

(Slide 1.0) **The Immanuel lifestyle and sustaining joy for a life time**

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****Note regarding this document:** This is the manuscript for the presentation we gave at the THRIVE annual gathering, April 11 2015. As mentioned, it includes a lot of additional details from the true story examples that had to be omitted due to lack of time. Unfortunately, it does not include the relational circuit demonstration component that I spontaneously incorporated into the live presentation. (At several points in the live presentation, when the combination of sleep deprivation, stress from time pressure, and various triggers pushed my relational circuits off, I paused, described my internal experience, and pointed out the indicators that my relational circuits were off. And then I would use one of the tools for getting relational circuits back on, and again describe my internal thoughts and emotions, pointing out the clues that now indicated that I was back in relational mode.) Hopefully this material will still be helpful, even without the relational circuit demonstration component. And, sadly, the manuscript is also missing the humor that spontaneously found it's way into the live presentation.

Introduction:

We have been created to be relational beings – we have been created to be in relationship with God and with each other. Our minds and spirits have been created to *desire* relationship and to *function best* in relationship, and the Lord has actually designed specific circuits in our biological brains to serve this longing and need for connection. When these relational brain circuits are working as designed, our spontaneous, normal experience will be to feel connected to the people around us, and to feel desire to be connected to the people around us.

Another foundational THRIVE concept is that being glad to be together gives us joy. When you see another person, and that person greets you with a genuine smile and a sparkle in their eye that says, “I’m glad to be with you,” that gives you joy. And if you return that smile, sparkle, and “I’m glad to be with you,” your response gives them joy as well.

Putting these pieces together, we get: **(Slide 2)** “*When our relational circuits are functioning as designed, we give each other joy by being glad to be together.*”

(Slide 3) Furthermore, “*When we apply these principles by building them into our lifestyles as habits, in both our relationships with God and with other people, we get joy that steadily grows and that is sustained over a life time.*”

(Slide 4.0) I. The Immanuel lifestyle: When we apply these principles to our relationships with God, and build them into our day-to-day lives as habits, we get what I call the Immanuel lifestyle, or the Immanuel approach to life. In my journey with the Lord, there have been a number of key components that have contributed to this Immanuel approach to life:

*Learning to be more consciously aware of my relational circuits, keeping them on, and deliberately pointing them towards the Lord.

*Regular times of deliberately establishing interactive connection, learning to be more consciously aware of spontaneous connection, and making more space for it.

*Regular, ongoing troubleshooting to remove hindrances.

*Regular, ongoing work to resolve trauma, as an especially important source of hindrances.
And,

*Deliberately accumulating faith-building experiences and stories.

I want to pause at this point to mention that there are others in the wider Immanuel approach community who talk about the Immanuel lifestyle. Every version of the Immanuel lifestyle I have seen includes the most central core of regular times of deliberately establishing interactive connection with the Lord, and also learning to be more consciously aware of spontaneous interactive connection. What I am presenting here is the doctor-Lehman-obsessively-thorough-“take no prisoners” version of the Immanuel lifestyle.

Now I would like to expand on each of these points.

(Slide 4.1) A. Learning to be more consciously aware of my relational circuits, keeping them on, and deliberately pointing them towards the Lord: Part of my Immanuel lifestyle has been deliberately *practicing the skill* and *building the habit* of monitoring/observing/being consciously aware of my relational circuits – being *mindful* of my relational circuits. And when I notice that they’re off, I take responsibility for getting them back on.

For example, our book, *Outsmarting Yourself*, has a list of questions that will indicate whether or not your relational circuits are on line. Such as, “Do I feel connected to Charlotte?” “Do I *want* to be connected to Charlotte?” “Do I experience Charlotte as a source of joy, or as a problem to be solved/resource to be used?” “Am I glad to be with Charlotte?” “Am I aware of her true heart?” “Do I feel compassionate concern regarding what she is thinking and feeling?” “Am I patient and tolerant, or am I impatient and irritable?” “Can I easily think of past positive experiences with Charlotte, and do I feel the positive emotions that should be associated with these memories?” “Can I easily think of things I appreciate about Charlotte, and do I feel gratitude as I think about these specific appreciations?” And, “Do I perceive the relationships involved to be more important than any problem I might be trying to solve?”

One of the best ways to develop the skill and build the habit of being mindful of your relational circuits is to look over the full list of questions (Chapters 15 & 16 in *Outsmarting Yourself*), pick the six or seven questions that resonate most with your own experience, write these out on a 3x5 card that you keep in your shirt pocket or purse, and then pull this card out and go over the questions whenever you feel particularly good or particularly bad.¹ If you do this regularly for even a few weeks, you will start to recognize what it feels like when your relational circuits are on and when they are off, and you will start to become much more consciously aware of when your relational circuits are on and when they are off.

And when you notice that your relational circuits are off, you can take responsibility for getting them back on by employing one or more of the following interventions: receiving attunement, calming exercises, deliberate appreciation, and strategic humor. We don’t have

¹An alternative is to set you smart phone to remind you every one to two hours, and then pull out the card and go over the questions whenever the reminder chime goes off.

time to expand on these now, but they are described in careful detail in Chapters 17 through 23 in *Outsmarting Yourself*, and they are simple enough that most people can begin to get results with a few weeks of practice. Also, I will try to demonstrate these interventions for you if fatigue or stress or triggering tip me into non-relational mode at any point during this presentation. (*As mentioned above, this idea came to me on Saturday morning, several hours before the presentation, and it worked out amazingly well. Sorry I can't reproduce it in this document.)

A closely related part of my Immanuel lifestyle is *practicing the skill* and *building the habit* of pointing my relational circuits towards the Lord – practicing the skills and building the habits of deliberately thinking about God, deliberately remembering past positive experiences with God, deliberately stirring up gratitude towards God, deliberately thanking God for the things I appreciate, and deliberately sending “I’m glad to be with you” messages to the Lord.

Note that these little pieces can be done in many brief moments throughout the day, without actually making the space and taking the time for all of the steps for establishing a full interactive connection. However, as I have steadily grown in these skills, as I have steadily built these habits, and as I have steadily eliminated more blockages, these little moments of pointing my relational circuits towards the Lord now often result in spontaneous perceptions of his presence and spontaneous moments of interactive connection. (They are usually more subtle and brief than when I take more time and space to deliberately go through all of the steps, but I’m still thrilled to be experiencing an increasing frequency of spontaneous God connections.)

(Slide 4.2) B. Regular times of deliberately establishing interactive connection, learning to be more consciously aware of spontaneous connection, and making more space for it: Another part of my Immanuel lifestyle has been practicing the skill and building the habit of *regularly* establishing good, strong interactive connections with the Lord. I find a quiet space, I take at least ten to fifteen minutes, I go through the Immanuel approach steps for establishing an interactive connection, and then I spend a few minutes just enjoying the Lord’s tangible, living, loving, interactive, personal presence.

A closely related part of my Immanuel lifestyle is learning to be much more consciously aware of spontaneous perception and connection. As I just mentioned a bit ago, practicing the skill and building the habit of keeping my relational circuits on and pointing them towards the Lord has resulted in spontaneous episodes of interactive connection with the Lord. My perception is that regularly taking the time and space to establish good, lasting connection is also contributing to these same spontaneous episodes. So now I’m practicing the skill and building the habit of watching/observing/noticing when I am experiencing spontaneous awareness of God’s presence and interactive connection – I am practicing the skill and building the habit of being *mindful* of perceiving God’s presence and having an interactive connection.

And when I do notice spontaneous awareness and connection, I try to make more space for it. If I’m walking, washing the dishes, or some other task that requires only a very small portion of my attention bandwidth, I lean into the spontaneous interactive connection with God by focusing my remaining attention on it, appreciating it, and participating in as much interaction as possible. And if I’m doing something that takes a lot more of my attention, like reading a book or preparing a presentation, I take a moment or two to focus more attention on

the spontaneous awareness and connection, acknowledge it, and appreciate it more deliberately, and then I try to enjoy the Lord's presence in the background as I continue with my initial task.

This last piece – becoming aware of a spontaneous connection even while I'm engaged in something that is already taking a lot of my attention – is actually a new one for me. It just started happening in maybe the last six to eight months, and I'm still trying to get words for it. The best I have so far is that it's like Charlotte and I sitting in our livingroom together, each of us focused primarily on whatever it is that we're reading, but still also aware of each other's presence. I'm not actively engaging with her, but I am aware of her presence and there is a very subtle interactive connection. For example, if Charlotte looks up at me I notice the movement in my peripheral vision and then look up at her. Or if Charlotte chuckles, I say, "What? What was so funny? Let me in on the fun." (and it's nice).

(Slide 4.3) C. Ongoing troubleshooting to remove hindrances: All of us have blockages that hinder us from perceiving God's presence and from connecting with God. Therefore, part of an Immanuel lifestyle is regular, deliberate, persistent troubleshooting to find and remove blockages. For example, identifying and dismantling patterns of judgement. Or finding and dismantling patterns of self-protection, such as focusing on making the pain stop instead of dealing with the underlying issues. Or identifying and dealing with sin that has not yet been confessed and forgiven.

(Slide 4.4) D. Ongoing work to resolve trauma, as an especially important source of hindrances: The toxic content from many of our painful memories gets transferred onto God, and as this toxic content gets transferred onto God it distorts our perceptions of God's character and heart, and it gets in the way of being able to connect with the Lord. Therefore, an important part of ongoing troubleshooting is ongoing, deliberate, persistent work to resolve these painful memories.

I'd like to share a true story example at this point, to illustrate how resolving trauma can be a part of removing blockages, and also to help your experiential, emotional right hemispheres to stay with me.

God, the psychotic cult leader story: "Tex" Watson, a young man who is now a committed Christian but was once a member of the Charles Manson cult, describes how Manson would ask one of his followers, "What is your most treasured possession?" When the one questioned would obediently answer, Manson would tell him or her to go and get it. Then he would say, "Do you love me more this? Put it on the ground. Pour gasoline on it. Burn it. Now tell me you love me."

