

**Notes to go with intro teaching from first week (January 5, 2009)
of “Healing in Community”
Reba Place Fellowship Monday evening seminar**

Teachers/Leaders for this 10-week seminar (Jan 5 through March 9, 2009):

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If anyone missed the first week and wants to join, they should review these notes and/or listen to the recording of the intro teaching block.

I. Psychological Trauma:

A. The pain processing pathway: I would like to start with a question: “How many of you have ever had a painful experience?” When I ask this question people always laugh. We all encounter pain, and people laugh because this reality is so obvious that the question is absurd. The question should not be *whether* we encounter pain, but rather: “What do we do *when* we encounter pain?” So, what *do* we *do* when we encounter pain?

When we encounter pain, our brain-mind-spirit system tries to process the painful experience, and there is a specific pathway that this processing follows. When we are able to successfully complete this processing journey, we get through the painful experience without being traumatized – we emotionally and cognitively “metabolize” the experience in a healthy way, and instead of having any toxic power in our lives, the adequately processed painful experience contributes to our knowledge, skills, empathy, wisdom, and maturity.

Unfortunately, various problems and/or limitations can block successful processing; and when we are *not* able to complete the processing journey, then the painful experience becomes a traumatic experience, and the memories for these traumatic experiences carry unresolved toxic content.¹

B. More easily caused and more common than most realize: Recognizing that psychological trauma comes from failure to successfully complete the journey through the pain processing pathway leads to a very important point regarding what kind of experiences can end up being traumatic. This point is discussed in much greater detail in the “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us” essays, but the short summary is: *you don’t need the overwhelming negative emotions and physical pain of military combat or Tsunami disasters to create psychological trauma.* In fact, **if you are a child, there is no one in your community who can help make sure you get through the processing pathway successfully, and a painful experience presents a challenge where your personal processing skills are especially weak, *even a fairly minor painful experience can result in psychological trauma.***

For example, I grew up in the turbulent 1960's in a church with a heavy emphasis on social justice and radical discipleship. The zealous young leaders constantly challenged us to follow

¹Note that this *very, very* brief summary of the pain processing pathway and psychological trauma is specifically designed to provide context for *this particular presentation.* For a MUCH more detailed discussion, see Part II of the “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us” essays available on our website www.kclehman.com.

the Lord no matter what the cost, and repeatedly emphasized that there should be nothing in our lives that we weren't willing to sacrifice for Jesus. To my young mind it felt like every other sermon was on “Take up your cross and follow me,” and the ones in between were distributed equally between “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out,” the story of Abraham being told to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and the story where Jesus tells the rich young ruler: “Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me.”

These challenges and exhortations were appropriate for the grownups in the congregation – from the foundation of adult maturity, it was appropriate that they hear these invitations to *choose* sacrifice, and they also had the cognitive maturity to be able to correctly understand how Jesus intended these passages to be received. However, as a four year old still working on the child maturity task of learning how to take care of myself, I was frightened and overwhelmed by these teachings that I received with the very concrete, literal understanding of a small child. I remember thinking about what it would be like to pluck out one of my eyes, and what it would be like to sell all that I had and walk out into the alley naked (at four years old, “sell *all* you have” includes clothing). I had no idea where one went in response to “and then come and follow me,” but I was pretty sure it meant that I couldn't stay in my house. I remember figuring out that maybe I could hide under people's porches during the day, to escape the embarrassment of people seeing me running around the neighborhood naked, and then I could come out at night and get food out of people's trash cans.

During this same time in my life, small group fellowship meetings were often held in our living room, next to my bedroom. My bed was right by the door, and I often overheard what was being said as I lay in bed waiting to fall asleep. On a number of occasions, one person especially talked about how God had taken away her jobs, boyfriends, and other treasures so that she wouldn't have any idols – so that “nothing would be before God in her life.” When I think back on this, my perception is that she totally missed the dynamic of the request on God's part, she missed the appropriate place for free will in the equation, and she didn't talk as if she perceived God as her friend. That is, she did *not* seem to be saying: “I *want* to love God more than anything else, and I've been asking Him to help me dismantle idolatry in my life. Even though it's been very painful, I'm *grateful* that He has removed the things I was wrongly worshiping...etc.” Instead, there was more of the sense that God was her adversary, and that He was taking and destroying the precious things in her life *without her permission or agreement*. The adults in the sharing group with her probably realized that her perception of God's heart was distorted, and they may even have discussed this at some point, but as a four year old in the next room, hearing only pieces of these conversations, I was frightened and confused by her comments.

