

**Notes to go with teaching from third week (January 19, 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 third week, they should review these notes and/or listen to the recording of the teaching block. ****Note**** For the January 19 session, there is important material in the recording that is not in these notes. After the “lecture” block, a number of people described their experiences of perceiving Jesus’ presence, as a way to give people an idea of the variety of ways this can happen. If you prefer reading the notes as opposed to listening to the recorded message, I would strongly encourage you to at least listen to the last 20 minutes of the recording for this material that is not included in the notes.

I. Describe everything that comes into your awareness (your brain works better in community): As you participate in the Immanuel group exercises, it is important that you describe everything that comes into our awareness, regardless of whether or not it *feels* important or “makes sense.” Those of you familiar with Theophostic will know that Dr. Smith has always taught this as an important part of the Theophostic process, but he has not provided any support for this point other than his personal observation that it appears to be consistently helpful. Over the last several years I have gathered a collection of data points that I believe come together to build a compelling explanation for why it’s so important for a person to describe everything that comes into her awareness when receiving therapy or ministry.

Case studies from our experience with emotional healing: The first data points I want to present are observations from our experience with emotional healing sessions.

– **My session regarding 2 y.o. separation memories:** When I was two years old my brother and I were sent to stay with friends for three to four weeks during a time when Mom was so physically ill that she was unable to care for us. To put this in perspective: a two-year-old will experience a three week separation from his parents in much the same way as he’ll experience his parents dying suddenly – they disappear suddenly, and stay away longer than any possible two-year-old ability to understand or cope with their absence. Furthermore, a two year old perceives his parents to be omnipotent – he believes nothing happens unless they allow it, and that nothing could make them do anything they don’t want to do. This means he’ll believe he’s separated from his parents because they *want* to be away from him, and he’ll believe that they can hear his calls and could come if they wanted to, but that they are *choosing* to ignore his cries for help. This extended separation from my parents was certainly more than I was able to successfully process with my very limited two-year-old capacity and maturity skills, and therefore ended up as psychological trauma.

For most of my life I didn’t even know about this early and important trauma. We usually start recording conscious, explicit, autobiographical memory for events around the age of three, and since all of this occurred when I was two, I had no conscious autobiographical memory for this important separation trauma. My discovery of these events makes a good story. I had been learning about association stimulation and the alternative memory retrieval system, and decided to be much more intentional with respect to noticing when I was triggered and then trying to figure out where the triggered content was coming from. As I

was doing this, I noticed one especially dramatic pattern that I could not explain. Any scene in a movie or book with a little boy losing his mother would make me cry. For example, even though I had watched the movie *The Kid* many times, I would still cry every time I came to one of the scenes about his mother dying of cancer. This didn't make sense to me, since my mother was still alive and well: “Why do I cry every time a kid loses his mother, since that has obviously never happened to me?”

During the time I'm making these observations my older brother comes to visit, and while we're sitting in a restaurant eating deep dish pizza I mention this particular puzzling observation: “...This one just doesn't make sense. Mom never got sick – why do these scenes stir up so much emotion for me?” He promptly replies with: “What about the time when Mom got so sick that we had to go stay with the Wetzels?” After looking stunned for several seconds, I respond with something along the lines of “What on earth are you talking about? Mom never got sick!” He goes on to tell the whole story, since he had been two years older and could still remember many of the details. He told me about how Mom got mono while she was pregnant with our younger sister, and eventually got so sick that Dad had to carry her to the bathroom. And about how they gladly accepted the Wetzel's offer to care for us, since Mom couldn't even get out of bed, let alone chase after two small boys, and Dad was working full time. I still didn't believe him until I talked to Mom and Dad and they both told the exact same story. How strange! These events had affected me greatly, and I could still observe intense triggered thoughts and emotions that I now recognized as coming from these memories, but I had absolutely no conscious autobiographical memories for these events.

I realized that I had often experienced triggered implicit memory thoughts and emotions from these events, but that I had never recognized or understood them. This implicit memory content had even come forward in emotional healing sessions, but I had not recognized it or known what to do with it, and so always eventually pushed it aside and went on to something else. So the next time I got together with my prayer partner, I decided to work very deliberately on these memories. In this session, I focused on the familiar triggered thoughts and emotions I guessed to be coming forward from these memories, and then asked the Lord to help me access the underlying trauma. What happened next is the data point that's relevant for this section. After asking the Lord to help me access the underlying memories, images and thoughts start coming into my mind. I have an image of holding a telephone to my ear, but I'm looking up at the place where the cord goes into the wall, so I must be quite small (about the size of a two year old). I'm looking around a room, with a door leading to a hallway to my right and a large sofa across the room from me. And the thought comes to me: “I can hear her voice – she must be here somewhere! I wonder where she could be hiding? The sofa's big enough to hide a grown-up – maybe she's behind the sofa!”

But here's the strange part: I do *not* have any sense that these images or thoughts are important, and I do *not* perceive their meaning. The thoughts and images don't *feel* important, and I don't recognize how they fit into my personal autobiographical story. In fact, this effect is so complete that I tell Dan: “Nothing's happening. I'm not getting anything.” Fortunately, Dan is an experienced enough therapist that he responds with: “Your

mind is never completely blank,¹ so why don't you just describe whatever's coming into your awareness, even if it doesn't make sense or feel important.” As soon as I start to describe the above thoughts and images, a huge wave of emotion wells up inside of me, I start sobbing, and I recognize that I'm getting the visual images, thoughts, and emotions from being at the Wetzel's and talking to Mom on the phone. At two years old I had not been able to comprehend that she could be so far away and still be talking to me – I figured that if I could hear her voice so clearly she must have been somewhere near by.