From my early childhood until the healing described in this essay, at the age of thirty-eight, I struggled with being afraid of the Lord's will and dreading his plan for my life. 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 threatened by my ten speed bicycle and that He spent a lot of His time prowling around snatching things away from his children – demanding that they give them up in order to prove their allegiance, submission, and obedience. I had a deep conviction that one of the top priorities in His plan for my life would be to take away anything I really wanted in order to keep my priorities straight.

For example, as I grew older I wanted very much to get married, so I feared the Lord would make me be single to prevent me from loving any *one* 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 my binoculars and bicycle to prevent me from loving any *thing* 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 remember trying to “hide” my bicycle and binoculars by thinking about them as little as possible, and by trying to convince myself that they weren’t really that important. At the same time I would deliberately focus more of my attention on less precious possessions, like my pocket knife and pet turtle. My hope was that God would follow the focus of my attention, and erroneously conclude that the knife and turtle were the idols that needed to be confiscated, but then miss the hidden treasures that were actually more precious. I can even remember bargaining with God: “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 just let me get married and don’t mess up my grades.”

I felt that God was insecure, angry, and selfish, and that He needed to be in control in some sick and dysfunctional way. This may seem strange to some of you, but at some place deep inside I felt that God was a lot like Tex Watson's description of Charles Manson. There was at least a part of me that felt that God was more like a psychotic cult leader than a loving father.

I never *wanted* to believe these perceptions about God’s character and heart. When my parents would tell me that the Lord loved me and that I could trust His care, I wanted desperately to believe them and tried to convince myself that they were right. In fact, I could never fully acknowledge to myself that I even had these intensely negative thoughts and feelings towards the Lord, and I would have argued vehemently if you had told me I believed God was like a psychotic cult leader. (I don’t think I knew what to do with the place in my heart that carried such outrageous and heretical beliefs. “How can it be true that some part of me believes God is a psychotic cult leader? I’m a committed Christian designing my whole life around discipleship!”)

I fought these distorted perceptions whenever they came forward, and this struggle slowly improved through years of discipleship and personal spiritual growth, as I spent thousands of hours 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 God’s goodness, and reminding myself of the evidence for God’s goodness in my own life. I became deeply convinced in my adult cognitive mind that these negative perceptions were the wrong answer to the question “What is God like?,” but I had to spend a lot of time and energy using cognitive tools to hold on to the truth about the Lord’s nature and to fight off these negative thoughts and feelings. It took larger and larger triggers to bring them out and I got better and better at stuffing them back in, but even with all of these coping tools in place, I would still occasionally struggle with these distorted negative thoughts and the associated negative feelings. If it looked like I was about to lose something really important, I would rediscover these memory-anchored distorted beliefs about the Lord.

And then one evening in October of 1998, I got really stirred up as Charlotte and I were going to bed. We had just returned from some advanced Theophostic training with Dr. Smith, and we decided to try Theophostic® principles and tools on whatever it was that was upsetting me. So we had an informal emotional healing session from about 12:00 midnight to 1:30 a.m.. I don't even remember what the initial trigger was, but it was not clearly connected to the "God is a psychotic cult leader" thoughts and feelings. We asked the Lord to guide the process and then I tried to just pay attention to the thoughts and feelings that came into my heart and mind. I tried to describe to Charlotte as accurately as possible the thoughts and feelings that were coming to me. I remember feeling that I was wandering all over the place, and commented repeatedly "This doesn't make any sense, it's not working." After maybe 45 minutes of what felt to me like fruitless wandering, I came to a series of memories with intense emotions attached.

I remembered being a small child in our 1960's-social-justice- radical-discipleship church. The zealous young leaders constantly challenged us to follow 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 that the ones in between were distributed equally between "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out," "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off," 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 grown-ups 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.

During this same time in my life, church meetings were sometimes 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, or 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 worshipping." 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.

If I was going to be a “real” Christian, if I was really going to “Take up my cross and follow Jesus,” I should be living out these teachings. I remembered thinking about what it would be like to pluck out one of my eyes or cut off one of my hands, and wondering if I would ever have the courage and strength to actually do it. And I remember thinking about the “Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and then come and follow me” passage. I had no idea where one went in response to the “and then come and follow me” part of the passage, but I was pretty sure it meant that I couldn’t stay in my house. I remember imagining what it would be like to walk out into the alley naked (when you’re four years old, “sell *all* you have” includes clothing), with no home to go back to and no parents to care for me.² I wanted to be a real Christian but didn’t have the courage to do any of these things. I therefore had a chronic sense of being a coward and a failure. I was afraid that although I was not courageous or obedient enough to volunteer, God would take away anything I treasured “so that nothing would be before Him in my life.” And I was afraid that God would make bad things happen to me “to purify me.”

I cried for some time as I remembered what it felt like to be three to five years old and trying to deal with this stuff – what it felt like to believe that God wanted to control me in a way that was selfish, insecure, and oppressive, what it felt like to believe that he would take the good and send the bad in order to break me and stay in control of my life, what it felt like to believe I was supposed to love and trust this God, and what it felt like to believe that I was a coward and a failure as a Christian because I did not have the courage and obedience to embrace Him and His plans for my life.

Charlotte was praying that the Lord would bring His truth to replace these lies, and then suddenly it just felt like all these thoughts were ridiculous instead of true. “This isn’t true. That’s not what the Lord is like!” I didn’t perceive God’s presence in any tangible or personal way, but suddenly the lies no longer felt true, the new truth did feel true, and the pain was gone.

And more good news is that I have *continued* to be free from these perceptions that God was like a psychotic cult leader. They went away and they never came back. Now the old negative perceptions just feel ridiculous and untrue. And they don’t even come back when something goes wrong and I lose something precious.

I do 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. I want to be at the place where there is nothing in my life more important than my relationship with God. But now I feel that the Lord is trying to bring me to this place in the most gentle way possible, as a loving Father. He might allow pain in this process, but only if it’s the only possible way to accomplish a greater good. Now it *feels* true that God is actually good, and that he is someone I would actually want to follow and want to be with.

I don’t think it’s too hard to see how resolving this kind of trauma and these kinds of lies would remove hindrances between me and God.

²I remember being relieved when I came up with a tentative plan – I could hide under peoples porches during the day, so that nobody would see me running around the neighborhood naked, and then I could come out at night and get food out of trash cans.

(Slide 5.0) E. Deliberately accumulating faith-building experiences and stories: In my personal journey, yet another part of the Immanuel lifestyle has been to steadily build faith and trust in God's character and heart by deliberately accumulating experiences and stories that demonstrate God's goodness.

(Slide 5.1) 1. My own positive experiences with interactive God-connections: The first contribution for this part of the plan has been to deliberately accumulate a pile of my own positive experiences with interactive God connections. This has included interactive God-connections in the context of memories for past positive experiences, interactive God-connections in the context of positive experiences/gratitude in the present, interactive God-connections in the context of working with traumatic memories (some of my most profound God connections have been the Lord meeting me in traumatic memories), and interactive God-connections when I'm in pain and receive attunement from the Lord in the present.

I would like to include another true story example at this point. For those of you who have not yet had much experience with the Immanuel approach, this will give you a better picture of what positive memory interactive connections can look like. And this story will also help your right hemispheres to *feel* how powerful this simple interactive-connection-in-the-context-of-a-positive-memory exercise can be.

Tree swallows in South Carolina: This story actually unfolds in three layers.

The first layer was just a particularly beautiful positive memory, not yet including the awareness of God's presence. I was doing a medical school away rotation in Charleston, South Carolina, and I went out very early one morning to walk the beach as the sun rose. There was no-one else on the vast, wide beach, the water was calm, and there wasn't a single footprint on the wide, wet sand that the receding tide had just washed and smoothed. As I walked along the beach I noticed something dark on the sand in the distance. As I got closer I could see that the sand was covered with small dark objects, evenly spaced maybe six inches apart, and extending maybe 100 feet in width and several hundred yards in length – about the area of three football fields. As I approached even more closely I was amazed and excited to discover that I was seeing a huge flock of migrating tree swallows, sitting on the sand and chittering quietly to each other.

(Slide 5.2 – picture of tree swallow) Now tree swallows are beautiful. They have undersides that are dazzlingly white, and the top half of their bodies are an intense, deep, beautiful iridescent blue. I had my binoculars with me, and by the time I got within thirty or forty feet of the nearest swallows, I could see their beautiful blue and white markings absolutely glowing in the light from the rising sun. I paused for a few minutes to just take in the glory of the one hundred to two hundred thousand tree swallows sitting in front of me, and then I inched closer and closer. When I was maybe fifteen or twenty feet away, the whole flock rose into the air with an impressive whirring of wings, and I just kept walking.

They remained within ten feet of the ground, swooping and diving and chittering, often flying within inches of my face and at times gently disturbing my hair as they flew past. I was walking through the middle of a gigantic cloud of tree swallows, and it was one of

the most amazing, wonderful nature experiences of my life. It was like being inside a National Geographic nature documentary.

The second layer of the story came when I used this memory as the positive memory for an Immanuel group exercise. I described the memory to the others in my small group, and after naming the aspects that I especially appreciated, I focused on the part of the memory where I was walking through the cloud of swallows, and then welcomed Jesus to be with me in the memory and asked Him to help me perceive His presence. Immediately I had this mental image of Jesus walking beside me, looking this way and that with this huge grin and an expression of wonder and joy on his face. And then he turns to me, gesturing excitedly towards the thousands of swallows flying around us, and exclaims, “Karl, can you believe this?!” And we’re both just totally excited together, about being in the middle of one of the wonders of creation.

And then yet another layer of cool Immanuel blessings unfolded at an Immanuel seminar that Charlotte and I were providing to a church group in Winnipeg. As part of the conference we broke the crowd into small groups and went through the first steps of the Immanuel approach – just the positive memory, appreciation, and connection with Jesus steps. After making sure that everybody else was getting started okay, I joined one of the groups and decided to use this memory (with Jesus included) as my initial positive memory. After describing the memory as I just described it to you, I focused on the part where Jesus was walking beside me and asked, “Jesus, help me to perceive you in this memory as a living and interactive presence, as opposed to just a memory.”

