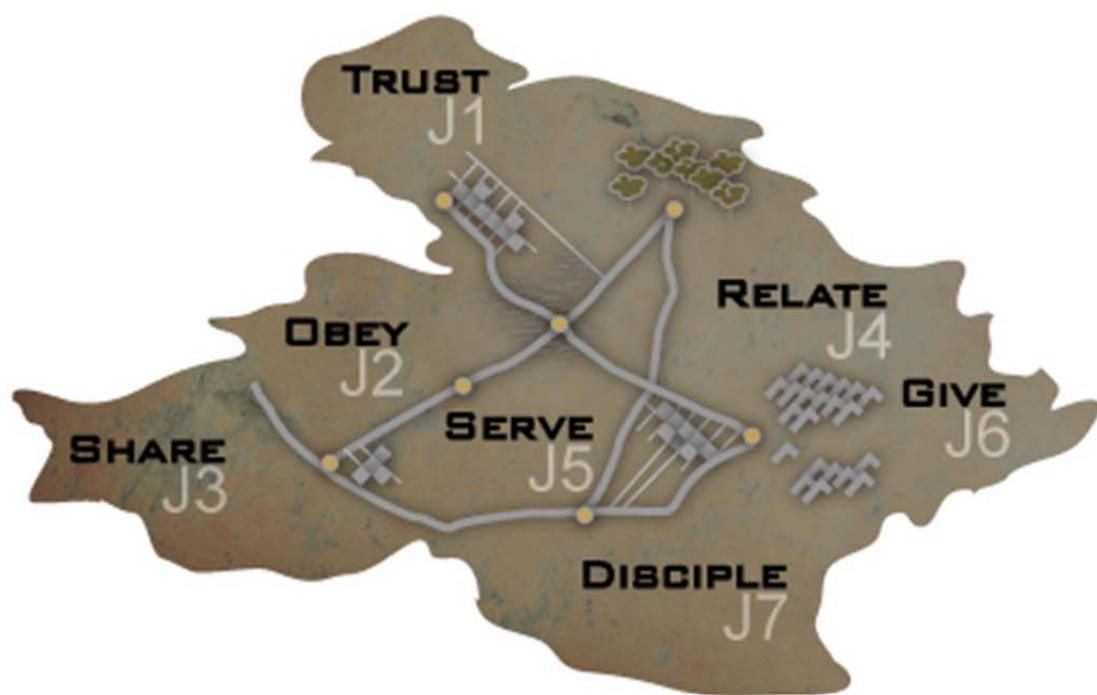


7 Journeys



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JOURNEY 2
SELF HEARTED TO SOFT HEARTED



The Dilemma

Neo, the main character in *The Matrix*, is a computer geek living in what appears to be a fairly ideal world. No crime, no war, no conflict. Yet Neo feels that something is somehow not quite right. One night at a bar a mysterious woman named Trinity approaches Neo and confirms what he has been thinking all along. She suggests that he meet Morpheus - a man who could explain everything.

"I imagine that right now you're feeling a little like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit-hole..." says Morpheus, sitting across from Neo in an abandoned building. "I can see it in your eyes. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees, because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth." Neo leans forward as Morpheus continues. "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here because you know something. What you know, you can't explain. But, you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

In his book *Inside Out*, Larry Crabb puts a spiritual spin on the metaphorical Matrix:

"No matter how together we may appear, even to ourselves, buried deep within our heart is the vague sense that something is wrong, dreadfully wrong." (p.33)

Agree or disagree? Explain your thoughts.

Life lived in the Matrix stirs up a haunting uneasiness that begs too many questions.

- Why am I here?
- Where am I going?
- What is the master plan?
- Am I the only strange person in this world?

There are things we'd rather keep hidden or forget altogether and questions we'd rather leave unanswered, so we ignore or deny their existence. We stuff them down deep, yet we cannot escape the feeling that things just aren't right. In desperation we search for something, some strategy that will make life make sense.