*When the content was isolated inside my head, I was not able to **feel its importance** or **perceive its meaning**; but as I described it to Dan, both of these pieces fell into place, and I was able to feel that it was important and to see how it fit into my personal story.*

– **Person with memory of looking out the window of a car:** In a session where I was facilitating the emotional healing process, the person I was working with initially reported “I'm not getting anything.” However, as I coached her to describe *whatever* was coming into her mind, regardless of whether or not it felt important, she eventually acknowledged that she *had* been getting a mental image, but she also assured me that it didn't make any sense and was certainly not important. With more coaching, she eventually described “I'm seeing myself in the car with my family – I'm sitting in the car, looking out the window as we drive down the highway;” *and as she continued to talk about and focus on this image, she realized that it was from the beginning of a trip that ended in deep rejection – it was from the beginning of an unresolved traumatic memory that was anchoring an important rejection lie.*

*When the content was isolated inside her head, she was not able to **feel its importance** or **perceive its meaning**; but as she described it to me, both of these pieces fell into place, and she was able to feel that it was important and to see how it fit into her personal story.*

– **“Pulu did it”:** In another session the person I was working with commented: “I'm not getting anything – I'm just getting gibberish.” But when I asked “What kind of gibberish?,” and encourage her to describe *whatever* was coming into her mind, regardless of whether or not it felt important, she reported “I just keep getting the words ‘Pulu Did It’.” “Who's Pulu? And what did she do?” I asked, thinking that maybe Pulu was the name of an internal child part. “No” she responded, “It's the name of a children's book I got in the mail yesterday,” and then immediately went on to make several spontaneous comments about things that had upset her about the book. I asked her to focus on these comments and ask the Lord to show her what He wanted her to know about them, and within five minutes these comments had led to an important connection to traumatic childhood memories.

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¹The one exception to “Your mind is never completely blank” is when internal parts and/or demonic spirits are deliberately creating the specific, unusual phenomena in which you truly perceive your internal mental awareness to be “completely blank.” However, once you know this it is no longer a problem because whenever you encounter “completely blank” you will realize this actually means you need to deal with internal parts and/or demonic spirits intentionally blocking whatever would otherwise be coming forward.

she was able to feel that it was important and to see how it fit into her personal story.

Neurological case study: Another collection of data points I want to present come from a fascinating case study described by Dr. Antonio Damasio.² Elliot was doing well personally, professionally, and socially. He was a good husband and father. He was very intelligent and talented, and had a good job with a successful business firm. He was a role model for his younger siblings and colleagues. And then he began to make poor decisions. For example, he might spend the entire afternoon on a series of tasks that were interesting but less important, while neglecting to prepare for a crucial meeting scheduled for the next morning. The tasks he did focus on would be done well, but then he would show up the next morning and be totally unprepared for the meeting. And these poor decisions were not an occasional accident, but rather became a consistent problem to the point that he could not be counted on to perform an appropriate action when it was expected. At this same time he also developed severe headaches, and it was eventually discovered that he had a large, fast growing brain tumor. The tumor was benign, and was successfully removed, but unfortunately a large area in the right-sided prefrontal cortex had been irreversibly damaged before the problem was corrected.

Elliot continued to make poor decisions so persistently that he eventually lost his job. And another job. And another job. In spite of warnings from several friends, he invested his life’s savings with a questionable business partner, and then lost all of his money when the venture ended in bankruptcy. Aside from his persistent difficulty with poor decisions he appeared remarkably normal, and this actually contributed to his problems because his family and friends could not understand why he was behaving so foolishly. His wife, for one, could not deal with this state of affairs, and his marriage eventually ended in divorce. And then his second marriage also ended in divorce. By the time Elliot was sent to Dr. Damasio he was unemployed, twice divorced, bankrupt, and in the custody of one of his siblings.

Dr. Damasio was asked to see Elliot because he had lost his disability income. The problem was that he appeared to be so normal the disability investigators concluded he simply did not want to work. As Dr. Damasio proceeded with his evaluation, he was increasingly able to understand why the disability investigators had decided to discontinue Elliot’s assistance – to his surprise, he could not demonstrate any objective impairment *even with an exhaustive battery of every psychological testing procedure that might possibly be relevant*. Standardized IQ testing showed his intelligence to be superior; normal performance on the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test demonstrated basic logical competence and the ability to change mental set; normal performance on specialized tests developed by Shallice and Evans³ revealed that he could complete the complex task of making estimates on the basis of incomplete knowledge; he generated a valid profile on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI); and a variety of additional tests revealed that his perceptual ability, past memory, short-term memory, working memory, attention, new learning, language, and ability to do arithmetic were all intact.

²Damasio, Antonio, R. *Descarte’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. (New York, NY: Avon Books), 1994, pages 34-51, 205-222.

³For detailed description and discussion of these specialized testing tasks, see Shallice, Tim, and Evans, Margaret E., “The involvement of the frontal lobes in cognitive estimation,” *Cortex*, 1978, Vol. 14, pages 294-303.