I had used the Jesus-included version of this memory for my initial positive memory before, and usually at this point in the exercise I would just get a subtle sense of Jesus’ renewed living, interactive presence with me in the context of the familiar memory images. But this time I suddenly had an image of Jesus standing behind me, leaning over my shoulder and watching the memory with me. It was like I was sitting in my chair at the seminar and watching a video of Jesus and me walking through the cloud of swallows, and then the living, interactive presence of Jesus was looking over my shoulder, watching it with me. Like two close friends remembering a really special experience that they had shared together. It was like Jesus was looking over my shoulder and saying, “Yeah, that was really cool wasn’t it?” And I could somehow sense that he had really enjoyed sharing it with me.

One of the thematic pains throughout my childhood was having very few friends. So when Jesus shows up and acts like a friend – when he shows up and acts like he just enjoys being with me – it really does something to me.

(Slide 6.0) 2. *Watching God/Jesus work in sessions I facilitate for others:* Watching Jesus do cool, beautiful, amazing stuff in sessions I’ve facilitated for others has also contributed to my steadily growing faith in God’s character and heart.

In fact, watching Jesus work has been a particularly special part of my experience with the Immanuel lifestyle. I have come to know the Lord in a whole new way as I have encountered his presence in hundreds of my own Immanuel sessions, and as I have watched others encounter his presence in the thousands of sessions that I have facilitated – I have come to know Jesus’ presence, voice, character, and heart in a whole new way as

I have experienced and observed him working with so many different problems, as I have experienced and observed him responding to so many different situations, and as I have experienced and observed the gentle, wise, creative, careful, beautiful, surprising, elegant, helpful, life-giving, effective, profound, amazing interventions he comes up with.

Let me share a couple more story examples. Again, to help your experiential, emotional right hemispheres stay on board.

Eileen, “She’s been sitting on Jesus’ lap” story: How many of you have seen the live ministry session DVD with Eileen?

Well, for those of you who have not seen the session, it was a session from one of our training groups. Jesus did lots of beautiful healing stuff, and at the end of the session Eileen was in a three-year-old memory in which she was sitting in Jesus’ lap, with her head against his chest and listening to His heart beat as He spoke words of reassurance and blessing.

At this point in the session it was obvious that Eileen had received some powerful, beautiful healing work, but it was also clear to me that there was a lot more that needed to be done, especially regarding trauma related to her mother. I didn’t say this out loud, but I was thinking, “If we had more time, I would coach Eileen to press into this remaining trauma.” As I was having this thought, and also thinking about how I might encourage Eileen to pursue this healing work in some other setting, she made a spontaneous comment along the lines of “Jesus is saying that for right now He wants me to just stay in His lap and enjoy being with Him, and then at some time in the future we need to do more healing work about my mother.” I thought, “Wow. That’s interesting. Jesus is obviously aware of the healing work that still needs to be done, but He also seems very clear that right now is not the time to do it.” So I let it go and closed the session.

Another part of this story is that in addition to her participation in one of our mentoring groups, Eileen would also come in for an occasional individual session. She did a lot of Immanuel healing work in personal prayer times with just herself and Jesus, but occasionally she would get really triggered, be unable to resolve the problem on her own, and then come in for a consultation session for help with getting unstuck. This happened every two to three months, and with each session we would start by helping her to establish an interactive connection with Jesus, we would ask Him to show us where to go and what to do for the rest of the session, and then we would just follow His lead. This seemed to be working very well so I wasn’t worrying about setting the agenda, and I had forgotten all about the comments from the end of the training group session.

And then, in one of these consultation sessions about a year-and-a-half after the healing work presented in the training DVD, Eileen established a good connection with Jesus, asked for guidance, and reported, “Jesus says that now it’s time to do the healing work about my mother.” Somehow the matter-of-fact way she stated this, and then looked at me with calm patience (as if she was waiting for me to take the next obvious, logical step), gave me the impression that she expected me to know exactly what she was talking about. It felt as if she were referring to something that had happened to both of us just a few minutes earlier, and that I should know what she meant by “...the healing work about my mother.”

I had no idea what she was talking about, and I'm sure I looked as clueless as I felt, because she eventually explained, "You know – the little girl – she's been sitting on His lap, building capacity, learning to trust Him, and just enjoying being with Him – and He says that now it's time to go and work on the painful memories."

I'm still totally lost. "Okay,...uhm,...ahh,...I'm not sure I'm exactly clear about which little girl and which memories we're referring to – I think somehow I missed something." So she explained further, "You know, the three-year-old child part from the memory in the kitchen, where my Mom was doing dishes and I was trying to get her attention, but she was so depressed that she was just staring blankly out the window. And Jesus told the little girl that He wanted her to just sit in His lap for a while, but sometime later we would need to do more healing work about my mother."

The lightbulb finally went on for me, "Oh! You mean from the session a couple of years ago – the session on the DVD? You're saying that the little girl child part from that session has been sitting on Jesus' lap all this time? She's been sitting on Jesus' lap for the last couple years, building trust and capacity, and now Jesus is saying that it's time to work on the traumatic memories regarding your mother He was referring to at the end of the session?" "Exactly!" says Eileen. "She's been with Jesus all this time, and Jesus says she's ready to do the healing work now."

Oh, wow. Amazing. I had never seen this one before, but in light of the dramatic fruit in Eileen's life after the earlier session (and also in light of the other things I had been seeing the Lord do in Immanuel sessions), it all seemed quite possible. So I spoke directly to the three-year-old child part, and asked if she would be willing to cooperate with whatever Jesus wanted to do regarding the painful memories with her mother. She promptly said "Yes," and within minutes Jesus had taken her to some very intense memories in which she had been terrified that her mother would die.

After this initial intervention to help her get started, all I did was coach her to focus on Jesus and ask Him for help at every point in the healing work, and the memories were resolved in less than twenty minutes. As we finished working through the memories, I remember thinking that this was some of the smoothest, easiest work I had ever done (especially with such intensely traumatic, early childhood experiences), and I particularly noted that Eileen did not have any problems with disconnection or inadequate capacity.

Afterwards, as I pondered this session, it became increasingly clear that Jesus is an excellent therapist, with a very high level of skill and excellent clinical judgment. He had made a very good clinical judgment call at the end of the initial session in directing us to wait before trying to work with the traumatic mother memories; He had obviously been very skilled in building trust and capacity with the child part as she spent 18 months sitting in His lap; He obviously made the right call in saying that she was now ready to work on this material; and He did a beautiful, gentle, extremely effective job of leading us through the healing work when Eileen finally did go to the memories.

Furthermore, I'm convinced that this healing work would have been much more difficult if I had tried to get Eileen to go to these memories prematurely. I'm sure we would have encountered complicated problems with inadequate capacity, and it would have been slower, messier, and much more painful.

I'm sure you can understand how watching the Lord do this kind of work could increase your faith. Watching Jesus do this kind of work bolsters your confidence in his goodness, in his clinical judgment, in his competence, in his skill, in his trustworthiness, etc.

And part of the deal with this kind of faith building experience is that it doesn't just happen once. It happens over and over again. That's part of what contributes to the end result of trust and faith. When you see this kind of thing over and over again, you actually come to *expect* that God is going to be this way.

So let me tell you another story.

Rita, "Let Jesus answer the questions" story: This happened a couple of years ago in another of our training groups. I was facilitating a demonstration session, and about ten minutes into the session the recipient, Rita, asked a question. It was a good question, asking for both clarification regarding the personal meaning of the memories she was working with and also for explanation regarding a theoretical point, and after a few moments of thought I had a really good answer. Just before opening my mouth to share my ideas, the thought occurred to me, "I wonder what would happen if I coach her to focus on Jesus and ask Him, instead of just giving the answer myself?"

To be painfully honest, my immediate internal response to this thought was something along the lines of, "Yeah, that's a nice idea, but the Lord sometimes seems to take His time with respect to answering questions – He's too relaxed, too willing to waste time, and not adequately concerned about making the best use of the session.³ Furthermore, He often seems to speak so quietly that it takes a bit of work to make sure we're accurately hearing and understanding His answer. I think we'll get a usable answer a lot more quickly if I just take care of it myself."

But then I had second thoughts, "You know, this is a training group, where trying new stuff and learning is more important than efficiency. So maybe I'll coach her to ask Jesus, just to see what happens." So I did, and sure enough, there was a long pause – we're in this strategic training group, with a whole room full of busy people trying to learn stuff, and Jesus waits for a couple of minutes before answering the question. And then we had to take some more time for me to coach Rita to verbalize what she thought she was hearing from the Lord. But when Rita finally described what she perceived as the Lord's answer, I was amazed to realize that it was exactly what I would have said.

Well, actually, not *exactly* what I would have said. The Lord's answer was actually more precise, more elegant, and more carefully nuanced than what I had been about to offer, and He didn't repeat Himself or get distracted by tangential digressions. But the core content was the same. And the Lord seemed to have a quiet but profound authority clearly beyond what I carry. I'm sure that if I had answered her question Rita would have listened to me, and she would have seriously considered the probability that my thoughts were valid, but subtle uncertainties would have lingered around the edges. In contrast, when she heard these same thoughts from the Lord she immediately had a deep, peaceful sense

³In addition to the long pauses, Jesus also seems to talk a lot more slowly than I do.

of confidence that they were true. It was done. No additional discussion was needed, and we moved on.

And then about fifteen minutes later, the whole thing happened again. Rita asked a good question, requiring an answer that would both clarify the personal meaning of the memories she was working with and explain a theoretical point. After a few moments of thought I had a really good answer. Just before opening my mouth to share my ideas, the thought occurred to me, “I wonder what would happen if I coach her to focus on Jesus and ask Him, instead of just giving the answer myself?” I felt the same skeptical assessment that we would probably get a usable answer much more quickly if I just answered the question myself. And I had the thought, “You know, this is a training group, where trying new stuff and learning is more important than efficiency. So maybe I’ll coach her to ask Jesus, just to see what happens.”