As part of my unsuccessful attempts to process these experiences I came to distorted conclusions about the Lord's character and heart. Instead of feeling safe in the Lord's love for me, trusting that His plans were good, and being truly willing to lay down anything in my life if it were necessary, I felt that the Lord was pathologically insecure and controlling, and that He spent a lot of His time prowling around snatching things away from his children, demanding that we give up anything that might be precious to us in order to prove our allegiance, submission, and obedience, and in order to “keep our priorities straight.” For example, as I grew older I wanted very much to get married, so I feared the Lord would demand that I remain single in order to prevent me from loving some one else more than Him; I had been able to purchase a pair of binoculars and a ten speed bicycle after years of saving my paper route money, so I feared the Lord would take these treasured possessions to prevent me from loving something else more than

Him; and doing well in school was very important to me, so I feared the Lord would intentionally mess up my studies and give me bad grades to prevent me from getting too attached to academic success. I can even remember bargaining with the Lord: “You can have all my other stuff if I can keep my bicycle and binoculars,” or even “I’ll throw in the bicycle AND the binoculars if you let me get married and don’t mess up my grades.”

I never *wanted* to believe these things, and truth in my non-traumatic memory files told me these beliefs were distorted. I fought them whenever they came forward, and the struggle slowly improved through years of discipleship and personal spiritual growth, as I spent thousands of studying the Bible, studying a wide variety of books arguing for God’s goodness, praying, receiving pastoral care, reading true stories that provided examples of the Lord’s goodness, and reminding myself of evidence for God’s goodness in my own life. It took larger and larger triggers to bring them out, and I got better and better at stuffing them back in. *But if it looked like I was about to lose something really important I would rediscover these memory-anchored distorted beliefs about the Lord.*

The good news is that Charlotte and I were able to pray through these experiences and the Lord helped resolve the toxic content in these memories.² But before this happened there were more than thirty years during which the unresolved traumatic content from these experiences powerfully affected what I believed about the Lord’s character and heart.

I (Charlotte) had a childhood experience that provides another example of the way in which minor painful events can result in trauma.

When I was in fifth grade, there was a boy in my class who dominated the social dynamics of the group. He wasn’t a bad kid really, but he was a little too smart regarding how to manipulate others, and he didn’t yet have the maturity to use his power for the good of the whole group vs. his own ego. And he also was, in a basic fifth grade sort of a way, quite misogynistic. He was always saying that boys were better than girls, and he would often try to make any classroom election or competition to be about boys vs. girls. For example, when we were voting for which one student would have the privilege of doing some coveted task, he would coach all the boys in the classroom to only have one boy nominated – because he had observed that if the girls’ votes were divided over more than one girl candidate, then the one boy on the slate usually won. And everything he succeeded in getting to happen *his* way seemed to prove his assertion that girls were inferior to boys.

Anyway, one day at recess we were all playing boxball – called foursquare in some parts of the country – and I don’t remember exactly how it happened, but this young man started giving orders to others. He’d tell one “You get yourself out” and another “Now you go over there” – and none of these “moves” were the usual competitive process of the game, but rather his capricious preferences, which for some reason on that day, he decided to try to impose on the rest of us.

²Now I believe that I should love the Lord with all my heart and all my mind and all my strength, and that I should love and obey the Lord before all else; but now it also feels true that I *choose* this and that the Lord is trying to bring me to this place in the most gentle way possible, as a loving Father. I realize that He might allow pain in this process, but only if it’s the only possible way to accomplish a greater good.

He wasn't physically forcing or threatening anyone. He wasn't even verbally threatening, using foul language, or even calling anyone names. He was just issuing commands in a forceful way.

I don't really remember what everyone else's reaction was to this ordering about, but I know that in me, something sort of snapped, or gave way. I just didn't have the strength or sense of self or something to fight back. So when he told me to get myself out, I did.

On the sidelines, my friend Anne, who was a healthier, stronger, person than I, was appalled that I would cave in to this boy's orders. “Charlotte! Charlotte! What are you doing?! Don't listen to him!!” she was saying. But I just didn't have it in me to resist. At the time it occurred I wasn't even aware of this event having any affect on me, but in retrospect I can see that in my unsuccessful attempt to process the experience I internalized the distorted belief: “I'm not as good as a boy/man.”

This distorted belief and the associated shame were actually so subtle that I was never even consciously aware of them until they came forward in a emotional healing session many years later. In this session one of my friends is praying for me, and this memory comes to mind. I describe the scenario to her, just as I've told you here today – with no big swell of emotion, very matter of fact – and I'm thinking, “Well, this isn't anything traumatic.” But then as I pressed in to describing how it felt, the words “He's better than me” popped out of my mouth. And as I said the words, a wave of shame passed over me, like a shudder. And then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the shame was gone and I realized that “He's better than me” no longer felt true.