Damasio and his colleagues also developed a number of specialized testing tasks to evaluate whether Elliot could come up with solutions for hypothetical ethical dilemmas and hypothetical business problems, whether he could predict the *practical* consequences of hypothetical events, whether he was aware of the *social* consequences of hypothetical actions, whether he could generate a variety of different options for how to respond in hypothetical situations, and whether he could conceptualize efficacious means for achieving a variety of hypothetical social goals. Elliot performed as well or better than the normal controls on each of these tasks, *demonstrating that he still had **cognitive** knowledge of the principles of behavior that he neglected to use day after day in real life. He still had **cognitive** knowledge of these principles, and could carry on a very coherent and logical discussion of the different considerations involved in all of these **hypothetical** scenarios, but he was unable to apply any of this knowledge or understanding in his real life decisions.*

As I am sure you already realize, one of the most significant points in all of this is the dramatic discrepancy between Elliot’s excellent performance on the tests and his dismal performance in real life. Not surprisingly, Dr. Damasio and his colleagues also noticed this dramatic discrepancy, and they wanted to develop new tests that *would* be able to demonstrate Elliot’s disability, and that would help to elucidate its source. But how to proceed? They knew that the damage to his prefrontal cortex had resulted in abnormalities in his brain function; but what were these abnormalities that caused him to perform so poorly in real life, but that did not affect his performance on the many different testing tasks? And they knew that the challenges encountered in real life must include component tasks that Elliot could not perform; but what were these tasks that he so persistently failed to navigate in everyday living, but that were obviously not included in the tests that he completed so successfully?

Two clues led Dr. Damasio and his colleagues to develop fascinating testing procedures that finally provided the explanation for Elliot’s puzzling disabilities. The first clue was noticing that Elliot lacked normal emotional responses to situations that would be expected to upset the average person, the clearest example being Elliot’s lack of negative emotions regarding his own tragic story. All of the testing had focused on Elliot’s *cognitive* abilities, but as Dr. Damasio spent hours talking with him about every detail of his story, he slowly realized that Elliot’s minimal display of *emotion* was not just the result of a stoic personality, but rather an abnormal lack of emotional response. And so the thought occurred to him: “Could Elliot’s problems somehow be linked to his impaired emotions?”

A comment from Elliot supplied the second clue. At the end of a session of working on the specialized testing tasks described above – after coming up with many plausible, reasonable ways in which he might handle the hypothetical situation that had been presented, Elliot commented spontaneously: “And after all this, I still wouldn’t know what to do!” Pondering this comment, Dr. Damasio realized that the specialized testing tasks had included formulation of alternatives, reasoning through costs and benefits, identifying possible consequences, etc – all of this being *logical discussion of the principles* – but the tests *had **not** included the bottom line of having to make **decisions or choices with actual consequences***. As Damasio points out: “Real life has a way of forcing you into choices,” (Page 49) and choices in real life have consequences. And so the thought occurred to him: “Could Elliot’s problems come from difficulty at the point where he has to make an actual choice with real life consequences?”

In response to these thoughts, Damasio and his colleagues set out to design testing procedures that would simulate the complexity and uncertainty of real life, that would require choices with consequences, and that would include the assessment of emotional response.⁴ They came up with a testing scenario that involved simulated gambling. The test subject, or “player,” was given \$2,000 of very real-looking play money, and told to lose as little as possible and make as much as possible. The player would then sit in front of four decks of cards, and would pick cards, one at a time, from whichever decks he chose. The only information the player received was that *every* card would indicate some amount of money that would be paid to him, and that some of the cards would also indicate a penalty he would have to pay to the experimenter. The algorithms for the actual numbers on each card in two of the decks were designed so that these decks were “slow but safe” – the rewards were small, but the penalties were also small, so that the subject would consistently win, over the course of the whole game, when pulling cards from these slow but safe decks. The other two decks were “fast,” with each reward being much higher, but these “fast” decks were also dangerous, with occasional penalties that were so large that the subjects would consistently lose, over the course of the whole game, if they consistently pulled cards from these fast but dangerous decks.

The details of the experiment were designed to be very complex, with lots of variability, lots of unpredictability, no patterns that were easy to identify, and the participants were not allowed to take notes or make calculations. The point of all this was to produce a very complicated situation with no clear right or wrong answers – a situation where the participants could not use their left hemisphere analytical systems to solve the problem by figuring out the underlying algorithms and thereby coming up with a logical plan that would guarantee success. *Just as often happens in real life*, they had to use right hemisphere intuitive assessment to come up with “best guess” decisions in a very complex situation with many variables and no clear right or wrong answers.

The results of this experiment were fascinating, and revealed that Damasio and his colleagues had designed the first laboratory task that could measure the functional difficulty displayed by people with frontal lobe damage such as Elliot’s. Normal subjects initially sampled all decks, and often showed early preference for the “fast” decks, but then always moved to the safe decks by the time they had pulled 30 cards. They then stayed with the safe decks, and although their games went more slowly, with smaller rewards, they consistently won. Elliot, on the other hand, did not do this. He continued with a strong preference for the fast but dangerous decks throughout the entire experiment, *even though he went bankrupt half way through the game and had to take “loans” from the experimenter*. One of the most intriguing data points is that by the end of the game Elliot had figured out, *cognitively*, that the two “fast” decks were bad; *but although he cognitively understood this key principle, he was not able to apply it when actually playing the game*.

The second part of the testing setup was that the investigators used skin conductance to measure the subjects emotional responses throughout their participation in the card game gambling

⁴For a more detailed discussion of this fascinating research, see: Bechara, Antoine; Damasio, Antonio R.; Damasio, Hanna; & Anderson, Steven W., “Insensitivity to future consequences following damage to human prefrontal cortex.” *Cognition*, 1994, Vol. 50, pages 7-15.

scenario.⁵ The results from this part of the study were also fascinating. *After* each card was turned – when they would see the results of each choice – Elliot’s skin conductance responses were similar to those of normal subjects; but there was a dramatic difference regarding their responses *before* turning each card. Normals had an increasingly intense skin conductance response *warning them of danger before taking cards from the dangerous decks*. As they reached for the danger decks, their spontaneous, intuitive, emotional response (measured by skin conductance) said “oh, oh, oh – danger, danger,” and this response steadily increased the longer they played the game. However, ***the right prefrontal injury patients showed no skin conductance responses prior to choosing from the dangerous decks***. The emotion-based intuitive guidance system, indicated by the skin conductance, was not working to contribute intuitive, emotion-based warning; ***and this matched exactly their hard to identify, but hugely disabling problems in real life***.