Once again, I went ahead and did this, there was a long pause before Jesus answered the question, and then we had to take more time for me to coach Rita to verbalize what she thought she was hearing from the Lord. Once again, I was amazed to realize that the Lord’s answer was exactly what I would have said, except clearer, more elegant, more carefully nuanced, without repetitions or digressions, and carrying His special authority. And once again, when she heard the answer from Jesus she immediately had a deep, peaceful sense of confidence that it was true. It was done. No discussion was needed, and we moved on.

Ten minutes later Rita asked another question, and after a few moments of thought I had a really good answer, but this time I then jumped right to, “Okay Lord, I get the point. You want me to coach her to ask You.” So I coached Rita to focus on Jesus and present her question to Him (but this time I was much more patient through the long pause as we waited for Jesus to answer, and I had more positive expectation as I coached Rita to verbalize what she thought she was hearing from the Lord.) And even though it had just happened twice in the last 35 minutes, I was still amazed that the Lord’s answer was exactly what I would have said, except clearer, more elegant, more carefully nuanced, without repetitions or digressions, and carrying His special authority. Once again, when she heard the answer from Jesus she immediately had a deep, peaceful sense of confidence that it was true. No additional discussion was needed, and we moved on.

When Rita paused to ask another good question fifteen minutes later, I thought, “Wow. You’re really making a point here Jesus.” And even though I once again had a good answer that I wanted to share, I went right to coaching her to focus on Jesus and ask Him. There was the familiar long pause while we waited for Jesus to answer, I supplied the familiar coaching to help Rita verbalize what she thought she was hearing from the Lord, and then for the fourth time in less than an hour Jesus said just what I would have said, but better. On the one hand, it was encouraging to see that I was thinking along the same lines as Jesus. It was kind of like being able to check the answers at the back of the book – “Hey, I’m still on the right track! That’s nice to know.” But it was also humbling to see Jesus provide yet another answer that was clearer, more elegant, more carefully nuanced, more concise, and carrying more authority than what I had to offer. And, not surprisingly, when she heard the answer from Jesus she immediately had a deep, peaceful sense of confidence that it was true. No discussion was needed, and we moved on.

When Rita paused to ask yet another question ten minutes later, I commented, out loud, “Okay Lord, I think we can all see that You are *really* trying to make a point here,” and everybody in the group chuckled with me.

As usual, I had some good ideas about what needed to be said, but by this point in the session it was pretty obvious that I should just jump right to coaching her to engage directly with Jesus regarding her question. So I did. There was still a long pause while we waited for Jesus to answer, and I still had to coach Rita to verbalize what she thought she was hearing from the Lord, but this time I was waiting with eager anticipation to see if He would do it again. Sure enough, for the fifth time in little more than an hour Jesus brought truth that made the exact same core points I had wanted to make, but with more clarity, elegance, nuance, and efficiency. And, as always, His answer came with a special authority, so that Rita immediately had a deep, peaceful sense of confidence that it was true. She was thoroughly satisfied, no discussion was needed, and we moved on.

By this point in the session I was very impressed with the Lord’s thoroughness and cleverness with respect to the teaching point He had just made, and I also felt like I had a good sense of where the rest of the session was going to go. Rita was in the middle of working on an important unresolved issue, and the Lord had just taken her to what looked like the key root memory. It all looked fairly straight forward – she just needed to work through a few unfinished processing tasks, the key root trauma would then be resolved, and we would be home free. To be totally honest, I felt like I could handle the rest of the session by myself. I wasn’t planning on grabbing the wheel from Jesus, but I felt like I could have taken care of the situation if Jesus had gotten called away for an emergency.

And then Rita suddenly said something along the lines of, “I can’t do this....This memory is too big – it’s too much – I don’t know how to handle this....I feel like I’m not able to work through this one – I can’t do it.” We only had about twenty minutes left before the end of the group, and Rita seemed to be completely stuck. Even after taking some time to think and listen for guidance, I couldn’t come up with a plan that would quickly deal with her apparent lack of the capacity and maturity skills needed to work through the traumatic memory that had somehow suddenly gotten bigger and more complicated.

The lesson so far seemed to have been, “Coach the person to take her questions to Jesus, even when you think you have good answers yourself,” but at this point I didn’t feel like I had much choice. I had no idea what to do, and was more than happy to apply the “Coach the person to engage directly with Jesus at every point in the session” Immanuel approach principle. So I coached Rita to focus on Jesus, ask Him for guidance and help, and then describe whatever came into her awareness.

After a long pause (and I’m thinking, “Jesus, don’t You realize how little time we have left?”), Rita reported that she was now in a completely different memory. This new memory was clearly much less complicated and less intense, and Rita seemed ready and willing to work with it, but it also seemed to be completely unrelated to the strategic traumatic memory in which she had just been stuck.

I was actually quite disappointed. I had hoped that the Lord would have some clever plan for working through the larger memory that seemed to be so key to the issue we had been working with, instead of just saying, “I can’t help her get through that one either, so let’s

just go find something smaller and easier.” (Shoot, Lord, I could’ve done that.) I was a bit puzzled and disappointed, but I figured we might as well work with what we had, so I kept coaching her to ask Jesus for guidance and help regarding the new memory.

She worked through this new memory quickly and easily, and then with about five minutes left, she popped out with, “Oh, wow! Now Jesus is taking me back to the other memory, and I’m just realizing that the key issue in the little memory we just resolved is the exact same as the key issue in the other memory that felt like it was too big for me.” After pausing for a few moments to think about what she had just said, the rest of us were all able to see the connection; but none of us had caught this until she had pointed it out.

Rita then went on to explain, “The main reason the bigger memory felt like too much for me was that I didn’t know how to go about working through the situation – I didn’t feel like I could handle such an intense memory when I had no idea regarding how to work with it. So Jesus took me to a smaller memory with the same issue, and then showed me what to do and helped me practice in the less intense memory.” Now that she had a clear battle plan for how to work through the traumatic pieces, she willingly went with Jesus back to the memory that had previously felt impossibly difficult and intense, and with His help she was able to resolve it within the remaining five minutes.

We were all in awe. This was one of the most effective, efficient, brilliant, elegant, creative therapy interventions that any of us had ever seen. Not to mention the fact that the rest of us wouldn’t have even known about the smaller, simpler parallel memory.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, after the fifth round of Jesus bringing an answer that was essentially the same as what I had I wanted to share, I was starting to feel pretty pleased with myself. I never would have said it out loud, due to the outrageous presumption, but if I had gotten words for what was starting to feel true, it might have been something like, “Well yeah, of course I know I’ll never be *fully* as good a therapist as Jesus. I mean, His answers and interventions are always a bit better than mine, *but I’m getting pretty close*. I mean – all false humility aside – I think I could take care of most of this by myself if I really needed to.”

Now I was just in awe. “Jesus, You’re the man! I am definitely the humble student, and You are most assuredly still the master.”

I’m sure you can imagine how watching Jesus do this kind of work in hundreds, or even thousands of sessions, would really start to convince you that he is good, that he’s always present, that he is competent, that he is careful, that he is kind, that he is dependable, that he is trustworthy, that he is wise, that he is smart, etc, etc, etc.

(Slide 6.1) 3. *Stories from others who are using the Immanuel approach:* Stories from others who are using the Immanuel approach just provides more of the same. More and more and more and more stories of Jesus being loving, always present, gentle, attuning, wise, creative, careful, kind, competent, beautiful, surprising, elegant, helpful, dependable, alive, trustworthy, life-giving, effective, profound, and amazing.

In my experience, hearing so many of these stories tangibly affects my relationship with the Lord. These stories cause me to trust him more, to like him more, to feel safe in his

presence, to want to be with him, and these stories cause me to want to share Jesus with others.

Note that this is another reason why it's important and valuable to formulate an Immanuel story narrative after a good Immanuel experience, and then to be deliberate about sharing the story with others. This is one way we can build each others faith in the goodness of God's character and heart.

For those who are interested, many of these stories are included in the new Immanuel approach book, and I can share some of them if we have extra time at the end.

To summarize again, the five components of the doctor-Lehman-obsessively-thorough-“take no prisoners” version of the Immanuel lifestyle are:

- *Learning to be more consciously aware of my relational circuits, keeping them on, and deliberately pointing them towards the Lord.
- *Regular times of deliberately establishing interactive connection, and also learning to be more consciously aware of spontaneous connection.
- *Ongoing troubleshooting to remove hindrances.
- *Ongoing work to resolve trauma, as an especially important source of hindrances. And,
- *Deliberately accumulating faith-building experiences and stories.

(Slide 7.0) II. Accumulating spiritual fruit over years of steadily increasing Immanuel lifestyle: Not surprisingly, pursuing a steadily increasing Immanuel lifestyle over the course of fifteen + years has produced a steadily increasing pile of spiritual fruit.

First and foremost, I have experienced a steadily increasing, progressing, maturing connection with the Lord. As mentioned above, I have become increasingly aware of God's presence and love as a background reality throughout the average day, even when I'm not doing anything deliberate. And when I make a deliberate effort to connect with the Lord: I have become able to perceive his tangible presence and connect with him more easily and more quickly; I have become able to perceive his presence and connect with him more frequently and more predictably; I have become able to perceive his tangible presence with more clarity, strength, and richness; the sense of God's presence as a person has slowly but steadily increased; the perception that my communication with God is interactive has slowly but steadily increased; and my feeling that God is attuning to me has grown slowly but steadily stronger.

I have also experienced a steadily increasing faith in the goodness and trustworthiness of God's character and heart. In general, at baseline, it *feels* true that God is good, that God loves me, that God is smiling, that God is with me, that God is *glad* to be with me, that God is hearing me and understanding, that God is attuning to me, that God has good plans for me, that God is patient and forgiving, etc. I used to know, cognitively, theoretically, that all of this was supposed to be true; but it didn't actually feel true. Now, on the average day, when I'm not in the middle of some difficulty, all of these truths about God's character and heart actually *feel* true.