This was all so low key that I might doubt the significance of both the original childhood experience and the prayer session if it hadn't been for an interesting incident shortly after the prayer time and then also changes inside of myself that have been both significant and lasting. Sometime in the next day or so following the prayer time with my friend, I was sitting at my desk in my office, and Karl was at his desk across the hall. Out of nowhere, a thought comes to me. So since there was no one else in the office, I call out to Karl across the hall, and say, “You know, Dallas Willard isn't better than me.” Dallas Willard is an author whom I greatly admire. And Karl said, “Yes, honey.” And maybe an hour or so later, another thought comes to me, and I said, “You know, Virgil isn't better than me.” Virgil was our pastor at the time – a wonderful, godly man. And Karl said “Yes, honey.” And a little while later, the thought came to me, “Even you – you aren't better than me.” And Karl patiently said, “Yes, honey,” one more time.

And since this curious day in which the new truth seemed to be “sinking in,” I have had more confidence, particularly when it came to relating to men with authority of one kind or another. I could look them in the eye, so to speak, in a way that I couldn't quite do so clearly before. In retrospect, I can also now see that this distorted “I'm not as good as a man” belief contributed to my lifelong lack of confidence and sense of insecurity.

This point is so important that I would like to provide another example from my (Karl's) childhood. On my grade school playground there was a lot of cheating. The biggest, toughest kids were particularly prone to cheat, since no one could stop them, and they found ways to cheat in most of the games we played. They might add points to their scores if they were losing, they might make up new rules that gave them a needed advantage, or they might simply insist that they had made it safely to first base when we could all see that this was not the case. The scenario that bothered me the most was kids cutting in line during batting practice. Each time

they finished their turn at the plate, the three or four toughest fifth graders would appear to go to the back of the line, but then every ten seconds or so they would cut forward by three or four kids. Day after day I would stand in line, watching these kids cut in front of me, knowing that there was nothing I could do about it unless I wanted to get beaten up. And the gym teacher never seemed to notice that these kids got to bat four or five times as often as the rest of us. He was the person with the size and the designated authority to maintain appropriate order, but he did nothing to protect the smaller, vulnerable kids (like me).

As part of my unsuccessful attempt to process these experiences I developed an exaggerated reaction to situations where others are cheating, and especially to situations where people are “cutting in line” in one way or another. Then, for many years (until this stuff got resolved), whenever I encountered a situation where someone was cheating, the toxic content carried in my unresolved playground memories would come forward and I would become both very miserable and very unpleasant to be with. For example, when we would come to a construction zone and some of the drivers were using the “merge” lane as a “personal bypass lane,” and zipping to the front of the line where they were cutting in front of those of us who had been waiting in the “good citizen” lane for the last 45 minutes, I would have a sense of being helpless and powerless, I would feel intense anger towards the “cheaters,” I would feel intense frustration towards “somebody” for not imposing order and fairness in the situation, and I would go back and forth between fuming (with lots of words I won’t use here) and indulging in a macabre little day dream. My little fantasy was that the government would pass a law making it legal to blow these people up, and I would get one of those rocket launchers you can hold on your shoulder. Then, when one of these guys zips by in the cheater lane, I would lean out my window and send one of those little rockets right through his rear license plate and into his back seat. KABOOM! One less cheater! And then we would roll the burning wreckage to the side of the road and put a sign on it: “This is what happened to the last guy who used the merge lane for a cheater lane.”

Charlotte, on the other hand, was an example of how a person might react in this situation if she were *not* being affected by old trauma. Charlotte could acknowledge that it was frustrating to see people whizzing by and then cutting in at the front of the line, and that these people were being inconsiderate, but she wasn’t all bent out of shape. Her attitude was more along the lines of “we can’t do anything about it, so we might as well make the best of it and try to enjoy being together while we’re waiting in line.” Furthermore, she would even offer charitable thoughts regarding the cheaters, such as “they might not be *maliciously* inconsiderate – maybe they just haven’t learned the maturity skill of being able to wait for their turn,” or “we don’t know what’s happening in their lives – maybe they’re single parents who’ve had especially hard days, and just can’t deal with waiting longer in the ‘good citizen’ lane.” And then she would make additional gracious suggestions, such as: “Even if they do know what they’re doing, we could be part of the solution by choosing to forgive them and pray for them.”³

³In the interest of truth, justice, and humility I will confess my own use of the “cheater” lane: For years as a young driver I was oblivious to the complexity of construction zone traffic flow, and innocently zipped along in the merge lane without even realizing that I was cheating. Even more narcissistically mortifying is the humbling truth that for several years after coming to understand the whole cheater lane phenomena, I found it so unbearable to feel like a helpless victim waiting in the “good citizen” lane that I actually used the cheater lane *fully aware of the fact that I was cheating*.