Finally, all the pieces fit together. Elliot’s life had fallen apart because his ability to make real life decisions was greatly impaired, and he had this difficulty with real life decisions because he could not *feel* what was important. He could endlessly discuss all of the cognitive, logical considerations, *but he couldn’t feel which considerations were more important*. He could logically analyze all of the different factors involved, *but he consistently made bad choices because he had lost his right sided intuitive guidance system that had previously enable him to feel the relative importance of the different considerations, and that had enabled him to feel whether a given bottom line decision was “good” or “bad.”* Elliot was crippled in the real life world of pervasive complexity and uncertainty, where we constantly rely on our intuitive, emotion-based system to augment our logical, analytical system. For example, Elliot could correctly formulate and logically discuss all the considerations that should contribute to scheduling the events of his next week, but he might make the very poor final decision of skipping his daughter’s birthday party in favor of getting his hair cut *because he could not feel that his daughter’s birthday party was more important than making sure to get his hair cut before the weekend, and he could not feel that it would be bad to miss his daughter’s party*.

And for the purposes of this discussion, it is important to remember the brain tumor at the beginning of the case study – *all of these problems were caused by damage to Elliot’s right prefrontal cortex*.

Other information regarding the prefrontal cortex: A large body of case studies and other research provides additional pieces to the puzzle: 1.) the right prefrontal cortex is the primary area for interactions with other people, and especially for face to face communication (for example, this part of the brain watches and interprets other people’s facial expressions and voice tones, and generates appropriate facial expressions and voice tones in response); 2.) the left prefrontal cortex is especially involved in language-based communication; and 3.) both right and left prefrontal cortices are heavily involved in perceiving the meaning of a particular piece of mental content, and especially perceiving how any particular mental content fits into your personal autobiographical story.

⁵For a more detailed discussion of this part of the study, see: Bechara, Antoine; Tranel, Daniel; Damasio, Hanna; & Damasio, Antonio R., “Failure to respond autonomically to anticipated future outcomes following damage to prefrontal cortex.” *Cerebral Cortex*, March/April 1996, Vol. 6, pages 215-225.

Returning to “Describe everything that comes into your awareness”: So, putting all the pieces together – Elliot’s right prefrontal brain injury, his impaired decision-making in real life, the normal results from most psychological tests, the gambling decision-making research, the skin conductance research, our experience with Theophostic-based therapy and Immanuel Interventions, and additional research regarding the functions of both right and left prefrontal cortices – I have come up with the following hypothesis regarding why it is so important to describe everything that comes into our awareness:

- We need the right-sided pre-frontal cortex to be online⁶ to be able to *feel* the importance of our internal mental content. In the same way that Elliot couldn’t *feel* any guidance from his damaged pre-frontal cortex, if we don’t have the right-sided pre-frontal cortex on line, we can look right at important internal mental content and not *feel* it’s importance. This is what often happens when we are in an emotional healing session and do *not* describe everything that comes into our awareness.
- We need both the right and left prefrontal cortices online to be able to recognize the meaning of our internal mental content, and especially to recognize how a given piece of content relates to our personal autobiographical story. If we *don’t* have both pre-frontal cortices on line, we can look right at important internal mental content and not recognize how it relates to our personal autobiographical story. This is what often happens when we are in an emotional healing session and do *not* describe everything that comes into our awareness.
- The *social interaction task* of communicating with the therapist/facilitator, especially face to face communication, causes the content you are describing to be processed through the right prefrontal cortex.
- The *language task* of getting words to describe your mental content causes the content to be processed through the left prefrontal cortex.
- **Therefore, when you describe your mental content to another person, the combination of the *social interaction task* and the *language task* causes the content you are describing to be processed through both the right and left prefrontal cortices, and thereby enables you to feel the importance of the content you are describing, to perceive the meaning of the content you are describing, and especially to perceive how the content fits into your personal autobiographical story.**

Upgrading from partial to full benefits: Furthermore, even if you *can* feel that something is important and *can* correctly perceive it’s meaning, you will often miss a large percentage of the positive power if you keep it to yourself. My experience during a THRIVE conference exercise

⁶It may be more accurate to say “If a particular piece of mental content is not processed through the right-sided pre-frontal cortex,” as opposed to “If the right-sided pre-frontal cortex is not online.” This may be more consistent with the full body of data, in that a person can often feel the importance of some mental content at the same time they are unable to feel the importance of other content. This would indicate that the problem is not the R pre-frontal cortex being offline, but rather that some of the mental content is not being processed through it for some reason.

several years ago provides a good example. We were doing a devotional exercise, with instructions along the lines of “Pay attention to any images or thoughts or emotions that come into your awareness. Write them down, and trust that they are from the Lord...etc.” Often when I would try this kind of exercise, I would not get anything that I perceived to be from the Lord, and so would usually end up disappointed, frustrated, and triggered. So my initial response was not exactly positive. I was thinking: “This kind of thing never works for me. For example, right now I get an image of His smiling face, but I can feel that it’s an imagination image that I’m generating as I think ‘So what would it look like if I could see His face?’ And I have the thought ‘I’m glad to be with you,’ but I can feel that this is just a thought that I’m generating in answer to my own question ‘So what would the Lord say?’”

And then suddenly I had a second mental image of His face, but this image was spontaneous, unexpected, not initiated by me, much more engaging, and had a smile that was *alive*. At the moment I perceived this new, spontaneous image of Jesus’ face, the thought came into my mind: “Just because you can accurately guess that I’m here and that I’m glad to be with you doesn’t make it not true – just because you accurately deduce these truths doesn’t disqualify them!” And the sense I had was that He said this with a smile and a chuckle – He wasn’t upset with me or rebuking me, but rather was on my side, and laughing *with* me regarding my logical error and spiritual fussing.