Furthermore, I have been increasingly able to hold onto these truths about God's character and heart even during times of difficulty and suffering. I have experienced a steady decrease in the frequency of triggered, distorted, negative reactions towards the Lord. It takes larger and larger triggers to activate these negative reactions. When they do get activated, the triggered, distorted content is not as intense or compelling as it used to be. And when these negative reactions do get triggered, I am able to subdue them more quickly and easily.

I have noticed an increasing ability to receive guidance from the Lord. I have observed steadily increasing, tangible progress with respect to areas of persistent sin. And I have experienced steadily increasing appreciation for scripture.

Furthermore, I have noticed a steady increase in the classic fruits of the Spirit described by Paul in Galatians 5:22. You can ask Charlotte to see what she thinks, but my perception is that deliberately pursuing an Immanuel lifestyle over the past fifteen + years has resulted in steadily increasing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

At this point I would like to share a bunch of specifics that will help you get a better feel for the most important piece – the steady growth and progress with respect to my connection with God.

(Slide 7.1) A. From 3 to 38 years old – only subtle guidance: For the first 35 years of my Christian walk, my only experiences of God's presence were two very subtle forms of guidance.

The first was that thoughts providing some form of helpful information would come into my awareness. These thoughts had a very subtle but recognizably distinct feeling, and over time I learned to recognize these thoughts as from God because they always turned out to be true, fruitful, and life-giving.

The second very subtle form of guidance was that I would get a subjective sense of direction regarding certain courses of action. In some situations I would get a very subtle but recognizably distinct sense, "Yes, this is good and right, I should go ahead with this," and in other situations I would get a similar but opposite sense, "No, this somehow is not a good plan, I should not go ahead with this." And I learned to recognize these subtle senses of direction as from God because they also had a subtle but recognizably distinct feeling, and they always turned out to be accurate and valuable. (Whenever I would follow this leading and go ahead with a possibility that felt right and good, things would turn out beautifully. And whenever I would ignore one of these "*don't* go ahead" warnings, things would turn out badly.)

However, even though I knew that these thoughts and senses of direction were coming from God, neither of these forms of subtle guidance ever included a sense of tangible *personal* presence. That is, there was no subjective perception that there was a *person* listening to me and/or responding to me.

Also, the sense of contingent, interactive, back-and-forth communication was very minimal. For example, often these thoughts and/or senses of direction would just come spontaneously. I knew they were from God, they were very helpful, and I greatly appreciated them, but there was no sense of interactive, back-and-forth communication. It was more like finding a notice

posted along the side of a trail, letting me know that there were wild strawberries in the nearby meadow, or a warning notice letting me know that I should be careful not to touch the poison ivy. I would be grateful for the helpful advice, but it wouldn't feel like I was having a living, real time interaction with another person.

In other situations I would ask for guidance, and then thoughts and/or a sense of direction would come in response. This was at least interactive communication, but it still felt very limited – like sending an e-mail asking my supervisor for help with a difficult question and then getting an e-mail response with the answer. It definitely felt like I was getting a contingent response to the question I had asked, and I was grateful that the reply was prompt and that the advice was excellent; but it wasn't like a back-and-forth interaction with a person who was actually with me. I was grateful for these quick, simple thoughts and senses of direction from God, but the *interactive* aspect of these communications still felt very limited.

Furthermore, these two subtle forms of guidance from God did not include attunement. I was grateful that God would give me *spontaneous* help and guidance, even when I *hadn't* asked for it. And I was grateful that he would send back answers when I did ask for help and guidance. But in these interactions I never had the sense that there was a personal presence that was seeing me, hearing me, understanding me, joining me in my emotions, genuinely caring about me, and glad to be with me.

For the first 35 years of my Christian walk, this was all I got. No perception of God's *tangible* presence being with me, no perception of God's presence *as a person*, no sense of the Lord *attuning to me*, and only the most extremely limited aspect of an *interactive connection*.

(Slide 7.2) B. Three years of Theophostic-based emotional healing: The next level of connection with God came for me in 1998 at the age of 38, when I started to do my own healing work.

At this point I was using Theophostic as opposed to the full Immanuel approach, but this theophostic work did include *some* of the pieces of the eventual Immanuel approach. For example, persistent troubleshooting to remove blockages, resolving specific traumatic content that got transferred onto God, and asking for guidance followed by watching for anything that came into my awareness.

I would get together every week with my friend, Dan, and we would trade off facilitating for each other. So part of my growing Immanuel lifestyle was to have a regular time twice a month in which I would work on removing blockages and resolving trauma. Also, Charlotte would facilitate an unscheduled session for me whenever I would get intensely triggered (maybe five or six times each year?). And this was very deliberate – I was very consciously committed to watching for these intense triggers, and then responding by working to find and resolve the underlying trauma (as opposed to allowing myself to just manage the pain and fight with the triggers as if they were the real problem). So this was another part of my growing Immanuel lifestyle.

In the context of these Theophostic sessions, I would be working with a traumatic memory, I would ask God to come with healing and truth, new thoughts and insights would come into a painful memory that had been stuck for many years, and then the toxic, traumatic content

would suddenly resolve. The old, familiar lies would suddenly be replaced with the new truth, the old, familiar negative emotions would suddenly be replaced with shalom, and following these sessions I would observe clear, dramatic, lasting fruit. And this was all wonderful – these experiences of healing were indicators of God’s presence that were much more intense and dramatic than the subtle guiding thoughts and senses of direction.

However, in many ways these Theophostic healing moments were very similar to my experiences with subtle guidance – there was still no *direct* perception of God’s tangible presence, there was still no sense of a *personal* presence, the *interactive* component was still very minimal, and there was still no sense that God was actually *attuning* to me (seeing me, hearing me, understanding me, joining me in my emotions, genuinely caring about me, and glad to be with me).

(Slide 7.3) C. God’s tangible presence as a person, an interactive connection, and receiving attunement: And then, in October of 2001, something new and different and wonderful occurred. I had a theophostic-based session in which I spent almost the whole session going through memory-anchored blockage after memory-anchored blockage after memory-anchored blockage, and then at the end of this session I perceived God’s tangible, personal, interactive, attuning presence for the first time in my life.

Seeing Jesus in the Candy store story: After asking for God’s guidance at the beginning of the session, the first place I went to was a memory in which I had lied because I was afraid of humiliation and rejection. When I was in second grade, whenever someone asked to go to the bathroom my teacher would make angry comments about the kids that used the bathroom pass to run around the halls. I was so afraid of being the target of my teacher’s angry disapproval that I never asked to go to the bathroom. This was not usually a big problem, but then one day I had diarrhea. I waited until I felt like I was going to explode, and then hurried to the front desk, asked for the bathroom pass, and raced to the bathroom. I almost made it – I got to the bathroom and into a stall before having a messy accident in my pants and on the floor. I felt like I would be ridiculed, humiliated, and exiled from grade school society **forever** if anyone discovered this horrible and shameful failure, and I was mortified when several older kids came into the bathroom while I was cleaning up the mess. “Look what somebody did” I blurted out immediately, lying in an attempt to avoid being ridiculed, humiliated, and rejected.

Then I went to a memory of not coming to the aid of another kid on our playground because I was afraid of getting hurt. An unfortunate third grader had run afoul of the meanest fifth grader in our school, and he was being taunted and slapped by the angry fifth grader. Furthermore, the whole event was surrounded by a group of the perpetrator’s jeering friends. I was horrified to watch the abuse, but I didn’t interfere in any way because I was afraid I would get beaten up as well. I didn’t even go and tell one of the teachers because I was afraid of retribution for being a “tattle tale.”

And then I remembered a number of incidents in which I went along with things that I knew were wrong because I was afraid of being ridiculed and rejected by my supposed friends. The leader of one group of friends often came up with ideas that involved breaking parental rules in one way or another. I would become anxious and object to these proposals, but I would then agree to go along when my friends would call me a sissy, coward, goody-goody, etc.

Another friend was a shoplifter, and would occasionally ask me to go with him on his stealing expeditions (he didn't actually push me to steal, but he wanted me to go along). And his older brother liked to play with fire, and would sometimes ask me to go with him when it was time to set off his home-made bombs. It was the same story with these two guys – I would become anxious and object to their proposals, but would then go along anyway when they started saying that I was a sissy, a coward, and a goody-two-shoes. I felt miserable the whole time we were engaged in any of these activities, but I went along anyway because I didn't want to be ridiculed and rejected.

The next memory that came forward was my earliest experience of stealing. I was standing outside the neighborhood convenience store with several of my friends and they were enthusiastically telling me about how easy it was to steal candy. “Come on!” “You can do it,” “Watch us,” they encouraged. The oldest and most experienced casually walked into the store, took a candy bar and started eating it, put other candy in his pockets, and then went to the cash register to buy one inexpensive item. I was intensely uncomfortable with the whole situation, but as I balked the encouragements turned into challenges and taunts, “What’s the matter? Are you scared? Are you a sissy? We do it all the time.” Eventually I walked into the store, picked up a piece of gum, and walked out with it. It was one of those really long sticks of bubble gum that you could get for five cents back in the 1960's. (It had a red wrapper, and it was cherry flavored if I remember correctly.)⁴

There were lots of pieces of these memories that the Lord helped me work through either before or after this particular session. For example, traumatic shame, feeling so isolated in these painful experiences, traumatic fear of rejection, and traumatic fear of violence. But in this session, when we asked for guidance, I had the clear thought that God wanted me to look at how I had turned away from what I knew was right because I was so afraid of ridicule, humiliation, rejection, anger, and violence. I realized that even as a kid I had known that my choices were wrong, and that this had been the Lord's presence in my heart. *I realized that I had turned away from the Lord's presence in my heart in order to protect myself.*

I didn't feel condemnation. I just had the clear thought that I needed to bring all of this to the Lord so that I could be forgiven and get it out of the way. So I did. “God, I'm so sorry that I turned away from your presence in my heart in order to protect myself.”