So, when we came to a construction zone where people were using the merge lane as a “cheater” lane, the toxic content from my unresolved memories would make me miserable, as I felt powerless, helpless, and furious; Charlotte had to endure the unpleasant experience of being trapped in the car with a husband who was alternating between openly fuming and silently fantasizing about killing people; and instead of participating in the Lord’s vision for redemption by forgiving these people and praying for them, I gave the enemy a foothold in my own life by indulging in bitterness and I contributed to the enemy’s schemes for destruction by spewing toxic waste into the spiritual environment.

As you may have noticed, two of these traumatic experiences were caused by kids playing games on grade school play grounds in the middle of the day with teachers present, and the third trauma was caused by comments made in the context of Sunday morning church services and small group fellowship meetings. There was no wreckage from a semi running into a passenger car at 70 miles per hour. There weren’t any suicide bombers, crazed gunmen, or burning buildings. There weren’t any tornados, earthquakes, or tidal waves. And there were no rescue squads, no ambulances, and no mangled bodies. In fact, there was no physical violence or physical danger of any kind, nobody was being forced, violated, or touched inappropriately, and nobody was intoxicated or out of control. Nobody even raised their voices. However, there *were* children who were unable to successfully process painful experiences, and the resulting unresolved toxic content carried in the memories for these experiences caused trouble for many years.

The point here is that psychological trauma is *not* a rare phenomena carried only by those who have survived overwhelmingly painful experiences, such as natural disasters, military combat, or child abuse. Our perception is that psychological trauma, especially from minor painful events, is much more common than most people realize, and that nobody is completely free of memories carrying unresolved traumatic content.⁴

C. The effects of trauma: When traumatic memories get activated, or “triggered,” the unresolved toxic content comes forward and causes a wide variety of problems, such as addictions, mysterious physical symptoms, post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, impaired parenting, difficulty receiving new truth, impaired discernment, and blocked peak performance. Unresolved trauma coming forward and blending with our experience in the present especially causes and/or exacerbates relational conflict, and this applies to every kind of relational conflict you can imagine – marital discord, conflicts between family members, conflicts between friends, conflicts in church, conflicts on the mission field, conflicts between neighbors, conflicts between employers and employees, conflicts between professional colleagues, conflicts between students and teachers, conflicts between warring tribal groups in Africa, conflicts between Arabs and Israelis, and even conflicts between complete strangers.

⁴Note that our formulations of “trauma” and “traumatic” are fundamentally different from the way most people use these terms. “Traumatic” is often used synonymously with “disastrous,” “life threatening,” “catastrophic,” and other terms you expect to see on the front page of the newspaper, and most definitions of trauma focus on the magnitude of the painful event. However, our definition is based *solely* on whether or not the person successfully processes the experience. Again, see “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us” for a much more detailed discussion of this point.

D. The good news – remedial work can be accomplished at any point in the future: The good news about the pain processing pathway and traumatic memories is that each time a traumatic memory gets activated you get another chance to finish the processing. If you don't have any additional resources since the time of the original trauma, this actually isn't very good news because you just feel bad, get stuck in the same places once again, and eventually put the unresolved content back into the same old traumatic memory file. However, if you do have additional resources, and you *are* able to successfully complete the processing tasks, the traumatic memory gets *permanently* resolved – just as with the initial painful experience, if a traumatic memory gets adequately, successfully processed, instead of being toxic it will contribute to wisdom, strength, maturity, compassion, etc. Furthermore, with knowledge regarding how traumatic memories work we can deliberately activate them, deliberately set up the conditions so that they can be modified, and then deliberately finish the processing tasks.

E. More good news – the Lord knows all this stuff: More good news is that the Lord knows all this stuff, and He wants to help us get healed. If we are able to perceive the Lord's presence and connect with Him so that He can lead the process, He can help us access traumatic memories, set up the conditions so that they can be modified, and then successfully complete the remedial processing that transforms them into fully processed experiences that now contribute to wisdom, strength, maturity, compassion, etc.

When a person has *not* been able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, stay synchronized with Him, and receive guidance from Him, it has been very helpful for us to understand many details regarding traumatic memory and the processing pathway, and to deliberately apply this information as we lead the session. However, for people who *are* able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him, and receive help from Him, this potentially complicated process can become very simple. Repeatedly turning to the Lord and staying synchronized with the Lord can help the person access the memories and the get through the processing pathway *without us needing to explicitly manage any of the details*. With people who *are* able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with Him deeply, and receive guidance from Him, all we do is help them perceive the Lord's presence, help them connect with Him and synchronize with Him, help them *stay* synchronized with Him, coach them to keep asking Him for guidance regarding “what's the next step I need to take?,” and coach them to engage with the Lord directly whenever they encounter problems in the process.