At the time this occurred, my initial response was surprisingly mild. I did recognize “I think this is really the Lord. I think this image and thought are actually from Him,” and I had a vague subjective sense that it was real and important, but both pieces of this initial reaction were quite subdued. However, later in the day as I described this experience to Charlotte, intense emotions began welling up as I was telling the story and I had a much clearer, keener perception of what it meant. Until I described the experience to Charlotte, I had not been able to *fully* feel its importance or to *fully* comprehending its meaning. As I think about this now, it seems that *I had been missing 90% of the blessing until I talked to Charlotte about it.*

Watching groups doing Immanuel exercises provides another good example. We have facilitated group Immanuel exercises that included breaking up into small groups so that the participants can apply this principle in describing their experiences to each other. As I observed those participating in the exercise, I noticed that people would usually be fairly calm while they were waiting to share – they had completed the exercise *internally*, but they were waiting to share with the rest of the group. And then these same people would *come alive emotionally* as they described the details of their experience with the others in their small group. When people are just doing the exercise in their own heads, I see smiles, nods, and observable emotions with levels of intensity between 1 and 3 (on a scale of 1 to 10); and then as they share with the group, I see tears, laughter, and observable emotions with levels of intensity between 3 and 7.

The reason I’m giving you this information: As mentioned above, Dr. Smith has taught “describe everything that comes into your awareness” as a part of the Theophostic process for years. However, my observation is that this simple directive is amazingly hard to implement when you are the one receiving healing. Even after being *repeatedly* instructed to “report everything,” it is still very easy to leave out the things that *feel* unimportant: “Yes, I know I’m supposed to report everything, but that can’t *really* apply to the things that I’m *sure* aren’t important.”

Regarding this point, there is a striking similarity between what I observe in emotional healing sessions and Elliot’s experience. Extensive psychological testing demonstrated that Elliot had a cognitive understanding of the principles regarding how to navigate life, but somehow being unable to *feel* their importance at the point they were relevant got in the way of actually being able to apply them in real life. In the card game, he eventually figured out the key principle that certain decks were dangerous, but somehow being unable to *feel* this danger at the point it was relevant got in the way of applying this knowledge when he was actually playing the game. ***And this same phenomena occurs with the “Describe everything” directive!*** We understand this principle *cognitively*, but somehow being unable to *feel* it at the point it is relevant gets in the way of actually applying it – we have a cognitive understanding of the principle, but somehow being unable to *feel* the importance of the mental content gets in the way of actually choosing to describe it.

My own experience provides an especially clear example. I understood this instruction with respect to process, and I was convinced that it was valid and important because I had seen it happen in front of me so many times. I consistently taught that this was an important principle, and even wrote an entire essay about the importance of making sure to describe *everything* that comes into your awareness. But in spite of all of this, I would still frequently fail to apply this principle in my own sessions. Somehow, when I was inside my own sessions, being unable to *feel* the importance of certain mental content got in the way of actually choosing to describe it. When I was inside my own sessions, it was *so* difficult to take the time and energy to report things that *truly, truly, truly felt* unimportant. “I know what I tell everybody else, and I know I’ve missed things in my own sessions when I didn’t report everything, but *these* thoughts/images/physical sensations (fill in the blank) are *truly* just distractions. I *will* ‘report everything’ *if it’s important.*”

Deep down in our experiential, intuitive, right hemisphere “guts,” it’s really hard to believe something might be important when it doesn’t *feel* important; and in the middle of a session (especially when we’re more triggered and blended than we realize), it’s *sooo* hard to report something when we truly don’t believe that it might be important.

Here’s the good news, and the reason I have just taken all this time to present this material: I have noticed a dramatic change in my behavior since coming to these conclusions regarding the underlying brain science. In sessions where I’m receiving, when I become aware of mental content that does not *feel* important, I find myself thinking about the material I’ve just presented, and it is so compelling that it consistently tips the balance. I can *feel* that being aware of this material helps me choose to go ahead and report things even when they don’t feel important. I have also observed this same benefit for people I work with – a clear understanding of this material helps them to more consistently implement the directive to “report everything.”

Caveat: not describing content because it’s too upsetting: In this section we are discussing the problem of choosing to not describe mental content because it doesn’t “make sense” (you don’t understand how it pertains to the current focus of your session) and/or it doesn’t *feel* important. Choosing to not describe mental content because it’s too embarrassing, too frightening, or too upsetting for some other reason is a completely different phenomena. If you’re in an Immanuel approach session/exercise and something comes forward that you don’t want to talk about, you do *not* have to describe the details if you don’t feel comfortable doing so.

However, it is very important to let the others know what’s happening. Simply tell them that something has come up that you know is important, but that you’re not comfortable saying more about it. In some situations you can continue working with the upsetting material by engaging directly with Jesus, but just not describing the details out loud. In other situations you will want to work with Jesus to shut down the upsetting content, and then come back to this material at some later time when optimal support is available. In either case, it’s important to let the others know what’s going on so they can provide support and avoid misinterpreting the session (for example, erroneously concluding that “it didn’t work – nothing happened”). For additional discussion of how to navigate situations where you’re reluctant to report what’s happening because it’s too upsetting, see “Not Reporting Everything – An Especially Sneaky Form of Interference.”⁷

Complexity, variability: There is obviously some complexity with respect to these circuits/this phenomena, since sometimes thoughts, emotions, images, etc come into our conscious awareness and we *are* able to feel the importance and perceive the meaning *even though we are not describing it out loud to another person*. Some people seem to prefer to process internally at times, and this is okay *as long as it works*. However, as described above, in many situations the person is *not* spontaneously able to feel the importance and perceive the meaning *and he usually has no insight regarding his lack of ability to feel the importance and perceive the meaning of the clues sitting in front of him*. Therefore, it is especially important to coach the person to “describe everything” when things are *not* moving forward and the session seems to be stuck. Furthermore, even with people who like to process internally (without reporting), I invite them to experiment with the “describe everything” technique to see if this tool will enable them to move forward even more effectively.

