

Transcript of Faithful Brain Foundational Knowledge Lesson 10

Hello and welcome back I'm Dr. Leonard Matheson.

This is the faithful brain counseling foundational lecture series.

In the last few lectures, we been talking about sexual abuse. I presented two case studies on childhood sexual abuse and a third case study on childhood sexual abuse as it affects a mature woman.

Today we're going to be talking about sexual abuse as it affects even battle hardened veterans. In this case, a gentleman that I'll call Charlie, who was a police detective in Los Angeles, who was involved in tracking down and prosecuting the “night stalker” a serial killer and rapist who terrorized Southern California for a couple of years in the mid-1980s. Charlie's experience led to posttraumatic stress disorder and he came to me for treatment.

But before we take a look at the specifics of Charlie's case, we need to go back to an issue that I've touched upon several times, and that has to do with why we start with God in our vertical integration, why is God the context of the reintegration of our brains and our bodies and the reintegration of ourselves with those we love and others in our community.

The basic question is, *“Why do we have faith in God?”*

Well, the brain and nervous system have been designed so that faithful love nourishes and protects the brain and nervous system. Neurogenesis, neuroplasticity, neuroconsolidation and neural reconsolidation and neural epigenesis, all of those unfold optimally within the context of faithful love. And faith in God is not just an excellent place to start, but in my mind, the necessary place to start to develop our capacity for love, our capacity to fulfill our designed state of joy.

And, the most obvious reason for this is that God is entirely trustworthy and we are not. Faith in God allows us to move into a faith relationship with others without holdbacks and reservations and to learn to love without contingencies. The offer of God's covenant love is one that we can accept on the way to develop covenant love relationships with others.

And there are important neurological reasons to start our faith capacity development experience with God. All of these reasons revolve around the idea

that the brain and nervous system responds to trustworthy love that is both protective of the brain processes for growth and development and also nourishing and growth producing.

And a part of the picture is that, without God unfocused faith cripples our ability to love. There are many problems that we will encounter if we do not develop a healthy faith in a trustworthy and loving God. Faith that is unfocused and not beginning with God before progressing to attempt to develop faith in others will cripple our ability to love because ultimately everyone is not fully trustworthy. And the pain that we experience when we become aware of this, causes us to pull back which ultimately stunts our growth.

Alternately when we begin the development of our faith capacity by trusting God, we develop neural networks that are supported by values that trump all others. As we practice our faith in God, these become predominant which improves our ability to discern and more widely choose to trust. It's not that we trust less, we trust better. We are pleasantly surprised when those we trust grow to be more trustworthy and we are more forgiving when those people we trust fall short.

But without God, we get skewed love - not fully integrated with God's design of our brain, skimpy love - cut off from its most nourishing source, wandering love - that never finds its way home, and ultimately, dangerous love - that is risky to us and others.

Because our relationship with God is our template for our relationships with others, we must start with God first. The faithful brain model of counseling has three orientations: *vertical integration* that starts with God, *horizontal integration* that includes both hemispheres of our brain and integration with our nervous system, and *relational or coronal or interpersonal integration* that includes integration of our brains with all of the brains of those with whom we are doing life.

But, if we practice love without starting with God first we fall short, our own brain development is stunted, handicapped by the template of love that's presented to us by our imperfect parents in this imperfect world. We really need supernatural help to fully expand our capacity for love into how we were designed designed by God to fully participate in this life with joy. Recent neuroscience demonstrates clearly that our brains need love, brain growth is stimulated by love, love protects neurogenesis, love guides and protects neuroplasticity.

One of the most exciting aspects of the integration of faith and neuroscience for Christian counselors is that there is widespread evidence that our brain needs love. Love promotes healthy neuronal growth and healthy synaptogenesis, a fancy word for the underlying linkages that are a crucial part of neuroplasticity. We don't yet understand how love participates with neuronal pruning, which is the other major component of neuroplasticity, but it wouldn't surprise me to find that pruning is most efficacious when provided by people who love and care for us.

And clients ask me, *"What if I'm unloved?"*

Well, without love's stimulation, we do have smaller brains, we do perform poorly, we don't handle trauma well. Infants and children who miss consistent and strong love in their relationships from caregivers develop brains that are actually smaller and less well integrated. They have lower levels of resilience for psychological and physical trauma. They are more prone to develop anxiety disorders including posttraumatic stress disorder.

And one of the problems that led Charlie to PTSD, is that he had a long experience with trauma in his job even before he began working on the "night stalker" case. The traumas that are faced by many police officers in the daily grind of their work can wear down their resilience, actually creating problems in their brains that only God can heal. Being in a loving family relationship like Charlie experienced is helpful, but as you'll hear as you listen to Charlie's wife and Charlie's story as it unfolds in our counseling sessions, even that is not adequate.

I'd like to ask you now to stop this audio and go to YouTube look at Charlie versus the Night Stalker video ([Charlie and PTSD Redemption and Restoration](#)) and then come back and we'll talk some more.

Welcome back.