After receiving forgiveness for this first pile of memories we asked the Lord for more guidance, and then I remembered a scheme that the shoplifter and his brother the bomber came up with. They decided that they would help me get rid of my conscience – so that I could go along on their adventures without being tormented by anxiety and guilt. (I think maybe they were also tired of having Jimminy Cricket (me) riding along with them, constantly worrying and volunteering to be their consciences.) The plan was to “practice” breaking rules until my conscience stopped protesting. And I actually went along with this plan because I wanted to fit in. My participation was so unenthusiastic that the plan quickly petered out, and I spent less and less time with these friends, but as I focused on these

⁴In case you're wondering, I felt terrible and the gum did not taste very good. In fact, I experienced such persistent guilt that I eventually told my parents, told the store owner, and paid for the stolen gum.

memories I realized that I had never actually confessed and renounced this plan to intentionally silence the Lord's voice in my heart. So I did.

We still had time, so we asked for more guidance. And then I began to think about my experiences of others stealing from me. When I was a kid, someone stole my bicycle. When I was in highschool, someone stole my really nice calculator. When I was in college, someone broke into my dorm room and stole a bunch of stuff. When I was on a college biology field trip, someone stole my camera and binoculars. When I was in medical school, someone broke into my home and stole a bunch of stuff. When I was on a vacation in residency, someone stole another pair of binoculars. And there were many other examples, in addition to these.

I realized how powerless to protect myself, vulnerable, and violated I felt when people stole from me. Angry thoughts welled up inside me: "You people who steal make it harder for the rest of us – we worked hard for what we have. . . . Get a job and pay your own way!" I wanted to apprehend and severely punish all those who had ever stolen from me in the past, or who would ever steal from me in the future. It was pretty obvious that I still had judgment and bitterness towards those who had stolen from me, so I prayed to confess, renounce, and release judgments and bitterness.

As soon as I finished releasing judgments and bitterness, images from the convenience store spontaneously came back into my mind. I could see myself, 5 or 6 years old, standing in front of the cash register counter and trying to decide whether or not to actually walk out with the 5 cents' worth of soon-to-be-stolen bubble gum. And then, all of a sudden, Jesus was beside me. He was about two feet away, to my right, and just a little behind me – between the cash register counter and the pastry rack – and He was squatting, with his knees bent and His elbows on His knees, so that His face was just slightly above the level of my own. He was all white and opaque, like a cloud, so I couldn't really make out a lot of details, but I could tell that He was smiling and that he was looking towards me.

In addition to the mental visual image, I also had a tangible, subjective sense of the Lord's gentle friendship presence – I could feel the Holy Spirit's presence convicting me of the truth that it was wrong to steal the gum, but I could also feel the Lord's friendship, relational presence as a *person*. Furthermore, I could also somehow sense that Jesus understood me, that he loved me, and that he was glad to be with me. And even though this awareness of Jesus' personal, loving, attuning, friendship presence was gentle and quiet, it was also powerful, poignant, and profound.

As I stood beside Jesus, seeing His smiling face and feeling His presence, I began to perceive a number of important truths. For example, I realized that the most important question in all of these memories was whether or not I would honor and be faithful to my personal, Lord-brother friendship with the living Jesus Christ. I had always been able to feel that it was wrong to lie or steal or disobey my parents, but this had always been a vague, impersonal, mysterious sense of wrong. Now I went back through all the memories we had been working on, and could perceive, *experientially*, that the core choice was whether I would honor and be faithful to my relationship with Jesus, regardless of the consequences, or whether I would betray and deny my friendship with Jesus in order to protect myself. This encounter with Jesus totally changed the way I thought about sin.

Jesus also showed me a lot of other cool stuff, but the insight most relevant to this current presentation was that blockages in my heart and mind and spirit had been in the way of being able to perceive God's presence during my childhood. One of the most painful parts of my traumatic childhood memories had been that I could never perceive the Lord's presence, and I felt like He was *choosing* to remain absent and/or silent for some reason. Why wouldn't He help me? Why wouldn't He come to me?

This healing moment was the first time in my life that I had been able to see and feel the Lord's tangible, personal presence in a childhood memory, and as I stood beside Jesus, seeing His smiling face and feeling His presence, I suddenly realized that He had always been with me. For the first time in my life, it actually *felt* true that he had been with me during my childhood, and I could see how I hadn't been able to see Him or feel Him because of the distortions, lies, judgments, bitterness, vows, defenses, sins, and demonic infections that had been in the way.

As you probably already realize, this whole session is a perfect example of how persistent troubleshooting to remove blockages, including healing work to resolve specific traumatic memories, can clear the way for better connection with the Lord. And at the end of the session, Jesus actually made this very point.

For the next six years after this session, I continued to regularly work on troubleshooting to remove blockages, and I continued to regularly work on resolving specific traumatic memories, but I only *rarely* perceived Jesus' tangible, personal, interactive, attuning presence.

One piece that eventually became clear is that there were still important blockages in the way. Also, we still didn't have all of the Immanuel approach tools in place.

(Slide 7.4) D. 2007 to the present – the full Immanuel approach, with God connection continuing to grow steadily: By 2007 all the pieces of our current Immanuel approach were finally falling into place, and this new resource, together with the resolution of an especially important memory anchored blockage, lead to the next step in my journey of steadily increasing perception and connection.

18 month separation trauma, car repair breakthrough story: This particular blockage started when I was two years old. Mom had mononucleosis during her pregnancy with my younger sister, and between the pregnancy and the mono she got to the point where she couldn't even get out of bed—Dad had to carry her across the hallway to the bathroom. She was certainly too ill to care for my four-year-old brother and myself, so we were sent to stay with friends in another city for three weeks while she was recovering. 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 will 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 will believe he's separated from his parents because they *want* to be away from him, and he will 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.

An important part of trauma is that we come up with distorted interpretations regarding the meaning of the experience; and by the end of these three weeks of separation I had come up with many distorted interpretations, such as: “I’ve been abandoned and I’m on my own,” “It’s hopeless and I’m powerless—they aren’t coming, and nothing I can do will make them come,” “I can’t trust their hearts toward me because there’s no possible justification for allowing this to happen,” and “They won’t help me when I’m overwhelmed and need their help.” Along with these distorted, erroneous beliefs came a miserable morass of associated emotions—loneliness, rejection, hopelessness, powerlessness, feeling overwhelmed, and confusion. And I was also very angry that they had left me, that they were allowing me to suffer so intensely, and that they wouldn’t come when I called for them.

In the years that followed, this toxic content would often get activated and transferred onto the Lord. Any time I would become stuck in a situation that felt overwhelming, and call out to the Lord for help, but then not be able to perceive his presence or assistance, my interactions with the Lord in the present would match my interactions with my parents in the original memory closely enough to activate the beliefs and emotions from the two-year-old separation. The beliefs and emotions from the two-year-old separation trauma would then come forward as implicit memory and get transferred onto the Lord—it would feel intensely true that I couldn’t trust God’s heart toward me because he chooses to allow things for which there is no possible justification; it would feel intensely true that he’s not with me now, and won’t come even though I call and call for him; and it would feel intensely true that he won’t do anything when I’m overwhelmed and need his help. The loneliness, rejection, hopelessness, powerlessness, overwhelm, confusion, and anger would come forward as well, and since all of this would come forward as “invisible” implicit memory accompanied by “explanations” that were always focused on the triggers in the present, I would have no awareness or insight regarding “Oh, these thoughts and emotions are coming from traumatic childhood memories.” Instead, I would perceive that the thoughts and emotions were *about the Lord*, and that they were true, valid, and reasonable in the present.

For example, our car got flooded so that the main wiring harness and the main circuit board for all the computerized electronics were *under water for several weeks* while we were away on an extended business/vacation trip. Not surprisingly, when we returned from our trip we found that the car wouldn’t start. When we had it towed to the dealer their head mechanic said we would have to have the entire electrical system replaced, and that it would cost *seven thousand dollars!* So we asked for a second opinion from the non-dealer mechanic who usually cared for our car—a very bright guy with thirty-five years of experience and a fully equipped garage at his disposal. He said that he had never had good results trying to repair this particular scenario in the VW Passat, *and told us that he wouldn’t touch it!*

Oh. Wow. Not what we wanted to hear.

So I decided to try to fix it myself, and spent the next two weeks feeling constantly overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the project. I repeatedly asked the Lord for help as I struggled with this daunting scenario, but other old memory stuff was constantly getting triggered and getting in the way, and I was not yet using our current Immanuel approach tools for establishing a connection with the Lord. So I was never able to perceive God’s presence, I usually felt like I was not getting enough assistance, and each time this would happen the unresolved toxic content from my two-year-old trauma would come forward as “invisible” implicit memory: it would feel intensely true that the Lord was not with me and that he

wouldn't come even if I called and called, it would feel intensely true that he wouldn't do anything even though I was overwhelmed and needed his help, it would feel intensely true that I couldn't trust his heart toward me because he chooses to allow things for which there's no possible justification, and I would feel intensely powerless, discouraged, betrayed, abandoned, and angry. Furthermore, because of the way in which implicit memory works, it would feel intensely true that my pain and anger were really about the situation in the present, and especially about the Lord failing to respond to my calls for help.

In addition to all of this toxic content getting stirred up and transferred onto the Lord, there was another part of this particular blockage that I wasn't even aware of yet. I will provide more details in a minute, but the really short summary is that in the context of the two-year-old separation trauma I had made choices to push Jesus away, and these choices were still hindering me from perceiving his presence or receiving his help.

The real truth was that the Lord was with me, standing beside me, and offering to help; but with all of these blockages in the way I was unable to perceive or receive this truth. So instead of feeling hope, recognizing my thoughts and emotions as traumatic content that was coming forward as implicit memory, and then turning to the Lord for healing, I would perceive the distorted conclusions to be true, I would perceive the implicit memory negative emotions to be valid in the present, and I would focus my energy and attention on the triggers – I would focus on trying to fix the immediate practical problem in the present (in this example, the car's failure to start), and I would fight with the Lord, first trying make him manifest more clearly and provide more help, and then complaining with hopelessness and bitterness when nothing would change.