”Value added” Material: The material below was not presented in the teaching time Monday evening, and is *not* “required reading” for the Monday evening seminar exercises. However, you should look at this material if you want to experiment with including the “describe everything” discipline as part of your marriage and/or other close personal friendships. Being aware of the information below will increase the benefits and help prevent unnecessary problems.

II. The “Describe everything” discipline in the context of close personal relationships:

In Part I, above, I discuss how you can dramatically increase your ability to *feel the importance* of your mental content and to *accurately perceive the meaning* of your mental content by describing, out loud to another person, everything that comes into your internal mental awareness. In addition to being an important part of our Immanuel group exercises, this simple yet powerful discipline can be included as a routine part of other relationships. For example, Charlotte and I have been practicing this relational discipline as a routine part of our marriage friendship for several years now. Prior to embracing this “describe everything” discipline as part of our marriage, there would often be long periods of silence during times when we were together, whether we were driving down the highway, sitting in the living room, or walking

⁷Lehman, Karl D., “Not Reporting Everything – An Especially Sneaky Form of Interference,” “About Our Theophostic-based Emotional Healing Ministry/Therapy” section, “Documents” page, www.kclehman.com.

around the neighborhood. Each of us would be absorbed in our private internal mental content but not talking about it. Even more common would be constant internal editing during conversations. Lots of thoughts, images, memory fragments, and emotions would be flowing through our minds, *but we would only report the content that felt important, the content that made sense, and the content that had been put together into nice, tidy packages.*

The “describe everything” discipline has been especially helpful when making decisions as a couple. In the past, when we would be discussing a decision that needed to be made, each of us would only share the mental content that felt important, made sense, and had been organized into nice, tidy, logical packages. Unfortunately, many pieces of information relevant to the final discernment did *not* feel important, did not yet “make sense,” and had not yet been adequately packaged. We would therefore not share this content, and much useful information would be excluded from the discussion. We were amazed to discover how much additional important information came forward and how much easier joint discernment became when we started applying the “describe everything” discipline during decision-making discussions.

For example, we were planning a celebration of some kind with a particularly delicious menu of grilled salmon and chocolate silk pie. As the date for our special celebration approached, Charlotte suggested that we invite several friends to join us, and asked if that would be all right with me. As we talked about this possibility I became increasingly unhappy. My unhappiness didn’t seem to “make sense,” and I could not come up with a logical argument to defend what I was feeling, but eventually I simply described what was happening inside: “I’m just noticing that I feel anxious and angry as we’re talking about this.” Pause. “And now that I’m saying it out loud, I’m realizing that my anxiety and anger are much stronger than I had perceived them to be before I said anything.” At this point, Charlotte responded with something like, “If you focus on the anxiety and anger, and don’t worry about whether or not it makes sense, can you notice anything else coming into your awareness?” After another pause to observe my internal mental content and get words to describe it, I reported: “If I just say exactly what I’m thinking and feeling inside, I feel like I want to say ‘No,’ but I don’t have a good enough reason.” “It feels like I’m not allowed to say ‘No.’ What feels true is that if I say ‘No,’ people will be angry with me, people will judge me, and people will inflict subtle relational punishment.”

As Charlotte asked clarifying questions and I continued to describe whatever came into my awareness, I eventually noticed that memory fragments from a negative teenage experience were coming into my mind. I was 14 years old and our youth group was making home made ice cream. As we were churning the ice cream, several of the older teens had the idea of inviting a number of additional youth from the neighborhood. I, being 14, immature, hungry, and not having much relationship with the teens they wanted to spend time with, protested that there would not be enough ice cream. In response to my protest the kids from our group who wanted to include their friends made angry, judgmental comments about my immaturity and selfishness, and expressed contempt in a variety of subtle ways throughout the rest of the evening. As I described this experience both Charlotte and I realized that it was the true source of my negative reaction; and as I recognized where my pain was really coming from, Charlotte attuned to my pain, and we both validated my concern that the celebration would not feel as festive with very small portions, my adversarial, defensive attitude towards her quickly resolved. Once we were “back on the same team,” had resolved my triggered pain, and had identified my legitimate concern, I was happy to embrace Charlotte’s desire to invite friends and we quickly and easily came up with a plan to make sure there would be enough food.

If we had had this conversation without the “describe everything” discipline, these thoughts and emotions would have been barely recognized even in my own mind, I would have had minimal insight regarding how these thoughts and emotions were coming from underlying unresolved memories, and I would not have shared any of this with Charlotte. My unrecognized and unspoken thoughts and emotions would have resulted in my continuing to be defensive and adversarial towards Charlotte, seriously hindering our ability to work together as a team in coming to a good decision, and neither of us would have had enough information regarding the underlying dynamics to know how to fix the problem.