II. Appreciation:

John Gottman, observable behavior, and “bottom line” sociological outcome: Some of the most original, intriguing research regarding marriage relationships has been carried out by John M. Gottman, Ph.D.. He set up an apartment wired with video cameras and microphones, recorded randomly selected couples spending weekends together,⁵ and then followed these couples for years into the future, monitoring “bottom line” sociological outcome, such as whether a given couple reported being happily married ten years later or whether they were divorced. Dr. Gottman then subjected this large pile of carefully gathered information to rigorous statistical

⁵Of course the couples were aware of being filmed and were willing to be a part of the study. Also, to preserve a certain necessary level of privacy, the couples were monitored only from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and never in the bathroom.

analysis, and thereby *identified which **observable behaviors** corresponded to which **bottom line sociological outcomes***. For example, did the couples who spent time watching Walt Disney movies together have a better chance of staying happily married? Were the couples who never washed the dishes more likely to end up in divorce court?

Since 1986 Dr. Gottman has filmed thousands of couples, he has recorded tens of thousands of hours of observable behavior, he has followed some of these couples for as many as 14 years, and he has taken the resulting mountain of data and run it through a vast array of high powered statistical analyses. One of the clearest conclusions from all of this research is that appreciation is good for relationships – the **observable behavior** of deliberately focusing on things you appreciate about your spouse leads to the “**bottom line**” good **sociological outcome** of staying married, *and being happy with your marriage*. Couples that were already doing this did very well, and deliberately learning to do this proved to be a powerful positive force in salvaging even deeply troubled marriages.

Neurobiology: Among other things, appreciation releases oxytocin, and oxytocin prepares your brain for bonding and positive relational connection.

Cognitive therapy: Our thoughts powerfully and predictably influence our emotions. Deliberately focusing your attention on thoughts of appreciation will consistently generate corresponding positive emotions towards the object of appreciation.

Each of these independent bodies of information are consistent with the conclusion that appreciation prepares your brain–mind–spirit system for positive relational connection. Dr. Gottman very deliberately uses this to help marriage partners increase their positive emotional bonding, and Dr. Wilder had the inspiration that this same information could be deliberately applied to our relationships with the Lord. *The beginning of each Immanuel approach exercise therefore includes an appreciation exercise focused on the Lord in order to prepare the person’s brain-mind-spirit system for a positive relational connection with Jesus.*

Biblical support for appreciation: As most of you are probably already realizing, this is also very Biblical. The scriptures are full of passages encouraging us to remember what the Lord has done for us: “Build an alter here to remind yourselves of...,” “Make a pile of stones in this place in remembrance of...,” “Have a feast at this time each year to remember...” And the psalms are full of examples of appreciating the Lord as part of worship.

III. Additional principles for group exercises:

Group exercises prohibited by the need for one-on-one trouble shooting: Prior to developing the Immanuel approach we had not done group exercises due to concerns about the possibility that many people might get stuck simultaneously. With Theophostic-based techniques, if people get stuck, you need to do trouble shooting “one on one.” This is not possible in a group setting. Therefore, we never did group exercises because we did not want to get to the end of a group exercise and have 27 people who were all stirred up, connected to traumatic memories, but stuck and unable to get through to healing.

Immanuel Approach safety nets: Our perception is that the Immanuel approach provides a

number of “safety nets” that now make it possible to do emotional healing exercises in group settings.

Safety net number one: The initial steps of identifying a positive memory, appreciation exercises, and refreshing connection with the Lord *combine to set up a safety net* that can be used during the exercise and at the end of the exercise for those who are having difficulty.

Safety net number two: Those who are not able to perceive the Lord’s presence and refresh a tangible connection with Him participate in the first steps of the exercise, and participate in the rest of the exercises as intercessors, but *do not work with their own traumatic memories*. This seems to identify and protect those who are most likely to get stuck and have a negative experience, and thereby provides a second safety net.

Safety net number three: We have people do the exercises in a small group setting, so that they can describe their mental content to each other, and thereby apply the benefit of “your brain works better in community.” This significantly increases the effectiveness of the exercise, and thereby provides a third safety net by increasing good results and decreasing disappointing results.

Safety net number four: Furthermore, if one member of the group gets stuck in a negative place, the other members can help the person return to the initial positive place by coaching him to describe the positive memory and repeat the appreciation exercise. This provides a fourth safety net.