Journey 1 - Earner to Heir taught us that our spiritual journey requires a level of **trust** that is counterintuitive. We feel a compelling need to please God and earn his favor by trying to do "good." But the Bible is clear that this is not possible. So we have to trust that God's act of

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sacrificing His Son on the cross is enough for our entrance into His family. This is counterintuitive. It is offensive. And yet it is essential to our spiritual growth.

Peter Senge illustrates the benefits of counterintuitive behavior in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. While on a canoe trip with a group of friends, Peter observed a young man in a canoe by himself. It was obvious that he had indulged in more than his fair share of adult beverages. Senge's group arrived at a very dangerous breakwater where it was necessary to lift the canoes out of the river and portage to calmer waters below. They saw the young man floating by, oblivious to the danger ahead. They yelled to warn him; in drunken abandon he declared that he would jump the breakwater. He paddled faster. They ran to the breakwater, searching desperately for ropes, rafts, tree limbs, anything to keep this fellow from plunging to his death. All they could do was stand and watch as the young man and his canoe tumbled into the turbulent eddies.

He fought against the chaotic, swirling water, yet the outcome was inevitable. Peter and the others saw him submerge and tried to predict where he might reappear. Just 45 seconds later his body bobbed to the surface a hundred yards down river. Quickly they administered emergency procedures, but to no avail. That brief underwater adventure sealed his fate.

Peter considers what might have happened had the young man acted counter to his intuition. What if instead of fighting to stay above the water he had simply succumbed to the power of the eddy and allowed himself be pulled under? Just 45 seconds later he would have surfaced. Granted, the 45 seconds would have been terrifying, but not life-threatening. Unfortunately, his fighting and flailing cost him what little oxygen he had left in his body. If he had surrendered to the undertow, Peter believes he might have saved enough energy and oxygen to survive.

In those moments it would be difficult to have that kind of reasoning. When faced with the danger of drowning, what one of us wouldn't fight to keep our head above the water?

There will be moments in your spiritual journey when you will feel like you are drowning, moments when you will be at risk and you will fear for your survival. Those are the moments you will experience the greatest growth.

Jesus said it this way in Luke 9:24.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. (NIV-New International Version)

What do you think Jesus is getting at?

How does this make you feel about the spiritual journey?

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To understand how we got here, we need to go back, way back to the beginning.

The Beginning

The Bible describes a time when man and woman lived in a near perfect world. Not a false reality...it was the real deal. Read Genesis 2:5 through 3:24 in the Bible.

Good theater stirs emotion in the audience as we interact with the movement of the characters' joys, struggles, heartaches and triumphs. Consider the story of Adam and Eve as a three act play. What titles would you give to each of these acts?

- Act #1 – Genesis 2:5-25
- Act #2 – Genesis 3:1-6
- Act #3 – Genesis 3:7-24

From one act to another what movements do you see in Adam and Eve's relationship with God, with each other, with their environment and within themselves?

How do you explain Adam and Eve's discontentedness in the near perfect world God created?

What was the serpent's unique selling proposition to get Adam and Eve to do what God asked them not to do?

Adam and Eve lived in a world that made perfect sense...to God. For some reason it wasn't enough for them. What God said didn't matter most. They believed that God was withholding something from them, and they wanted it. The serpent suggested there was more to life than God had given them and promised that they could find it in the knowledge of good and evil.

Is it fair to accuse Adam and Eve of not believing that God was good? Why or why not?

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In the midst of experiencing something wrong for the first time, Adam and Eve immediately move to playing the Blame Game! They are quick to shed personal responsibility.

In what way did their world go from being God centered to being self centered?