Our experiences with the “describe everything” discipline have not only involved big, important, intense issues. For example, sometimes as we are walking around the neighborhood various landmarks, such as a particular house or tree, will remind me of events from my childhood. In the past I would let these memory associations slip in and out of my awareness without commenting on them. Now, as we walk through the neighborhood, I will share this content with Charlotte: “I was just noticing that big rock on the corner, and remembering the sense of accomplishment I felt when I was finally able to climb on top of it,” or “As we walk past this building, I’m remembering delivering papers to the back porches, and how spooky the rear stairwell would be in December when it would get dark so early.” Both Charlotte and I have experienced these shared memories as a subtle but significant source of additional intimacy and connection.⁸

Many benefits: As you practice this relational discipline over time, you will slowly but surely train your brain to pull all spontaneous mental content through your prefrontal cortices. As this happens, you will become increasingly aware of the stream of thoughts, images, emotions, and physical sensations that flow through your consciousness, and you will also become increasingly able to feel the importance and perceive the meaning of these thoughts, images, emotions, and physical sensations. And as you become more aware of, more able to feel the importance of, and more able to perceive the meaning of spontaneous mental content, you will receive a number of benefits:

***You will become more self aware, in general:** I think this one is self explanatory. As you become more acutely aware of your spontaneous mental content, and as you become increasingly skilled at feeling the importance and perceiving the meaning of this content, you will become more acutely aware of your spontaneous mental content, more able to feel it’s importance, and more able to perceive it’s meaning. Like I said, I think this one is self explanatory.

***You will bring previously unrecognized content into conscious awareness:** All of us have important mental content that we can’t “find” because we don’t “see” the clues that would show us the way. However, as you become more acutely aware of your spontaneous mental content, and as you become increasingly skilled at feeling the importance and perceiving the meaning of this content, you will realize that many clues have been passing

⁸Just in case you are wondering, we are not talking all the time. Both of us still feel the need for times of quiet, and it has been fairly easy to negotiate ways to care for these needs as we each “describe everything” in our conversations about this concern. Also, this “describe everything” relational discipline is *not* the same thing as a triggered need to talk all the time.

before you each day, but you simple did not *recognize* them. And you will then begin to “see” these clues that will lead you to important memories, connections, issues, insights, defenses, etc that you had previously been unable to “find.”

***You will expose defenses that hinder emotional healing:** As you become more acutely aware of your spontaneous mental content, and as you become increasingly skilled at feeling the importance and perceiving the meaning of this content, it will become much easier to spot unpleasant thoughts and emotions that you choose to turn away from. This will make it easier to see the places where you are using psychological defenses to avoid unresolved painful content, and this, in turn, will make it easier to engage with the Lord to dismantle these defenses. You still have to choose to do this, but the defenses will be more apparent and the choice will be more clearly focused.

***You will develop “basic skills” that are important in many contexts:** In basketball, being able to dribble the ball without looking at it is a basic skill. No matter what else you’re trying to do, mastery of dribbling will contribute to accomplishing your goals. In hockey, skating is a basic skill. No matter what else you’re trying to do, mastery of skating is a foundational skill that will contribute to success. Similarly, being able to feel the importance and correctly perceive the meaning of mental content are “basic skills” that will contribute to accomplishing many larger goals.

*Following mental content trail to underlying memories: These “basic skills” contribute to being able to follow the trail of spontaneous mental content to underlying traumatic memories.

*Recognizing and understanding clues regarding blockages: These “basic skills” contribute to being able to recognize and understand clues regarding blockages and the interventions needed to resolved them.

*Recognizing and utilizing intuitive guidance: The final “output” of the right hemisphere intuitive guidance system is your “spontaneous” internal mental content. Being able to feel the importance and perceive the meaning of mental content are the “basic skills” you use to recognize and utilize this intuitive guidance “output.”

*Recognizing when you are triggered: Feeling the importance and perceiving the meaning of mental content strongly contribute to being able to recognize when your are triggered.

*Recognizing and utilizing the guidance of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit often guides us through the thoughts, emotions, images, memories, and physical sensations that “spontaneously” come into our awareness. Being able to feel the importance and perceive the meaning of spontaneous mental content are the “basic skills” you use to recognize and utilize this form of guidance.

Several important caveats:

Not an excuse to be hurtful: The “describe everything” relational discipline is *not* an excuse

to say things you know will be hurtful to the other person. For example, if you are having angry, hurtful thoughts towards your spouse, the “describe everything” discipline is not an excuse to throw kidney punches, such as “The thoughts that come to me are: ‘You’re just a selfish, mean, arrogant pinhead, and your complaints are stupid and immature.’” If these are the thoughts coming into your awareness, you can choose to present them much more gently, such as “I’m having thoughts that are really angry and judgmental towards you.”⁹ Furthermore, if the relationship you are in does not yet have the capacity to handle even this gentler statement, you can choose to withhold it, and, instead, discuss it later with the Lord and/or some other wise, trusted person.

The “describe everything” discipline is trying to address the problem of choosing to not describe mental content because it does **not feel important**, because it does **not “make sense”** (you don’t yet understand how it pertains to your current conversation), or because it has **not yet been organized into a nice, tidy package**. This is about “practicing” the brain/mind “skill” of pulling all your mental content through your prefrontal cortices. The key in this process is to practice being more aware of your spontaneous mental content, and to practice sharing it, out loud, with another person whose face you can see. And for this part of the discipline and practice, the point is to get better at noticing and describing *content that does not feel important, content that does not make sense, and content that has not yet been nicely packaged*, as opposed to forcing yourself to say things that will be hurtful. Choosing to not describe mental content because it would be hurtful to another person is a completely different phenomena.

Not a mandate to say things you are not yet comfortable disclosing: The “describe everything” relational discipline is *not* a mandate to force yourself to say things that you don’t yet feel comfortable saying. For example, if a particularly painful, vulnerable, unresolved traumatic memory comes to mind, the “describe everything” discipline is not a mandate to force yourself to talk about it. One option is to describe the painful content in general terms, so that the other person will have some idea of what you’re dealing with. Instead of describing the excruciating details, you might say: “A memory has come to mind that I know is important, but I’m not comfortable saying more about it.” Furthermore, if your relationship with the person you’re talking to is not yet safe enough to handle even this more cautious statement, you can choose to remain silent regarding the painful memory, and, instead, discuss it later with the Lord and/or some other wise, trusted person.