IV Brief outline of the full group exercise: Note that this is a brief overview of the complete exercise we will eventually get to. We will practice initial steps during the first weeks, and then progress to working with painful memories after people feel comfortable with the building block components. Also, Charlotte and I will be coaching/leading/providing direction as the small groups go through these exercises.

1.) Break up into small groups: Break the larger group up into small groups of three to four persons each, and keep both functions of the small group in mind:

First, the small group provides a context for describing “whatever comes into your awareness” at each point in the exercise. This obviously takes a lot more time, but our perception is that this is part of the larger picture that has enabled us to do group exercises with good results and minimal breakage.

The second purpose of the small groups is to provide the fourth safety net, where other members of the group can help the person get back to the positive initial starting place if he gets stuck in intense negative emotions. In order to do this, *you need to pay attention to each other’s stories and appreciations, so that you are able to provide the safety net if this is necessary*.

2.) Positive memories and appreciation: Ask the Lord to bring forward one or several memories of previous positive experiences of perceiving His presence and connecting with Him. If no memories come forward spontaneously, take time to deliberately recall one to several

memories of times when you could perceive the Lord’s presence and felt a positive connection with Him. Ask the Lord to help you perceive specific things to appreciate. Each person in the group then describes her positive connection memory/memories to the others in the small group, and names specific things she appreciates about these experiences. The goal is to share appreciations until you *feel* appreciation for the Lord. Note that faith and gratitude “momentum” usually grow for all in the group as each person shares.

Remember that you may need to help others in the group return to their positive memories later in the exercise, so pay attention so that you will be able to remind/coach/help the others in your group to repeat their positive memory stories and appreciations, should this be necessary.

Comment regarding “one to several”: One memory is often adequate, but it is ideal to have several since appreciation momentum builds as one works with several positive memories in succession, and having this additional resource available will be helpful if anyone gets stuck in intense negative emotions later in the exercise and needs an especially strong positive memory and appreciation “safety net.”

3.) Ask the Lord to refresh your perception of His presence and a positive connection with Him:

In the context of thinking about the positive memories and feeling appreciation, pray something along the lines of: “Lord, refresh my perception of Your presence and a positive connection with You, so that these are real and living in the present.” Share whatever comes into your awareness with the others in your group (remember that your brain works better in community – sometimes you will not recognize perception of the Lord’s presence until you describe what you are experiencing). Some people perceive the Lord’s presence and refresh connection with Him in the context of the positive memories (the memory morphs into a new, living interaction with Him, as opposed to remaining as just a memory), while others perceive the Lord’s presence and refresh connection with him in the immediate surroundings of the present.

After each member of the group has shared, pick one person to continue through the rest of the exercise (steps #4 through #7),⁶ with the rest of the group listening, supporting, and interceding.

If you perceive the Lord’s presence and feel connected to Him: proceed on to Step #4.

If you do not perceive the Lord’s presence or feel connected to Him, and you would like to try simple “trouble-shooting”: 1.) Ask: “What’s in the way of my being able to perceive Your presence in this memory?;” 2.) observe whatever thoughts, emotions, images, memories, physical sensations, etc come into your mind; 3.) to the extent you feel comfortable doing so, describe these to the others in your group *regardless of whether they “make sense” or feel important*; 4.) Ask: “What do I need to do to take the next step forward?,” and then follow-up on any direction the Lord provides.

⁶“Your brain works better in community” benefits are much more powerful when you can describe what’s coming into you awareness immediately at each point as you go through the exercise, and this is only possible if group members go through the rest of the exercise one at a time. Another way to say this is that when everybody goes through the exercise at the same time there are long delays as you take turns reporting to the group, and these long delays will significantly diminish the benefits of the “describe what’s coming to you” technique.

If “trouble-shooting” has identified and resolved blockages, so that you are now able to perceive the Lord’s presence and connect with Him, then proceed on to step #4.

If you do *not* perceive the Lord’s presence and feel connected to Him after a brief season of simple trouble-shooting, return to your positive memories and appreciation until you *feel* appreciation and are at an okay place to stop. *Please* do not go on to working with traumatic memories *in this group setting* if you are still not able to perceive the Lord’s presence and feel connected to Him. Also: If your difficulty with perceiving the Lord’s presence and connecting with Him persists, especially across multiple sessions, we strongly encourage you to get help with “trouble shooting” in the context of individual sessions with someone experienced with finding and resolving blockages. If time permits, the group can go through the rest of the exercise with another person.

4.) Choose memories to work on: Select a small to medium sized traumatic memory from one of the following categories:⁷

Memories for experiences from your recent adult life that were painful and do not yet feel fully resolved (picking a recent adult memory is probably the best way to stay in the shallow end of the pool).