In order to make life make sense again, Adam and Eve rationalize their disobedience. Their hearts had previously been inclined toward believing and doing what mattered to God. Now their hearts are bent toward meeting their own desires, wants and needs. They become *Self hearted*. In his book, *Connecting*, Larry Crabb describes it this way,

Drastic consequences follow when a creature breaks away from the creator. For Adam, the immediate consequence was terror. "Can I go back? Does he hate me? I can't bear to see his eyes. I must look away. I'll make it on my own. Let's see, what resources do I have for taking hold of my life?"

So Adam, and all his descendants with him, struck out on his own, independent from God, dependent on self, all because he did not believe God could be that good. (p.75)

Humanity has carried on the tradition of independently making life make sense ever since that original orchard encounter. We all have committed to managing our lives all by ourselves, refusing to connect to a God we don't fully trust. This practice begins at childhood and is perfected over years of trial and error. There are several components that contribute to the way we have chosen to "do life" apart from God.

Let's get personal and consider your history, your story. Your personal history leads to a personal set of beliefs that you learned to live by. You may not be aware of these beliefs since you've never sat down and listed them out on paper. But they control how you do life. Here is an illustration of what it looks like:

A highly intelligent forty-three-year-old woman, now divorced, was raised in what appeared to be, and in many ways was, a good, solid Christian family. Mom and dad got along well. They spent lots of time with their kids. And every Sunday they all piled in the car to go to a vibrant, Bible-teaching, Christ-centered evangelical church.

The woman (I'll call her Deb) accepted Christ as a six-year-old child. Her mother led her to Christ one night as she was tucking her into bed. When Deb prayed the prayer, her mom called her dad, who came into her bedroom with a huge smile on his face, hugged his little girl, and said, "I'm so proud of you. You've been a part of our family. Now you're also part of God's family." Deb went to sleep that night feeling as good as she had ever felt: My daddy's proud of me!

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But in her mid-teens, doubts began to surface. Were other religions wrong? Was her best friend, a Jewish girl who was really nice, going to hell? Was the Bible really true?

She was afraid to share her doubts with her parents, especially her dad: He's been so proud of me. I'd hate to disappoint him. So she confided in her youth pastor, an energetic twenty-something who was on fire for Jesus. She remembered his look of angry confusion. He said, "So what do you want to believe? C'mon, Deb. You don't believe Islam. You're not an atheist. And, yes, your Jewish friend needs to get saved. Have you witnessed to her? Are you praying for her? Invite her to youth group. Deb, with your family background, I'm really surprised you're asking all these questions."

Some teenagers would have gotten angry and rebelled. That's what I did when a youth pastor rebuked me for not being as involved as he wanted me to be in the activities he planned. But Deb felt shamed, devastated. She backed down and buried her doubts beneath renewed professions of faith. (By the way, my response was no better, just different.)

In that emotionally charged relational moment with her unwise youth pastor, a pattern already learned as early as age six was transformed into a resolution, a life-controlling decision: I will never disappoint anyone again. My life depends on it.

That's a lie. It's hellishly untrue, it's spiritually deforming, it's painfully isolating, and it's compulsively self-obsessed--nothing matters more than protecting myself from shame. The deepest desire of which Deb was aware was to always be approved, to disappoint no one. The worst problem she could recognize in herself involved all the worries and doubts and opinions and longings she had within her that, if exposed, were sure to disappoint people important to her.

As an adult, she worked hard to be a good wife. She never realized that she wasn't loving her husband, that she was rather protecting herself from him, fearfully demanding that he like her and enjoy her. Deb was a closet idolater, disguised as a godly woman. She lived for no greater purpose than winning approval. Her history of pleasurable relational moments ("Honey, I'm so proud of you") and painful relational moments ("I can't believe a girl from a family like yours would ever doubt the truth of Christianity") taught her lies.

Life? Disappoint no one. Death? Disappoint someone.

Deb entered this world with foolishness bound up in her heart: I'll find satisfaction in life and fix whatever's wrong with me without ever turning to God. I'll define what's good and evil. I'll decide what life is for me and what death would be. And if God loves me, He'll cooperate with my plans. He'll give me the life I desire and fix the problems I hate. He'll satisfy the longings I feel and protect me from the things I fear.

