

2008 Turkey
Process and Cross
Spiritual Growth Lecture #4
2-9-08

JULIE

SLIDE: *My daughter Bronwyn struggled for ten years with mental illness—a disease in her brain that caused severe depression, mania, and panic attacks. Doctors tried all kinds of drugs. Prayer teams prayed over her again and again. She went through deliverance prayers in the case she was suffering from spiritual attacks. But the illness still remained. She would have good days and bad days. She also had many physical complications from the strong medicines she needed to survive. For years, she asked God why He had not healed her. Today, she is in full-time Christian ministry and is happily married. She still has good days and bad days, but this is what she told me. “Mom, I wouldn’t trade my bipolar illness anymore. Every person I meet, I can understand the emotions and pain they feel. I may not have been in the same circumstances they have suffered, but I can identify deeply with their hurts and I can help them. Now I know why God hasn’t chosen to heal me yet.*

► SLIDE #: *John 12:24: “Except this little grain of wheat fall in the ground and die, it abides alone. But if it dies it brings forth much fruit.”*

The question is not, “Is there life inside the seed?” There is life inside the seed. The question is, “Has the shell broken for the life to come forth?”

In terms of our spiritual growth, the issue is not, “Is there Life inside the Christian?” Christ lives inside the Christian. The question is, “Has the shell broken so the Life can come forth?”

God intends to break through our “outside shells.” He plans for people to see the Jesus Christ who lives within us and for the Lord Jesus Christ within us to be free to move out and touch people around us.

ROGER

DRAW: Two circles (imagine shells) represent two individuals.

The shell represents the outside manifestations of us that people tend to see when they interact with us—our wishes, desires, will, personality, strengths, weaknesses and talents.

One is a new Christian—recently indwelt by Jesus Christ. The other person is not yet a Christian. Notice that Christ is outside his or her life.

Spiritual infants don’t look much like Jesus. They can’t yet accurately and fully reflect Christ. Notice how Christ, like an embryo, is trapped inside.

To most, both individuals look much alike. Christ has not yet had time to make the inner transformations which will one-day manifest in Christ-like values and behaviors.

DRAW: God's strategy is simple. His design is to break down the outside shell to allow *Jesus Christ to minister out through us*, and to *allow the people outside of us to see through to the Christ inside of us*.

DRAW: God has a selection of hammers and wedges which may include challenging trials, painful life events, failed relationships, or serious illnesses. When He decides to process a part of our lives He selects a small wedge and hammer with which to hit carefully on just the right spot.

The writer to the Hebrews described this truth

► SLIDE #: Hebrews 12:5-11: "...My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves...Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.... Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good that we might share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasing at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it."

JULIE

When my children, Brianna and Bronwyn were little Brie had a school project that required using a stick substance called wheat paste that is a sticky substance like concrete, oatmeal or cement. Bronwyn was angry Brie wasn't paying attention so her and she began to poke and tease her big sister. Brie had had enough of her annoying little sister, so she emptied the entire bowl of wheat paste on Bronwyn's head. After two hours in the shower, Bronwyn came out sticky and fighting mad.

Discipline was administered as appropriate. I tried never to discipline them in anger.

The offending child was always hugged tightly and lovingly as I explained to them, "Brianna, Bronwyn (whomever), what you did was wrong. I want you understand what I love you too much to let you get away with what you just did. I want you to someone really special. So, I am going to punish you so you will never behave that way again. I am punishing you because I love you with all my heart." My goal was to produce a harvest of righteousness and peace in their lives.

Unfortunately, the most common response when God begins His sculpting work is anger and dissatisfaction: "God, why me? Why is my baby the one who is going to die? ... Why did the drunk driver hit my son? ... Why did my business fail? ... Why did I get cancer? This is not fair. If you loved me You would never let this happen to me!"

ROGER

A callus forms at the very point where God is doing His work.

Have you ever seen bitter Christians? Have you ever watched spiritual children murmur and complain against God because of how they felt about the way He was treating them?

When we refuse to submit humbly to the Father and thank Him for producing more likeness to Christ we get hard and calloused at the very point where Christ is doing His processing work. God says, "No problem. I can handle that response. I'll just use a bigger hammer and a larger wedge."

DRAW:

God will do His work. Therefore, we would be wise to "listen to God's little taps, and thus avoid His mighty raps."