⁹In certain situations it can be valuable to describe the specific angry, judgmental thoughts coming into your awareness because the details will provide clues. If the relationship you are in has the maturity and capacity to handle this kind of intense content, you and the person you are with should be able to discern this together. One of the most important indicators that this is the case is that the two of you are able to talk openly about this issue, and you *both* agree it would be helpful to know the details. Even in this situation you can choose to present the words as gently as possible. For example, with an apologetic look on your face, and speaking quietly, you can say: “Boy, I realize these are really angry, judgmental words, but I think it might be helpful to get them out in the light. The thoughts that have been coming to me are.....” In contrast, you can present the exact same words in a much more toxic fashion by glaring at the person and spewing the hurtful words directly at them in a loud, angry voice: “Well, I think you’re...etc.”

As mentioned above, the “describe everything” discipline is trying to address the problem of choosing to not describe mental content because it does **not feel important**, because it does **not “make sense”**, or because it has **not yet been nicely packaged**. Choosing to not describe mental content because it’s too embarrassing, too frightening, or too upsetting for some other reason is a completely different phenomena. If something comes into your awareness that you don’t want to talk about, you do *not* have to describe the details if you don’t feel comfortable doing so.¹⁰

Not a mandate to say things that will cause conflict/be upsetting to others: The “describe everything” relational discipline is *not* a mandate to force yourself to say things, *right now*, that will cause conflict/be upsetting to others. For example, let’s say your daughter’s birthday party is supposed to start in ten minutes, and just as you are putting the last touch on the cake you notice a certain look of preoccupation, anxiety, and guilt on your husband’s face. Several other recent observations spontaneously come into your mind, and with a sinking feeling you realize: “In the past, whenever I’ve noticed this same pattern it has always eventually come out that Pete has gotten back into pornography.” The “describe everything” discipline is not a mandate to force yourself to share all of this with Pete *right now*. At some point it will be important to tell Pete about the things you have observed, the sinking feeling in your gut, and the thought that came to you regarding pornography. But not ten minutes before your daughter’s birthday party is supposed to start.

In other situations it’s important to wait until you are in a better place. For example, let’s say you are in a heated conflict with your wife, and spontaneous thoughts come into your mind regarding ways in which her weaknesses are contributing to the problem. However, you also notice that you are triggered, judgmental, and that your relational connection circuits are off line. Putting all this together, you realize that if you “describe everything,” you will make comments about her weaknesses that will be unnecessarily hurtful due to the anger, judgment, and lack of compassion that would necessarily be associated with your comments if you make them *right now*. At some point it will be important to share the thoughts that came to you, but they will be less hurtful and more constructive if you first take time to resolve your triggering, release your judgments, and re-establish access to your relational connection circuits.

As already mentioned, the “describe everything” discipline is trying to address the problem of choosing to not describe mental content because it does **not feel important**, because it does **not “make sense”**, or because it has **not yet been nicely packaged**. Choosing to not describe mental content because it would cause conflict/be upsetting to others, *and you perceive this is not the right time and/or place to address the issue*, is a completely different phenomena. Feel free to “save it for later” if something comes into your awareness and you perceive it would not be helpful to describe this particular mental content at this particular time.

Not left hemisphere analysis: The “describe everything” relational discipline is *not* about

¹⁰In your closest relationships, can push on this boundary as an exercise in transparency, vulnerability, honesty, and humility, but these issues are not the purpose of the “describe everything” discipline.

giving left hemisphere theoretical/analytical monologues every time something reminds you of a subject you have thought a lot about. For example, if I’m in a conversation and the other person mentions psychological trauma, her comment might remind me of an essay I have been working on and I could easily launch into an hour of extemporaneous comments related to the topic. The person I’m talking to might even be interested in the topic and welcome my comments, but this would *not* be an application of the “describe everything” discipline we are presenting here. In contrast, application of the describe everything discipline would look like this: I’m in a conversation, the other person mentions psychological trauma, and her comment reminds me of the essay I’ve been working on. At this point, I notice both the association and my internal response to it, and comment: “I’ve just spent the last week working on an essay about faith-based interventions for resolving psychological trauma, and your comment brings to mind some of the stuff I’ve been studying and writing. And I can feel an emotional response as well – just thinking about it for a few seconds, I can feel how passionate I am about the subject. In fact, as I focus on the energy I’m feeling right now, the thought comes to me that I might even have some triggered energy. If you ever want to hear more I’d be happy to tell you about it.”

Once again, the “describe everything” discipline is trying to address the problem of choosing to not describe mental content because it does **not feel important**, because it does **not “make sense”**, or because it has **not yet been nicely packaged**. Choosing to not talk about the content of my essay because other considerations and social cues indicate this is not the place for a lecture on psychological trauma is a completely different phenomena.

Noticing and describing spontaneous mental content can be included in many relationships: Charlotte and I started with practicing this relational discipline in our marriage, but as we have continued over several years and become increasingly comfortable with it we have discovered that we can include it in many relationships.¹¹ With most of our family, friends, and colleagues we will now often notice some piece of mental content, and then simply report it. For example, during a discussion with friends at church about a possible block party, I might notice and comment: “I don’t know why, but I’m just noticing that I’m feeling anxious as we talk about this block party idea; and I don’t see the connection, but I’m noticing that as we talk about the block party I’m remembering a boy scout trip that didn’t turn out well.” On many occasions, important insights and connections become clear *as I describe the content* that’s spontaneously coming into my awareness.

¹¹To varying degrees, as appropriate. Keep the caveats in mind, and use good judgment