Deb's name is everyone. We all come into this world driven by foolishness. We all live in this world that, with Satan's help, shapes our foolishness into specific understandings of

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what's good and what's evil for us! We've all taken a bite of the forbidden fruit. (Larry Crabb, *Real Church*, p.66ff)

My Story

We all have a history similar to Deb. From birth to adulthood we are touched and marked by people and experiences. Some are positive and some are negative. We have had evil things done to us and we have done evil things to others. This is our history. Looking back on that history is often painful, yet it is essential if we wish to grow in our spiritual journey. Looking back is the only way to reveal the reasoning behind the life-strategies we've designed.

List 3 significant experiences that have marked you (positive or negative).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List 3 significant relational interactions (positive or negative).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What hopes and disappointments did you feel as a result of these experiences and relationships?

What personal beliefs did you develop as a result of these experiences and relationships?

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How have these personal beliefs affected your life? Or better yet, how would those closest to you describe how they have affected your life?

What regrets (should've, could've, would've) do you have as a result of these experiences?

“Beneath the surface of everyone’s life, especially the more mature, is an ache that will not go away. It can be ignored, disguised, mislabeled, or submerged by a torrent of activity, but it will not disappear. And for good reason. We were designed to enjoy a better world than this. And until that better world comes along, we will groan for what we do not have. An aching soul is evidence not of neurosis or spiritual immaturity: but of realism. (Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, p. 18)

Might the ache Crabb refers to expose the disappointment of an unfulfilled deep longing? Often the things we are most disappointed in are the things we hoped for the most. Our disappointment leads us to identify those longings. A man looks back on his childhood and is disappointed that his dad never seemed interested in the sports he played. He is mediocre athletic achievements never seemed to be good enough for his dad. This might expose in him a desire to be loved -- just as he is. A woman is disappointed that the husband she thought had her best interests in mind gambled away the money they were saving to get out of debt. Her disappointment might reveal a longing for security. A man strives to please his parents by fulfilling their dream for him to become an accountant. He goes to work every day, but deep down is disappointed in himself; he wonders if he could have done something more significant with his life.

Strategies for Living

How did your life strategy develop? Your *Story* (relationships and experiences) exposes your desires - to be deeply loved, secure and significant. Those *desires* motivate you to develop a *Strategy* that attempts to make sure those longings are met. As long as your strategy is not immoral or unethical you may live with it at such a discreet level you are not even aware it is there. You in fact often don't even recognize it as a strategy at all.

“What does a fish know about the water in which it swims all its life?” Albert Einstein

Ever ask a fish if it feels wet? If you have, I hope no one was around. A fish doesn't feel wet because its natural environment is water. Wetness is normal for a fish, so to feel his wetness is to feel normal.

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The counterintuitive nature of the spiritual journey is found in discovering our wetness. Wetness is the discreet strategy for living that we have developed by living our lives.

How you respond to people, how you interact with your environment, how you view situations, how you make life make sense is your *wetness*, it is an integral part of your nature - of who you are. The only time a fish can possibly not feel wet is when he is taken out of the water and exposed to the dryness of air. Similarly, we realize that we have created a system that informs all we say, do and feel when *it doesn't come through for us anymore*. As long as the system is working well we happily swim in our aquatic bliss. But sooner or later the system springs a leak. It threatens to drag you under and you find yourself struggling to keep your head above water, gasping for air. It is at this point that Jesus' words in Matthew 5:3 make sense,

“You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.” (The Message)

The Strategy Examined

What if your “nature”, your "wetness" -- the natural way you react and respond in order to meet your needs and make life make sense -- is not OK? Maybe the truth is you are self-willed, self-centered and self hearted. Perhaps your natural bent is to self and not to God or to others. Maybe even the things you do that appear “good” you do out of a selfish nature. What if the ways you've chosen to meet your needs are contrary to what God plans for you? Maybe your wetness is an excuse for sin. Maybe your wetness is like the Matrix that hides reality from Neo until he Morpheus offers him his choice of pills. Which will it be for you? The red pill or the blue?