JULIE

► SLIDE #: Romans 5:3-5: "... but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

We can thank God for our troubles and rejoice in them only when we can say with deep confidence, ► SLIDE #: "Thank you, God. I understand that even this difficult time in my life is allowed by You for the purpose of making me look like Jesus."

The shell of a spiritual child is still mostly intact. God's breaking work is showing results; but frankly, spiritual children do not yet look much like Jesus.

ROGER

DRAW: God is just beginning His work with spiritual children. There are only a few places for God to minister freely through a spiritual child—and certainly there are not many places for others to see through the child's personality and self to observe the Christ who lives within.

Spiritual young men and women have substantial gaps. Much more processing has occurred. Brokenness is progressing well.

Hardly any shell is visible around spiritual mothers and fathers. Very little of their self reliance, self-centeredness, self-condemnation, selfish wants and/or personal desires remain. People see clearly the person of Christ within and His ability to work through them is greatly enhanced.

► SLIDE #: 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...

JULIE

The principle of brokenness runs relentlessly throughout the pages of Scripture.

Chronologically, Job was the first Bible book written and the ideal of brokenness was implanted early. In the midst of his trials Job cried out:

► SLIDE #: “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Joseph was processed in the slave pits of Egypt.

Moses learned that the victory belonged to God in frightening encounters with Pharaoh.

Jeremiah matured in the cisterns of Israel.

Hosea was broken beside the hearth in his own home.

► SLIDE #: Our goal is not the suffering. The cross is the means, not the result. The goal is the Resurrected life of Jesus Christ.

► SLIDE #: Thank you, God; I know that every trial and trouble you allow is for the good purpose of maturing me to look like Jesus.

ROGER

I was concluding a three-month study on principles of spiritual growth just before the Christmas season began. Ten minutes remained in class when I asked, “Are there any final questions?” A very pregnant woman raised her hand and said, “You may have noticed that I have not said anything since I began coming to this class. I attend another church; but, I heard about this class and wanted to come. You can see that I am pregnant and I have wanted to ask a question but was too shy and afraid. However, I really want to know ... if I began to pray to be a spiritual mother at any price, is there a chance that God might take my baby?” The room hushed in silence. “I wish I had dismissed you ten minutes ago!” I joked. Everyone chuckled nervously. “I really don’t want to answer that question! But, I will do the best I can” “The truth is, I can think of some extreme scenarios where if you begin to pray to for maturity that your question might come into play. But, I certainly would not worry about it in your case. You go ahead and pray for God to make you a spiritual mother at any price. I am sure your baby will be just fine.”

I was working in my office several days after the New Year when my phone rang: “Hi, Remember me? I am the pregnant woman in your spiritual growth class who asked if God might take my baby if I began to pray to be a spiritual woman at any price.”

“Certainly, I remember you.”

“I just called to tell you that I went home that night and began to pray to be a spiritual mother at any price.”

“Oh, good, I am so glad,” I interrupted.

“I just wanted you to know that I gave birth to my baby three days ago. My baby lived for six hours and then died. I just returned home from the funeral. My pastor performed the service. Could you come over and see me?”

I was stunned—and felt awful.

She gave me directions to her house and I drove over with multiple trepidations coursing through my mind. How would she receive me? What should I say? What should I not say? Would it do any good to try to explain? Explain what? Should I just keep my mouth shut and let her do all the talking? “Oh, God, help me!” I prayed.

I parked in front of her house and walked up the sidewalk filled with consternation and fear. When her husband opened the door I saw that she was sitting, resting, in a recliner across the room. Her husband invited me to sit on the couch next to her. She spoke first, “I wanted you to know that I may never know if there was any connection between my prayer to be a spiritual mother and the death of my baby. But, I do know this—God will use even this for the good purpose of molding me to look like Jesus. Thank you.”

EXERCISE: How much of your “shell” is broken? How clearly can others see through you to the Jesus in you? How free is Jesus to minister through you to the people around you?

**EXERCISE: How far along are you in your spiritual journey?
Draw chart and circles and close eyes and raise hands.**

THE CROSS

JULIE

SLIDE: The cross is God's basic tool for making us look like Jesus.

SLIDE: Matthew 16:24: "If any man would come after me, let him deny Himself, take up His cross, and follow me."

Jesus asked three things. He invited His followers to deny themselves, to take up their crosses and to follow Him.

Notice He did not ask them to follow Him to be a missionary, or pastor, or to preach, to be a Campus Crusade Staff Leader.