I'd like to talk with you in more detail about posttraumatic stress disorder. In this case, I'd like to focus on police officers but obviously posttraumatic stress disorder is something that we are all heir to. But police officers deal with us at the worst time of our lives, they experience both incidental psychological trauma and focused psychological trauma. Charlie was incidentally traumatized.

So, one of the questions I have is, *"How would you help Charlie short-circuit his PTSD?"*

Incidental psychological trauma stems from the emotional stress of an experience that is not directed at us. Being exposed to natural catastrophes or traumatic events that are directed at other people is distressful to us and produces psychological trauma. However, this type of stress is handled much better and is much less likely to produce subsequent disorders such as PTSD than is psychological trauma focused on us personally.

Personal psychological trauma is much more likely to lead to PTSD because it is so out of bounds in God's created reality. We are not designed to handle this type of trauma so we struggle with it and without guidance can develop strategies to handle it poorly. We can adapt to personal psychological trauma in the short run but will often find that this is maladaptive in the long run.

Unfortunately, it is fairly easy for us to personalize incidental psychological trauma also. This was the case with Charlie, as he began to identify with the husband of the rape victim that he interviewed. His interview with the rape victim and her husband led Charlie to compare her to his daughter which caused him to identify with the victim's father and husband. This turned a severe incidental psychological trauma into a severe personal psychological trauma that was beginning to create a posttraumatic stress disorder. Charlie tried to tough it out but ultimately it beat him down. Fortunately Charlie came to me and we used faithful brain counseling to address his trauma.

Charlie came to me early in my career and so the faithful brain model was not fully developed in my mind. I was early in my faith journey and my own experiences with how my developing faith in God was helping me deal with some of the traumas of my life, helped me help Charlie. My own experience in the early 1980s was that my developing faith in God and my relationship with Jesus was really helping me revisit some of the traumas of my life and recast them as growth steps, as steps in my spiritual development that help me develop emotional resilience.

The link between spiritual development and emotional resilience has been identified as a key component of the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program developed by the United States Department of Defense to help American soldiers handle the psychological stresses of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In these wars, the enemy is very difficult to identify and adequately objectify.

The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program was taught to noncommissioned officers to be the instructors and mentors of people they supervised, typically soldiers in their late teens and early 20s. In general, the program was effective

but was not found to be effective in the prevention of posttraumatic stress disorder.

The reasons for the absence of efficacy for PTSD are not yet identified in follow-up research, but looking at the design criteria for the interventions we can identify a potential problem. As I've taken a look at the design criteria, a key part of the problem is that integrating the soldier's faith as a resilience resource was watered down in the CSF so that what they called "spirituality" actually doesn't focus on God.

As the CSF program manual defines this, spirituality draws upon the personal, philosophical, psychological and/or religious teachings or beliefs and forms the basis of the soldier's character. At the very least this is confusing because most Americans link their spirituality with God. At the worst, CSF training without a focus on God may supplant the faith that has been a key part of the warrior's resources throughout history. Warriors across recorded time have called upon God to protect them.

We can take a look at the American experience in World War II to corroborate this. The serenity prayer is a prayer of petition for God's grace that was developed by American pastor Reinhold Niebuhr. During World War II a condensed version of the serenity prayer was printed on small cards and presented to soldiers who carried it with them into battle. Soon thereafter Bill W, the cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous included it in approved AA literature and it became adopted as a public prayer offered during AA meetings. *"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."*

An important component of the efficacy of this prayer is its public profession of dependence on God. In every group setting, the ability of individuals to develop clarity about their motives is clouded by pride. In AA meetings however, the public profession of dependence on God helps deflate some of the pride that would otherwise be in evidence during the meeting. The public nature of this dependency tends to level the playing field. Counselors can use this relational strategy to help clients both in one-on-one sessions and in group sessions to become more self-effacing and transparent and open to helpful guidance.

And my experience is that this dependence on God can often lead to what we call post traumatic growth. Remember, that only about 20% of severely traumatized people actually develop PTSD. More than half of the traumatized people develop posttraumatic growth.

How can counselors help people take a traumatic experience and grow from it? Well, for me the answer is very clear and that's what I call faithful brain development. Over my career I've had the opportunity to work with literally thousands of people suffered severe disabilities due to accidents and illnesses. Most of these were unexpected and all were initially unwelcome. However, when faced with severe trauma, many people not only cope with the trauma but respond to aspects of it as if it were a "just right" challenge.

The growth that is possible in the face of severe trauma is truly remarkable. Counselors must recognize the importance of this, and keep in mind that the people who are coming in for assistance are usually among the 20% of people who are struggling with the trauma and need assistance to grow beyond it.

Christian counselors can help clients who are struggling with severe trauma to move past the trauma to posttraumatic growth, guided by the Bible.

For more information about this, visit us at faithfulbrain.com, check out our [YouTube channel](#) and [Faithful Brain Counseling](#) and consider buying my book, *"Your Faithful Brain: designed for so much more!"* It's available at Amazon.com in both paperback, hardbound and Kindle versions. It's also available in many church bookstores.

Thanks for listening. Take care.