Memories that you have been able to think about and talk about without getting overwhelmed, “stuck,” and needing someone else to help you get back on your feet emotionally.

Please *do not* focus on an upsetting symptom and ask: “Lord, take me to the memory where this is coming from.” This approach may take you to a memory that you have never before worked with, or even to a memory you have never before been consciously aware of.

Please *do not* go to memories where you have gotten stuck and/or overwhelmed, and have needed someone else to help you get back to a place where you were okay.

5.) Invite the Lord into the memory, ask Him to help you to perceive His presence, and engage with Him to receive healing: Focus on the memory, invite Him to be with you, and ask Him to help you perceive His presence in the memory. From the perspective of being inside the memory, pray something like: “Jesus, I make a heart invitation for You to be with me here. Please help me to perceive Your presence.”

a.) If you are able to perceive the Lord’s presence: If you are able to perceive the Lord’s

⁷Some ask “why not just ask the Lord to bring forward the memory He wants to work on?” This *is* what we do in individual sessions, but our concern in the group setting is that none of us have perfect perception of the Lord’s guidance. In the context of a group exercise the leader cannot discern with each participant regarding the accuracy of their perception of the Lord’s guidance, and the consequences of mistaken discernment are much greater (for example, getting into an overwhelming traumatic memory in the group setting, without appropriate resources to care for this). Therefore, in the group setting we are more conservative and directive, and provide guidelines for selecting memories as opposed to having each person simply ask the Lord what to do/where to go.

presence in the traumatic memory, then get words for any perceptions, thoughts, emotions, etc that feel true regarding the memory, and explain these directly to the Lord. As you continue focusing on Him, observe any thoughts, emotions, images, memories, etc that come into your awareness, *and especially anything you see or sense the Lord to be doing*. To the extent you feel comfortable doing so, describe all of this to the others in your group *regardless of whether they “make sense” or feel important* (your brain works better in community).

Keep focusing on Jesus, ask Him for guidance, ask Him for help, ask Him for healing, ask Him for resources, and at any point you are having difficulty, focus on Jesus and ask Him for help. After each interaction with Jesus, observe any thoughts, emotions, images, memories, etc that come into your awareness, *and especially anything you see or sense the Lord to be doing*. As always, describe everything to the others in your group.

b.) If you are not able to perceive the Lord’s presence: 1.) Ask: “What’s in the way of my being able to perceive Your presence in this memory?;” 2.) observe whatever thoughts, emotions, images, memories, physical sensations, etc come into your mind; 3.) to the extent you feel comfortable doing so, describe these to the others in your group *regardless of whether they “make sense” or feel important*; 4.) Ask: “What do I need to do to take the next step forward?;” 5.) and then follow-up on any direction the Lord provides.

If “trouble-shooting” has identified and resolved blockages, so that you are now able to perceive the Lord’s presence and connect with Him, then engage with Jesus to receive healing, as described in 4a, above.

If you do *not* perceive the Lord’s presence and feel connected to Him after a brief season of simple trouble-shooting, move to the “safety net” trouble-shooting intervention described below.

If you become stuck, and asking Jesus for guidance, help, etc does *not* seem to be resolving the problem: If you become stuck at any point in working with the traumatic memory and you still perceive the Lord’s presence in the memory, the first response is to focus on the Lord, ask Him for guidance, ask Him for help, and then describe to the group whatever thoughts, images, memories, emotions, etc come into your awareness *focusing especially on anything the Lord is doing*. However, if these interventions do not seem to be resolving the problem, then transition to the safety net intervention described below.

If you’re running out of time (ten to fifteen minutes left) and you still feel bad: If you are getting to the end of the session (ten to fifteen minutes left), the traumatic memory has not been resolved, and you want to make sure the negative emotions you are feeling are significantly reduced before you go home, then transition to the “safety net” intervention described below, so that deliberate appreciation can move you to a better place before the end of the session. If you feel okay about ending the session with lingering negative emotions and, you feel like something positive is happening, and you therefore want to use all the time to continue working with the traumatic memory, you can make the judgment call to continue interacting with the Lord regarding the traumatic memory right up until the end of the session. However, if you want to make sure your negative emotions are reduced before you

go home, make sure to leave time at the end so that you can work *with the group* (your brain works better in community) to use the “safety net” intervention to get back to a better place.