Where did He take His cross? To Golgotha. And what did He do with it. He died with it.

ROGER

CHART OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

(The work of the cross is not finished at conversion.)

Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily."

In reality there is not just one big cross that we experience. There are many crosses we deal with daily. All of them are designed to lead us on to maturity in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the sanctifying work of the cross is kill the manifestations of our pride and sin natures—our self-reliance, self-centeredness and self-condemnation.

I Want To Teach Three Things Very Simply About Dying On A Cross.

SLIDE: Dying on a cross hurts.

SLIDE: Dying on a cross takes time.

SLIDE: Self crucifixion is not an option.

SLIDE: *DYING ON A CROSS HURTS.*

Asphyxiation: The science of crucifixion reveals that no one ever bled to death on a cross. As the crucified one hung with arms outstretched, strength failed rapidly. As the body sagged, the chest cavity compressed, exhaling carbon dioxide waste products was impossible without pushing up strongly with the feet. As strength ebbed, unable to exhale, the poor souls literally asphyxiated in their own carbon dioxide.

This is why the authorities broke the legs of the two thieves who were hanging beside Jesus. It was against the Law to have unburied bodies exposed on the Passover. As long as the thieves could push up with their feet and expel breath, they lived. But, with broken legs, they died rather quickly. Not one of Jesus' bones was broken. He dismissed His spirit earlier.

JULIE

Peter spoke of the pain in graphic detail:

SLIDE: *1 Peter 1:6: "In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These trials have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes, even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

DRAW

Gold ore was placed in a crucible. The fire underneath heated the ore until it melted. Since gold was one of the heaviest elements, it sank to the bottom.

As the relatively lighter impurities surfaced the goldsmith skimmed them off the top. He continued the process until he saw his face perfectly reflected in the gold. The gold was now pure.

God places His children in a variety of crucibles the crucibles—each one is best designed to burn off the impurities so we look more like Jesus.

As God heats up the fire those undergoing processing begin to melt. Jesus Christ constantly skims off the impurities. When He sees Himself perfectly reflected in the gold, He turns off the heat.

God will never heat up the crucible hotter than we can handle.

God has a thermometer inside every crucible calibrated with the letters, "L-O-V-E." Our Father carefully monitors the flame and the temperature, making it just hot enough, for just long enough, to boil away our impurities—so that we reflect the image of Jesus Christ.

SLIDE: Remember, "...there has no temptation overtaken us, but such as is common to man, from which God always provides a way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

ROGER

Dr. Harry Ironside was a masterful Bible expositor. He wrote a commentary on almost every book in the Bible. Dr. Ironside became hard of hearing in his older years. One of his students said, "Dr. Ironside, I'm having difficulty with patience. Would you please pray that God would give me patience?"

Ironside replied, "Certainly."

They got on their knees and Dr. Ironside lifted his voice to heaven and prayed, "Dear Father, would you please send this young brother some problems."

Knowing that Ironside was hard of hearing, the student interrupted the prayer: "Hold it, Dr. Ironside, no, no, no; I don't want problems. I want patience."

Ironside said, "Then, let's pray again." Dr. Ironside prayed: "Dear Father, would you please send this young boy some problems."

"No, no, no, no; I don't want problems. I want patience."

Dr. Ironside calmly quoted from James 1:2-4: "Don't you know that troubles and problems produce patience!"

SLIDE AND DRAW: 1 Kings 17:1: Elijah the Tishbite. 1 Kings 17:24: Elijah the Man of God

To Ahab: "No rain or dew." Gone

Brook Kerith

Ravens

Drying brook! "Is this the way you take care of your prophet!"

"Kerith" means "to cut."

Zarephath (smelter there)

Ask woman for a meal (thing of shame in OT times to ask a widow for food in a time of drought)

Shame

"You killed my son. Why did you ever come!!"

"Zarephath" means "to melt."

JULIE

SLIDE: 2. DYING ON A CROSS TAKES TIME.

Spiritual growth takes time. God is in no hurry.

SLIDE: Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

ROGER

DRAW: It was not until Albert Einstein that mankind understood that time is not constant. Time is relative depending on the speed of the observer (the faster we go the more time slows down for us). Time is also relative depending upon the proximity of an observer to a gravitational field (the more massive the body, the slower time proceeds). In fact, there are places in our universe, like the event horizon of a black hole, where time totally stops.

Is it possible that God does not measure time like we measure time? God declared in Psalm 90:4: "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."

