

“Healing in Community” Reba Place Fellowship Monday evening seminar

Karl D. Lehman, MD & Charlotte E.T. Lehman, M.Div.

drkarl@kclehman.com charlotte@kclehman.com

Instructions for group exercises (full text version):

1.) 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.”

2.) 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 #3 through #5),¹ with the others in the group listening, supporting, and interceding.

If you perceive the Lord’s presence and feel connected to Him: proceed on to Step #3.

If you do not perceive the Lord’s presence or feel connected to Him, and you would like to

¹“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.

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.

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 #3.

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.

3.) Choose memories to work on: Select a small to medium sized traumatic memory from one of the following categories:²

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.

4.) 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

²Some 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.

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 in the memory: If you are able to perceive the Lord’s 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 in the memory: 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.

c.) 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.

d.) 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.

e.) 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 #2 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 #2 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 #2 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.