In taking the red pill, Neo discovers that everything he believes about his life, his past, and his relationships is a lie. His escape from the Matrix exposes the truth – the painful truth that the world he once knew has been destroyed and that he was bred to be nothing more than a battery charger for the machines that have taken over the world. Naked and detached from the lifeline that created his false reality, Neo plunges into the painful but freeing truth.

Could your Matrix be that you are your primary strategy? Have you bought into the lie that to get what you want you need to be in control, to rely on your own confidence, to protect yourself and find satisfaction any way you can?

How do you depend on your own control to make your life work?

What kind of energy do you feel when things get out of control?

What exists in your story that connects you to this strategy?

Breaking free from this *Matrix* takes more than just unplugging and regaining consciousness as Neo did - it takes radical surgery.

Self hearted vs Soft hearted

Eustace is a primary character in the children's book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (by C.S. Lewis). Nobody likes him and for good reason. He is a nasty and selfish little boy. He boards Prince Caspian's ship with his cousins and they travel to the islands of Narnia. On one island Eustace stumbles into a cave to discover a mound of diamonds, rubies and gold coins. He's beside himself with joy and imagines himself standing tall, finally getting what he deserves and showing all the others how superior he is to them. Confident of his plan he falls asleep. When he awakes he realizes he is in a dragon's cave, lying on the dragon's treasure and that he has become the dragon himself. Now, his ambitions are lost. His greed has turned him into a mean, ugly dragon, covered with a thick skin of hard, knobby scales. His outer appearance now reflects the inner state of his heart.

Aslan, the Lion King of Narnia, arrives to rescue Eustace. He takes the boy-dragon to a pool in the forest and tells him to undress. Eustace discovers that the dragon skin comes off like a garment. He begins to rip and tear at the skin. But each time he scrapes off a layer of dragon skin, there is another one underneath. He does it again and again with the same result. Finally Eustace realizes that he is powerless to rid himself of the ugly dragon skin and Aslan tells him, "You're going to have to let me do it."

Later in the story Eustace describes the experience to his cousin, Edmond, who had a similar come-to-Jesus meeting in a previous story. "I was afraid of his claws... But I was desperate by now," Eustace says. "The first tear he made went so deep I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began to pull the skin off it hurt worse than anything I had ever felt before. He peeled the beastly stuff right off, just as I had done, except this time it hurt. There it was, lying in the grass only ever so much thicker, darker and more knobby-looking than the others had been. Then he threw me in the pool. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. Then I saw that I had become a boy again."

God promises to be our surgeon, to remove the dragon skin that hinders our growth. But He doesn't promise it will be easy or comfortable or safe.

Ezekiel 36:24-28

'''For here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to take you out of these countries, gather you from all over, and bring you back to your own land. I'll pour pure water over you and scrub you clean. I'll give you a new *heart*, put a new spirit in you. I'll remove the *stone heart* from your body and replace it with a *heart* that's God-willed,

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not self-willed. I'll put my Spirit in you and make it possible for you to do what I tell you and live by my commands...You'll be my people! I'll be your God! (The Message, *emphasis added*)

What fears, hesitations, and concerns do you have in realizing that God wants you to change, not superficially, but to be thoroughly transformed from the inside out?

Do you believe radical surgery is necessary? Why or Why not?

Desperation begs for change. Eustace felt it in his ugliness. So did the people of Israel who were scattered and broken. This change is not the “wash it away with soap and water” kind of change. It is a deep transformation from being self hearted to soft hearted.