One day I got out my calculator and considered a relative perspective from God's point of view. If one day is with God as a thousand years, then one year on earth equals 86.4 seconds in heaven. Now, of course, this analogy is totally speculative—certainly not literal. But consider the implications.

One of the most frequently asked questions I get from a new widow is, "Will he miss me?" I respond, "Let's put the answer in perspective. Let's say you outlive your husband by ten years. Will he miss you? Well, if one year on earth equals 86.4 seconds in heaven, what that means is that your husband dies and goes to heaven, and fifteen minutes later, here you come! He's probably still waiting in line to see Jesus!"

God is not in a hurry. How often it seems that our spiritual growth is proceeding so slowly. God might well respond, "No, from my perspective everything is right on schedule. I'm in no hurry. I am working for eternity."

JULIE

SLIDE: "It is often God's design to set a new Christian aside for a while after his initial start, so that self-confidence may die down."

Moses was forty when the call came. "Moses," God requested, "Will you set my people free?" "Certainly, God, I can handle that," the new missionary replied, and promptly went out and committed murder. God surely shook His head and said, "Moses, Moses, Moses, I sent you to be a missionary, and now you are a murderer."

For forty years Moses wandered in the wilderness tending sheep—useless to God and others. Finally, at the age of eighty, God spoke from the burning bush, "I want you to lead my people out of Egypt."

Moses replied, "Are you kidding! I can't do that, God." What a difference forty years in the desert can make!

God smiled and He thought, "Perfect. He is finally ready. Now I can use him for the Kingdom." By eighty Moses had finally learned that the victory belonged to God and not to him.

Paul became a Christian in his early thirties. Historical records corroborate that Paul was forty-nine when he embarked on his first missionary journey.

The average male-life expectancy in the first century was thirty-five. In other words, Paul was an old man when he set sail. For seventeen years after his conversion God left him out in the desert, making tents, until Paul finally understood that the victory belonged to God and not to Paul.

Finally, at forty-nine, God said, "Okay, now I can use you. Let's go on a journey."

SLIDE: "It takes God one hundred years to make a mighty oak. He can turn out a squash in six weeks." Which would you like to be? An oak? Or a squash?

Spiritual growth takes time.

SLIDE: By the way, we cannot speed up God's process, but we certainly can slow it down.

ROGER

Dying on a cross hurts.
Dying on a cross takes time.

FINALLY,
SLIDE: *SELF-CRUCIFIXION IS NOT AN OPTION.*

People commit suicide in all sorts of horrible ways. People shoot, hang, and poison themselves. They cut their wrists, overdose on drugs, jump off cliffs and drive into bridge abutments. But, when is the last time you read that some one committed suicide by crucifixion.

Lay down on a cross if you have the courage. Take a big nail, hold both feet in place and drive that nail through your feet. Take another big nail and ram it through your wrist, and with your free hand, hammer that hand into the cross. Now, try to fix firmly your other hand. It can't be done! No one ever succeeded in self crucifixion!

SLIDE: *PHILIPPIANS 2:13: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."*

God-engineered crucifixion means that the Father uses different methods and approaches with each of us.

I had open heart surgery for a hole in my heart when I was thirteen—and the doctors made a mistake—nothing was wrong with my heart.

My diseased colon was removed when I was twenty-four.

One of my daughters died in my arms.

One Saturday evening I sat stressed out weeping behind the burnt-orange couch in our living room.

The next Monday I was with a Christian counselor averting a nervous breakdown. I own a bullet-proof vest in which I have preached forty-one times (as of this writing) because of personal threats on my life.

Heart stopped (Describe riding the lightning.)

God said to me, "Roger, I'm using these things to mold you to look more like Jesus."

The point is that the life events that God employs to crucify me are likely not to be what He will use with you. God has many different means—and different plans and purposes—for each of His followers.

EXERCISE: Did you realize when you first became a Christian how much surrendering would cost? Share some examples of what God's maturing work has looked like in your life?

JULIE

An old Chinese proverb illustrates well the sanctifying principle of the cross and the resurrected life of Christ.

SLIDE: Once upon a time far off in the heart of the Western Kingdom the master came to walk day by day. In the midst of the garden there in the Western Kingdom was the most beautiful bamboo tree that ever grew in all the earth. The master would come by and look at his plants; but, he had a special affinity for that old bamboo tree. He watched it as it grew. He nurtured it almost to complete maturity.