The good news is that this especially miserable incident with the car lead to a breakthrough regarding my two-year-old separation trauma memories, enabling me to finally get healing for the toxic content that had so often gotten transferred onto the Lord and to finally recognize and reverse the choices to push the Lord away.

Part of the breakthrough was that this whole ordeal with the car occurred as Charlotte and I were finishing with the first wave of developing our Immanuel teachings. As part of developing this material I had become *profoundly* convinced that if we could not perceive the Lord's presence it was because there was something in the way, and I had become profoundly convinced that the Lord always wanted to help us resolve these blockages. Another part of the breakthrough was that I had new information and insight regarding this particular triggered content and the time of separation from my parents. (I had never had any conscious memory of these events, since they occurred when I was so young; but shortly before the ordeal with the flooded car I learned about this history from conversations with my older brother and parents, and I was finally recognizing the connections between the two-year-old separation trauma and this particular toxic content that would get transferred onto the Lord).

So even though it *felt intensely true* that these painful thoughts and emotions towards the Lord were valid, the opposing truth in my adult mind was even more powerful – even though the triggered thoughts and emotions felt so intensely true with respect to the Lord, my conviction that they were actually implicit memory from this unresolved trauma was even more powerful.

Therefore, as I sat in the car surrounded by tools, wires, and disassembled parts of the electrical system, I chose to surrender my bitter accusations that God was perversely withholding the help I needed, I chose to acknowledge that there must be something on my side that was in the way, and I chose to ask for help. I was still so angry that I could barely keep from screaming and swearing at the Lord, but I managed to choke out a prayer. (It is a testimony to God's mercy and grace that he honored my true heart, even though it was mixed in with a lot of triggered confusion and anger.) My "humble," "submitted," "open-hearted" (sarcasm intended) prayer was something along the lines of:

Lord, I am *so* angry that you 're not manifesting in some way that I can perceive and that you're not providing more tangible help. And it feels *intensely, excruciatingly* true that this is all *your* fault, and that *you* should apologize and then fix the problem. But I know you 're here with me, I know there must be something in the way, and I am *so* tired of being stuck in this triggered place of blaming you. Oh, man, *it infuriates me to say this!* Grrrrrr! (brief pause to fume silently). Okay: What am *I* doing that's hindering me from perceiving your presence? What choice do *I* need to make to take the next step forward?

The moment these words were out of my mouth, I felt like I was inside the two-year-old separation memories. I had a spontaneous mental image of Jesus standing right beside me, I could feel his personal presence, and I had the sense that he was saying, "Karl, your mom isn't going to come back for a long time—let me comfort you." Furthermore, I realized that the response I had made at the time of the original trauma, and that I had stubbornly held onto for forty years, was something along the lines of: "The only plans I'm interested in are ones that include you producing my mother *right now*. I can't believe you're even talking to me about some other plan. If you don't have Mom with you, *then just get away from me—go jump off a cliff, and I hope there are rocks at the bottom!*"

Not surprisingly, telling the Lord to jump off a cliff had kind of gotten in the way of my being able to sense his presence or receive his help. However, thanks to a number of new factors, including the ones just mentioned, I was finally able to surrender my anger and my demand that the Lord make things different, and I reversed the choices to refuse his help and push him away.

As soon as I chose to welcome Jesus instead of push him away I was able to connect with him inside the two-year-old memories, and being able to feel his comfort and receive his assistance inside the memories immediately lead to healing for some of the most important aspects of the separation trauma. From that point forward it no longer felt like God was refusing to be with me or help me as I continued to struggle with the car, and over the next several days (with some strategic guidance from God) I was able to completely restore the electrical system for a total cost of \$125. Furthermore, since this experience I have noticed that the (now healed) two-year-old "traumatic memories" no longer hinder my ability to connect with Jesus when I struggle with something difficult, ask for help, but then do not initially perceive his presence.⁵

⁵For full disclosure regarding this story, another part of the breakthrough was that I was miserably triggered to this toxic content most of the time for two weeks, and the intensity and persistence of this pain helped me realize that I was ready to try something new.

Since this is a long and complicated example, let me summarize regarding the points I would like to highlight. First, in more than forty years of Christian discipleship this was only the third time I had been able to perceive Jesus' tangible, personal, interactive, attuning presence, and this happened spontaneously and immediately after I removed a major blockage by choosing to surrender my bitter accusations that God was perversely withholding the help I needed, by choosing to acknowledge that there must be something on my side that was in the way, and by choosing to ask for help. Second, I was able to connect with Jesus and feel his comforting presence inside the two year old memories as soon as I removed another major blockage by choosing to welcome him instead of pushing him away. Third, since the healing work at the end of the experience I no longer notice the two-year-old separation memories getting triggered forward and hindering me from connecting with the Lord.⁶

Furthermore, I think that removing this whole pernicious blockage tangle opened the door for better results with Immanuel approach tools. The data point suggesting this conclusion is that shortly after resolving these blockages, I was able to use the Immanuel approach principles and tools to quickly go from perceiving and connecting with God's tangible, personal, interactive, attuning presence three times in over forty years to enjoying this perception and connection usually two to three times each week. We'll never know for sure, since I didn't start experimenting with the Immanuel approach tools in my own life until after this healing breakthrough with the car, but it's hard to imagine that it wasn't helpful to resolve this pernicious tangle of bitterness, despair, intense negative thoughts toward God, and explicit anti-Immanuel choices.⁷

Again, within months of this specific memory breakthrough and also starting to regularly practice the whole Immanuel approach package, being able to perceive Jesus' tangible, personal, attuning presence and establishing an interactive connection became my usual baseline. And with deliberately embracing the whole Immanuel lifestyle package, the frequency, regularity, and predictability slowly but steadily increased. For example, when this all began in 2007, I was able to perceive God's tangible presence and establish a personal, interactive, attuning connection maybe 60% to 70% of the time when I would use the Immanuel approach. And now this success rate has increased to probably 95%. Also, as mentioned earlier, I sometimes just become aware of Jesus' subtle presence in the background even when I am focusing on other tasks.

Furthermore, the strength and clarity of each component has also slowly but steadily increased. As I have continued to troubleshoot for blockages, as I have regularly received Immanuel approach healing, as I have grown in skill with respect to the Immanuel approach principles and tools, as my faith has increased, and as I have spent more and more time with Jesus, I have become able to perceive and connect with God more and more clearly, more and

⁶Actually, I still occasionally notice lingering splinters of traumatic content getting triggered forward, but the frequency and intensity are greatly reduced and the overall interference with my ability to connect with Jesus is much less.

⁷From a scientific perspective, this point would be much stronger if I had initially tried the Immanuel approach tools *before* resolving my pernicious blockage tangle, experienced less dramatic results with this initial attempt, and then observed much better results *after* resolving the pernicious blockage tangle.

more intensely, and more and more richly. My visual images have slowly but steadily become more clear and more intense. My sense of God's presence as a person has slowly but steadily become clearer and stronger. The perception that my communication with God is interactive has slowly but steadily increased. And my feeling that God is attuning to me has grown slowly but steadily stronger. (To put this in perspective, my perceptions of God's presence are still usually subtle, faint, and vague, but now they are just less subtle, less faint, and less vague.)

(Slide 8.0) III. Relational connection/relational joy *lifestyle* for marriage (and all other important relationships): The most important part of adequate, sustainable joy for a lifetime is the Immanuel lifestyle – building and maintaining a lifestyle that includes relational connection joy with God as the center of our lives. However, I don't think God intends for this to be the whole plan. I think God's intention is for us to include joyful relationships with others as an important part of having adequate, sustainable joy for a lifetime. My proposal is that we deliberately build a relational lifestyle with others that is parallel to our Immanuel lifestyle with the Lord.

First let's review the basic principles from the introduction:

- * Our minds and spirits have been created to *desire* relationship and to *function best* in relationship, and the Lord has actually designed specific circuits in our biological brains to serve this longing and need for connection.
- * When these relational brain circuits are working as designed, our spontaneous, normal experience will be to feel connected to the people around us, and to feel desire to be connected to the people around us.
- * Being glad to be together gives us joy. When you see another person, and that person greets you with a genuine smile and a sparkle in their eye that says, "I'm glad to be with you," that gives you joy. And if you return that smile, sparkle, and "I'm glad to be with you," that gives them joy as well.

Putting these pieces together, we get: **(Slide 7.1) When our relational circuits are functioning as designed, we give each other joy by being glad to be together.**

(Slide 9.0) Furthermore, *when we apply these principles to our important relationships with other people, and build them into our day-to-day lives as habits, we get what I call the relational connection/ relational joy lifestyle, or the relational connection/relational joy approach to life.*

(Slide 10.0) For Charlotte and I, there have been a number of key components that have contributed to this relational connection/relational joy approach to life. And as you will see, they pretty much correspond to the components of the Immanuel lifestyle.

(Slide 10.1) A. Learning to be more consciously aware of our relational circuits, keeping them on, and deliberately pointing them towards each other: Part of this relational connection/relational joy lifestyle in our marriage has been deliberately *practicing the skill* and *building the habit* of monitoring/observing/ being more consciously aware of our relational circuits – being *mindful* of our relational circuits. And when we notice that they're off, we each take responsibility for getting our own relational circuits back on.

A closely related part of our relational connection and relational joy approach to life is practicing the skill and building the habit of pointing our relational circuits towards each other. We practice the skills and build the habits of deliberately thinking about each other, deliberately remembering past positive experiences with each other, deliberately stirring up gratitude for each other, and deliberately thanking God and each other for the things we appreciate.