Adam and Eve lived "naked and not ashamed" before God. Now that is a sense of security! They were given jobs to care for the rest of God's masterpiece. And that is a magnificent sense of worth and significance which God was pleased to endow them with.

Enter stubborn independence. Self heartedness. Sin. Adam, Eve and the story of Eden. In heaven the God of the Universe experiences agonizing betrayal.

Fast forward to a baby in a manger and a cross on a hill.

Despite being treated so harshly by all of humanity, God designs a plan to restore us to his family through the death of his Son. The one to whom creation is credited chose to be sacrificed for his creatures so He could again demonstrate that you are **unconditionally loved, secure in his acceptance and significant in his calling and purpose for your life.**

If you were God and sacrificed the thing that was most precious to you for someone who in essence said, "You've never been there for me, what you did really isn't enough." how would you feel?

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Does knowing you have broken the heart of God, break your heart? Explain your answer.

Understanding how I have broken and trampled the heart of God and then in turn allowing that to break my own heart enough to yield it totally to God is the essence of repentance and the path to soft hearted, spiritual growth.

Luke 18:9-14

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness [*and independent strategy*] and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NIV, *italicized words added*)

Think of an incident in which you were self-righteously self hearted, in which you looked down on someone else and their behavior. Be brutally honest with yourself. Use your own words and paraphrase the Pharisee's behavior as your own. In what way does your strategy foster your sense of superiority and keep you distant from God? Finish the following sentence in your own words.

God, I thank you that I'm not like other men/women who...

What would need to change in you to have the heart of the tax collector?

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We use the term *journey* for a reason. This is not an event but a process. To keep the process active in our lives we need to learn some skills and set expectations. This is vitally important to our growth because our goal is to be become like Jesus. Not just on the outside—but from the inside out. Proverbs 4:23 says,

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (NIV)

This is first and foremost a matter of the heart. Acquiring that depth of insight requires us to slow down and pay attention to things that aren't usual. Let me warn you, this is counterintuitive! *Most people's intuition leads them to embark on the spiritual journey because they want to feel better.* But as Larry Crabb says,

“Finding Christ is a long, pride-crushing battle that leads through despair to the unmanageable joy of Spirit-fullness and then back again through darker despair to an even brighter joy.” (Larry Crabb, *Silence of Adam*, p. 33)

Skills to Learn & Practice

- **Awareness**: This is the continual surveillance of my internal world to expose my wetness.

What have you discovered about your wetness doing this study?

- **Brokenness**: This is the necessary breaking that allows the essence of the internal to emerge. Examples of breaking are by default negative but if we stop and think for a bit we find that there are also many positive examples of breaking or brokenness. For example, seeds must be broken in order to grow into new plants and grain is broken to produce the fine powder we use to cook and bake.

How have you experienced brokenness in your spiritual journey?

Brokenness is often accompanied by deep emotions, sadness and grief. It is the deep pain we feel when we discover we haven't just broken God's laws but that we've broken his heart. We aren't just law breakers, we are betrayers of someone who loves us so much he refused to spare his own Son. Rather he delivered him up for us all (Romans 8:32). This hurts deep and could drive us to use guilt as a motivation to better our relationship with God. *Don't give in to that temptation!* This is where the next skill comes in!

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- **Repentance:** Deep emotions tend to move us to action. But again, if we allow our wetness to control us -- and it is easy to do that -- we are headed in the wrong direction. Most of us come to a point of realization and feel a sense of adequacy to right the wrong. But even though we feel the capacity to undo what we've done in our relationship with God (this is our wetness blinding us), the truth is we are totally inadequate and must trust God rather than ourselves for the remedy.

Repentance is often described as changing our minds but it is more than just a mental commitment. Repentance is the *visceral* reaction to brokenness. Visceral means a deep connection of our mind and spirit, a decision made at the soul level. It is not just an emotional eruption that relieves the guilt of our betrayal of God; it is a settled commitment to grow in our understanding of how our wetness has led us astray.