SLIDE: One day, as the great master was walking through his garden, he came to that bamboo tree, and on impulse that bamboo tree bowed down in loving adoration of his master. The master said, "Bamboo, most beautiful of all the trees in my garden, I think that you're just about ready to become useful to me."

Bamboo said, "Oh, great master, if I can do anything for you, I will. Just take me. Use me."

SLIDE: The great master said, "Bamboo, Bamboo, most beautiful of all the trees in my garden, if I'm going to use you I have to cut you down." The wind stopped blowing, and the birds stopped singing and all the butterflies were still.

Then Bamboo said, "Well, master, I'm yours. But, you yourself said that I'm the most beautiful of all the trees in the garden, must you cut me down?"

And the great master said, "I must, if you're going to be useful to me, I must cut you down."

SLIDE: The sounds of the garden were hushed in silence as that great bamboo bent his neck, and the master cut him down.

Then the master said, "Bamboo, You're still not useful to me. If you're going to be useful to me I must cut off all your branches."

Bamboo pleaded, "Oh, master, not that. You've already cut me down. Isn't that enough? Please don't cut off my branches."

But, the great master said, "No, I must cut off your branches."

SLIDE: Once more the garden was silenced, and all the plants looked on with rapt attention as the great master snipped off branch after branch, and bared that great bamboo.

Then the master said, "Bamboo, you're not useful to me yet. There's one more thing. If you're going to be useful to me, then I must split you open and cut your heart out."

Bamboo wept, "Oh, master, not that! "You've already taken away my beauty. There's nothing left now—just me. Must you scrape my heart out?"

SLIDE: "I must if you're to be useful to me." Once more the garden was hushed as the great master took that bamboo, split him down the middle and scraped his heart out.

SLIDE: Then the great master took that bamboo shoot, now hollowed out and scraped clean, and walked over to a spring which was bubbling with water. He laid one end of that hollowed-out bamboo shoot in the stream. He placed the other end of that bamboo shoot in the irrigation ditch that watered his garden. Then the waters began to flow; and the fields began to grow. The wind began to blow again. The birds began to sing. The rice was planted and the harvest came.

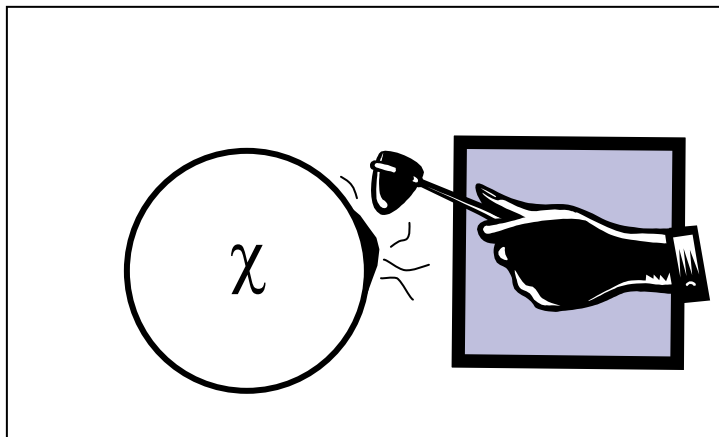
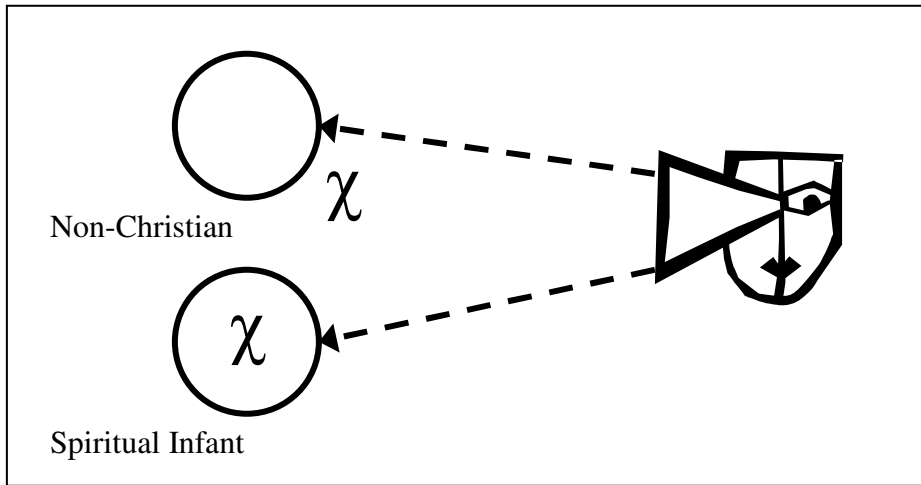
SLIDE: And, that bamboo who standing all alone in the garden was the most beautiful of all the master's plants, that bamboo, which meant so much to himself, when he was stripped bare, and hollowed out, was then, and only then, useful in the great master's garden."

