said he’d rather the person go and get someone more trained to do the counseling.”**

It is true that many people doing Theophostic ministry are lay people with little or no formal mental health training. However, Dr. Smith explicitly encourages lay people doing Theophostic to work in a situation where they have supervision/oversight by a therapist and/or pastor with appropriate training. My wife and I are involved in a number of groups where lay people facilitate Theophostic, but with some kind of appropriate supervision/oversight. My observation is that the Lord has been blessing these people with wonderful healing in the lives of those receiving ministry. These lay people working under appropriate supervision greatly increase the availability and afford ability of emotional healing for the large number of people who desperately need it.

Also, there are a growing number of well-trained professionals who use Theophostic. Clients with especially complex problems can work with one of these professionals. Another option is for one of these professionals to provide closer supervision if lay people are providing ministry for especially complex problems. Our experience is that some of the lay people we supervise have observed profound healing, even with difficult cases that have not responded to therapy with well-trained professionals.

4. Atypical healing experiences – “Don’t put God in a box:”

A number of people have sent us notes describing healing experiences that do not look like typical Theophostic ministry. For example, “The Lord healed the person I was praying for, but he never identified or spoke to a lie,” or “The Lord healed the person, but never went to any memories.” Some who have sent these notes have been concerned that we might be “putting God in a box” by trying to make everything fit into Theophostic. Here are a couple thoughts. We will add thoughts to this section as we have them.

- Especially since we are doing so much training, we try to be very careful to present our material so that it will help teach and clarify basic principles, especially for those who are still learning. We have seen a number of situations where the Lord seems to have healed the person receiving ministry without explicitly identifying a lie. However, my experience is that it is usually possible to go back and identify the lie that was removed if I take the time to do so. I do this for examples we use in our teaching material to optimize teaching clarity and avoid confusion/-misunderstanding. The exceptions we have seen have been situations where the lies had already

been removed and the Lord was healing truth-based pain or where the lies had already been removed and the Lord was doing “clean-up” work to address lingering vows, judgements, etc.

- Our experience is similar to Dr. Smith's, in that we have found that the enemy uses deception to short circuit healing. The simplest and possibly most common is that he impersonates Jesus and counterfeits Theophostic healing, hoping that the person will end the session prematurely because they think the job is done. He then also tries to discourage them regarding Theophostic ministry when the symptoms come back later. We want to be open to the Lord healing people even more quickly and effectively, but we also want to be cautious of counterfeits that look good initially but produce fruit that doesn't continue. Since we have found the principles of Theophostic to be so consistently valid and effective, we are especially careful to test anything that departs from the usual Theophostic pattern. We have also seen healing that does not look like typical Theophostic, but we are especially careful to test it.