Are you feeling (or have you felt) a pull toward this type of reaction to your behavior? Explain.

- **Confession:** This is the reaction to repentance. Guilt motivates us to serve, to give, to do something to pay back the damage that has been done. Guilt feeds the delusion of adequacy. Confession is the Biblical response to repentance, to face the one we've betrayed and agree with his assessment of our betrayal.

Confession expresses a confidence and trust in God. We can face him and tell him that we understand what we've done. The power of grace is released deep within when our badness is acknowledged and owned in the presence of absolute goodness.

Let's stop for a moment and answer a difficult question.

What do you need to confess?

Spiritual growth from self hearted to soft hearted is not a quick and easy process. It begs a question that we must regularly ask ourselves: "Where have I fallen short, and what do I need to confess?" The journey from self hearted to soft hearted requires regular time with God in which he is invited to enter our world and speak to us.

Take some time to reflect and then write out your confession.

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- **Perseverance:** There is no substitute for perseverance! James, the brother of Jesus, says it this way in the first chapter of his letter in the Bible.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)

If our goal is to grow, to become like Jesus from the inside out (doing the right thing for the right reason at the right time), then we will learn to trust God -- even when it feels like the very skin is being ripped from our flesh. The pain is real, but it pales in comparison to the joy that follows.

God says in Hosea 2:14 to the children of Abraham, the nation of Israel, after a long diatribe about the badness they have been up to,

**"Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her." (NIV)**

Many times God uses the hard stuff to help us grow into who He wants us to be. In Romans 5:3-5, Paul says it this way,

...We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit! (The Message)

If we want to become like Jesus we will place our hope in God and his son Jesus and keep trusting even though our flesh tells us it hurts. Remember this journey is counterintuitive!

When you are ready to give up, what kinds of things can keep you going on?

- **Joy:** God set out mandatory celebrations for the children of Abraham, the Israelites. In fact, author C. S. Lewis said the primary occupation of heaven is joy. That is why this journey must include a regular dose of the joy of living in this world in the favor of a God who loves us.

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Unfortunately we often short circuit the process that leads to the deep and satisfying joy that God intends for us. We reach for quick, easy routes to a feeling that is disguised as joy but ends up being a cheap substitute. Joy cannot be manufactured or produced by artificial means. It is a collision of reality with truth. In *Christ Esteem* Don Matzat suggests a prayer that can be a way of celebrating who I am and what I am growing into despite my circumstances:

“I believe that in Christ Jesus my sins have been fully and freely forgiven, and I am a new creation. I have died with Christ to my old identity in Adam. I have been raised with Christ to a new life. I am seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. God has given to me the full righteousness of Jesus Christ. I am joined with angels, archangels, and all the saints in heaven. God is my Father, and if He is for me, who can be against me? Because of who I am in Christ, I am more than a conqueror. In fact, I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me. Christ Jesus is my life! Everything in my life here on this earth is working out for good according to the purposes of God. Christ Jesus Himself dwells within me. I have been called according to the purposes of God. These things I believe and confess, because God, my Father in heaven, says they are true. Amen!” (p. 96)

Stop right now. Take time to let the words of this prayer soften your heart. Recite it out loud; rewrite it by hand; memorize it. Do whatever it takes to let these truths take root and grow to maturity. *I'm serious. Stop right now. Put this study guide aside, and don't jump ahead until you've completed the assignment!*

A young concert violinist was late for her first rehearsal in New York City. She stopped a stranger to ask, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?”

“Practice, my girl,” the stranger replied. “Practice!”

This movement through Awareness to Brokenness to Repentance to Confession to Perseverance to Joy must be practiced regularly if we are to grow from Self Hearted to Soft Hearted. As with any discipline, it is difficult at first; but it becomes easier with practice and rewards along the way. Jesus states it best (as he always does) in Matthew 16:24-26.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? (NIV)