The “safety net” trouble-shooting intervention: When other attempts at trouble shooting don’t work, the “safety net” intervention is to go back to the place in step #3 where you experienced a refreshed perception of the Lord’s presence and a refreshed connection with Him. Sometimes this is not necessary, but you may need to review your positive memories and repeat the appreciation exercise in order to return to the place where you perceived the Lord’s presence and felt connected. Also, depending on how intensely you were connected to negative emotions in the context of the painful memory, it may take some time to transition back to feeling appreciation. Try to find some new specific appreciations, and persist until you again *feel* appreciation.

Once you have reconnected with the Lord, then, *continuing in the context of this positive place*, engage with Him regarding the painful memory. Get words for any perceptions, thoughts, emotions, etc that feel true, and explain these directly to the Lord. An then, as you continue focusing on Him, observe any thoughts, emotions, images, memories, etc that come into your awareness, *and especially anything you see or sense the Lord to be doing*. To the extent you feel comfortable doing so, describe all of this to the others in your group (your brain works better in community!). Especially talk to Him about the place of stuckness with respect to working with the traumatic memory directly (for example, not being able to perceive His presence in the memory, losing the ability to perceive his presence part way through, or asking for help regarding some point and not perceiving resolution).

Sometimes, just restoring the positive connection with the Lord from step #3 and then talking to Him about the traumatic memory and the problems that developed in trying to work with it directly will take the whole session. However, sometimes you reconnect with the Lord, talk to Him about the traumatic memory and any points of difficulty, and get to a good place fairly quickly – you get to a place where it feels like you’re connection with the Lord is good and you understand whatever He has shown you about the problems that developed in working directly with the traumatic memory. At this point, if time permits, you can return to the traumatic memory and try again to work with it directly (working from the perspective of being inside/connected to the painful memory). Sometimes the process will then proceed smoothly to complete resolution; but if you get stuck again, just use the safety net intervention again. I have had sessions where all we did was to go back and forth between the traumatic memory and the initial positive connection, and then after four or five “back and forth” cycles the person was finally able to connect with Jesus inside the memory and work through it to complete resolution.

Note: If you get stuck in a place where you are upset and are having difficulty getting back to the positive starting place memory on your own, other members of your group can coach you through each step of the “safety net” intervention. Once you have calmed down, you may return to the exercise, but if your group had to do a lot of coaching (as opposed to a few gentle reminders) *please work with a different memory*. The fact that you needed so much help indicates that the first painful memory is not good material for a group setting. I am confident the Lord can heal any traumatic memory, but it is best to deal with the more intense traumas in settings where you can receive one-on-one trouble shooting if this is necessary.

5.) End of session – more appreciation:

If you experience complete resolution of the traumatic memory: Thank the Lord for His healing presence and healing work, and name several specifics you especially appreciate.

If you experienced some kind of positive interaction with the Lord in the context of the traumatic memory, but only partial resolution: Thank the Lord for this positive interaction, and name specific things you appreciate until you feel peaceful (until you no longer feel the negative emotions from the trauma). If appreciation regarding the positive interaction in the traumatic memory does not take you all the way back to peaceful, then return to original positive memory/memories and do more appreciation until you do feel peaceful.

If you did not have a positive interaction with the Lord in the context of the traumatic memory: Return to the positive starting place memory/memories, and repeat the appreciation exercise until you feel peaceful.

With each of these, remember to do this out loud with the others in your group (your brain works better in community).

If time permits, the group can return to step #3 and then go through the full exercise with another member of the group.

Summary regarding the “Safety net” intervention (going back to the initial positive memories, appreciation, refreshed connection with the Lord): When encountering any of the difficulties below, you can go back to the positive memories, appreciation, and refreshed connection from the beginning of the session, and reconnect with Jesus in that positive context. In this way, the initial positive memories, appreciation, and refreshed connection with the Lord can be a resource and/or safety net in various ways at various points throughout the rest of the session.

- If you are not able to perceive the Lord’s presence in the traumatic memory, even after asking “what’s in the way?” and trouble-shooting, go back to the positive starting place and re-establish connection with Him in this context. From this place of restored connection with Jesus, ask Him for help and specifically ask Him about the traumatic memory. Then go back and forth until you can perceive the Lord’s presence in the traumatic memory.
- If you should become stuck at any point in working with the traumatic memory, and especially if you become stuck and have lost your perception of and connection with Jesus, go back to the positive starting place and re-establish connection with Him in this context. At any point that you have difficulty perceiving the Lord’s presence or connecting with Him, you can go back to the initial positive connection
- If you are able to perceive the Lord’s presence in the traumatic memory, but do not experience strong enough connection to be able to receive the help you need, you can reference back to the initial positive connection to re-establish a stronger connection.

- At the end of the session, if you run out of time before you can resolve the traumatic memory to a point of peace and calm, you can return to the initial positive connection in order to help end the session in a good place.