ROGER

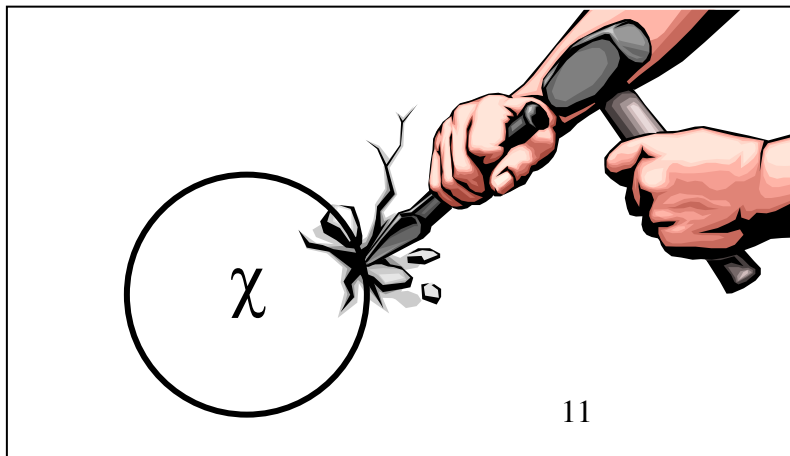
SLIDE: The cross is not the end. It is the beginning of resurrection life.

So, bow your head; go ahead; ask God to mold you to be a spiritual mother or father at any price. Amen.

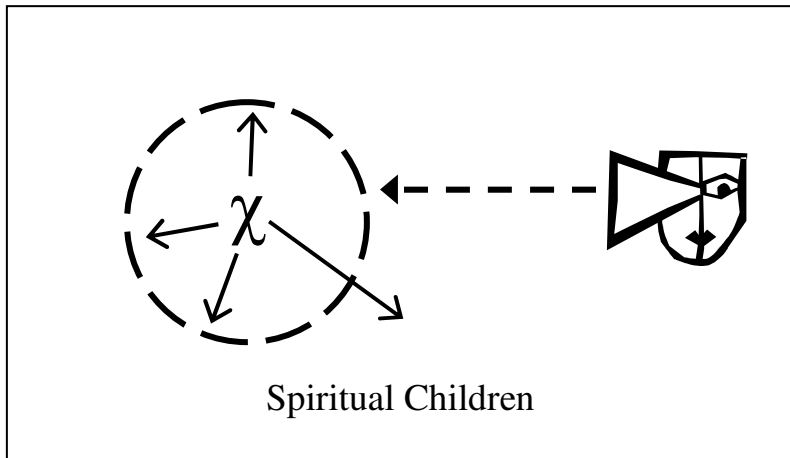
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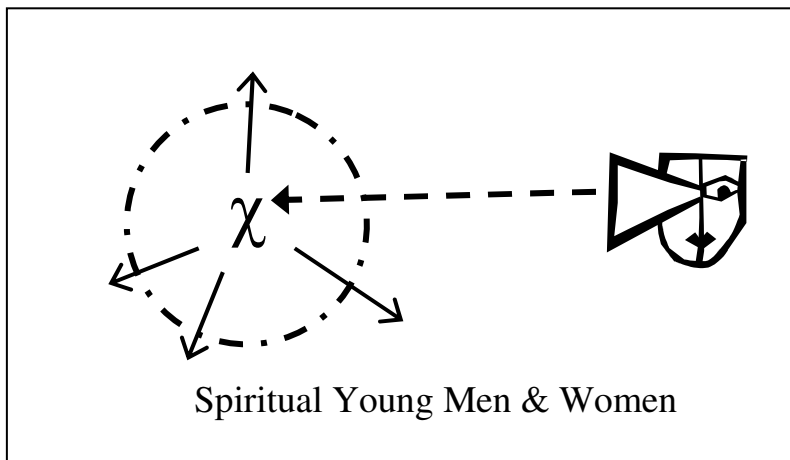
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