And one more point that deserves its own Power Point text box: **(Slide 10.2) we practice the skill and build the habit of regularly, deliberately sending (genuine) “I’m glad to be with you” messages to each other.**

(Slide 11.0) B. Regular times of RC-on-glad-to-be-together connection, and also learning to be more consciously aware of connection status: Another part of our relational connection and relational joy lifestyle has been to deliberately, regularly spend time together when both of us have our relational circuits on and we’re glad to be together. **(Slide 11.1) Note that just being consciously aware of this goal, and agreeing on it, is helpful.**

A closely related part of our relational connection and relational joy approach to life has been practicing the skill and building the habit of watching/monitoring/noticing our connection status – learning to be more *mindful* of our connection status. When we notice that we’re not relational and glad to be together, we name this, out loud, and ask “What’s the matter? What’s causing this? How can we fix it?”

And when we notice spontaneous times of being relational and glad to be together, we try to make more space for this. Some times we can take a little extra time for gentle snuggling and deliberate connection (thought rhyming?). For example, checking in re what’s on our hearts, expressing gratitude, and finding different ways to express “I’m glad to be with you.” And if we’re both engaged in other tasks, we can practice being peripherally aware of and grateful for the subtle background connection even while we both continue working. (Again, like reading together in the living room, but still being aware of each other and glad to be together as a subtle background condition. We are not actively engaging, but we are aware of each other’s presence and there is a very subtle interactive connection. To remember the example from earlier: if Charlotte looks up at me, I notice the movement with my peripheral vision and then look up at her. Or if Charlotte chuckles, I say, “What? What was so funny? Let me in on the fun,” (and it’s nice).)

(Slide 12.0) C. Ongoing troubleshooting to remove hindrances: All of us have blockages that hinder us from connecting. Therefore, part of our relational connection/relational joy lifestyle has been regular, deliberate, persistent troubleshooting to identify and dismantle blockages. (For example, identifying and dismantling my patterns of judging, focusing and dismantling habits of self-protection such as withholding vulnerable information, identifying and dismantling self-protective vows, and identifying and dismantling patterns of avoiding emotions, such as using distraction/self-comfort behaviors to avoid unpleasant emotions that need to be dealt with.)

And Just to acknowledge a reality: We find that this is more vulnerable and difficult to do with each other than with God, because God is safer than people – God will never get triggered or non-relational or take advantage of vulnerability. It’s still possible. It’s still good. But I just want to acknowledge that it’s more difficult.

(Slide 13.0) D. Ongoing work to resolve trauma, as an especially important source of hindrances: Charlotte and I often trigger each other because we are together so much, we are often together in challenging circumstances, and we are so important to each other. And when toxic content from traumatic memories gets stirred up and transferred onto each other, it really gets in the way of relational connection and relational joy. Therefore, an important part of ongoing troubleshooting to remove hindrances to connection (and an important part of our relational lifestyle) has been ongoing, deliberate, persistent, regular work to resolve these painful memories. We have both been able to notice steady benefit over time as we have done this. For example, I no longer get triggered at the beginning of trips (see *Outsmarting Yourself* more about this), and this is very nice. Another very noticeable benefit from my healing work is that I no longer get triggered by Charlotte being sick, and Charlotte really appreciates this. (**Note to self: both of these could be longer stories, in a forum with more time available**)

(Slide 13.1) E. Deliberately accumulating and remembering trust-building experiences: Just as I have been deliberate about building my faith and trust in God's character and heart, Charlotte and I have tried to be deliberate about building trust with each other as another part of our relational connection relational joy approach to life. Another way to say this is that **(Add new slide) we are deliberate about accumulating and remembering experiences that help us see and know each other's true hearts.**

This has included being very deliberate about planning and remembering positive experiences, and it has also included being deliberate about remembering when we go through difficult experiences and then get back to joy together.

For example, we often share with others about the places we have gotten triggered and stuck in our marriage, and then also how we got our relational circuits back on and how we eventually found and resolved the underlying trauma. Remembering and telling these stories of successfully getting through difficulties together has been great for building trust. (In her section, Charlotte can share about our anniversary time line for remembering both special fun times and also times of getting through challenges together)

Note: with human relationships, building trust also requires dealing with experiences of broken trust. This is obviously a huge subject, but two quick thoughts: 1) If you don't feel like you have the capacity or maturity skill to deal with a painful, scary area of broken trust in a relationship, get a good connection with Jesus and talk to him about it. Jesus can show you the lies and unresolved trauma that are increasing your fear and decreasing your usable capacity. He can then also *resolve* the lies and trauma, and he can help you build your capacity in other ways as well. Furthermore, he can teach you and coach you regarding the necessary maturity skills. 2) If you are not yet able to get a strong enough Immanuel connection to provide all of the resources you need, then find a minister or therapist who can help you with the fears, lack of capacity, and lack of maturity skills that are in the way of resolving the broken trust.

(Slide 14.0) Warning: avoid the relational death trap: My observation is that there is a serious and sneaky problem that many of us can easily fall into, and I call it a relational death trap because it is so costly. Most of us have at least some infant/child experiences of not getting enough joy, and in the original child experiences it is okay for us to just express increasing

distress and wait for the grown ups to fix the problem. However, when lack of joy in the present triggers these infant/child memories, instead of taking adult responsibility to name and care for the problem in a relational, constructive way, we blend into the miserable infant/child memory place. We feel increasingly miserable, and it feels incredibly, compellingly true that the source of the problem is that our spouse (or friends or family or pastor or small group or...etc) is not giving us enough joy, that it is the other person's fault that we are not getting enough joy, that it is their responsibility to fix the problem, and that it is acceptable for us to get increasingly unpleasant in order to help them realize the problem and to motivate them to fix it. Furthermore, when we are blended into these infant/child memories, we feel infant/child entitlement: "My spouse (friends, family, pastor, small group, etc) *ought* to be giving me more joy." We often end up resenting, judging, and blaming them, and get increasingly unpleasant as we wait for them to repent, apologize, and fix the problem.

It is important to avoid this relational death trap. If we recognize the real source of the problem, take responsibility for our triggered memories, and then get help to deal with them we can dismantle the whole thing. **(Add new slide) But if we allow ourselves to stay blended with the triggered traumatic content, and if we choose to act as if it is actually true in the present, then things turn out badly.**

I will say more about this in a bit, in the context of mine and Charlotte's experience with this death trap.

(Slide 15.0) IV. Summary of fruit in our marriage: For a number of years now, Charlotte and I have been deliberately applying these principles in our marriage. We have been deliberately learning skills and practicing habits that keep our relational circuits functioning well, we have been deliberately working to remove blockages that get in the way of connection, we have been deliberately working to get rid of traumas that get triggered and transferred onto each other, we have been deliberately working to build trust, and we have been deliberately learning to give each other joy by communicating genuine "I'm glad to be with you." As we have been doing this, **(Slide 15.1) we have been spending less and less of our time being cranky and unhappy with each other, and we have been spending more and more of our time really enjoying being together.**

(By the way, the back-and-forth "I'm glad to be with you" that produces relational joy is also the foundation for romantic energy in a marriage.)

(Slide 16.0) V. Charlotte's thoughts regarding II, III, and IV: As Karl mentioned earlier, a practice we've developed over the 24 years of our marriage is our Timeline. It started around our 5th anniversary, when I made Karl a card on which I drew a simple timeline of the years of our married life and marked a bunch of significant events on it, both happy ones and hard ones.

Well Karl loved the card, and we were both surprised with how much fun we had remembering together things like a huge challenge we had weathered at the church we attended during our first year of marriage, then Karl's finishing his residency, when we moved back to Illinois, when I started seminary, a deeply significant small group we began to be part of... you get the idea. The Thrive conferences didn't exist yet, so we didn't have the language of "stories of us," but that's what we had stumbled on to. All we knew was that it was fun and made us happy to be together – which makes for a good anniversary celebration!

So we made it a tradition, and after a few less enjoyable years while we worked out the things that can kill the joy in it – like obsessing or arguing over the exact date when something happened, or writing too many details for each item – it has now become something we really look forward to. In the days around our anniversary each year we sit together with our favorite hot drinks (this is February in Chicago, after all) and we think back over the significant events of the last year and add them to our timeline, which is just a computer file. And yes, a beautifully illustrated scrapbook would be lovely, but if we set that as our standard, we'd never get around to doing it! So this simple ever-growing digital document is better. We smile as remember our mule ride to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and we grieve as we remember friends who have died. We recall ministry challenges and victories. We list wonderful new friends we've made. And we remember milestones in our journeys of healing and maturity. And after listing all the things we remember for the year just past, we look back over highlights of the full timeline, now 24 years long.

We build joy in this practice in at least 3 ways I can name:

- First, as we remember and talk about the happy times, we mentally relive them and feel good all over again! When we booked that mule ride in the Grand Canyon I had some second thoughts because it seemed kind of expensive. But now every year that we enjoy thinking about it again, I feel that we've really gotten our money's worth from it!
- Second, as we recall the hard times we've come through together, our trust in God's faithfulness and one another's true hearts grows. Every experience of having overcome a challenge in our relationship gives us confidence that God will enable us to do it again in the future as needed. We feel more secure in the Lord and with each other.
- And last, the effect of looking at the whole timeline every year is to systematically remind us of just how far we have come. And that causes us to express a lot of gratitude to God and to each other, so by the time we're done, our relational connection circuits are really glowing strongly – again, good for anniversary celebrations!

And speaking of how far we have come, one thing I like about Karl is that he is, himself, a convincing, albeit anecdotal, longitudinal study of the benefits of the practices he teaches. Over the 24 years of our marriage, he has healed and grown and changed considerably. I don't mean to imply that I started our marriage perfect and have had no need to change; there are plenty of my healing and growth milestones on our timeline! But for our purposes today, it seems more relevant that I give my testimony as his spouse about how much good these practices, which Karl has just been advocating, have done for him.

So I'll just mention three examples.

Some of you have heard Karl's story of how he used to get crazy when we'd leave on road trips. He would be irritable and obsessive about leaving at the crack of dawn. And although he would always pack the car faithfully, he would then get in to a sort of kid emotional state in which the last minute grown-up details of remembering to bring cash, get gas, have the directions to where we were going, and recruit someone to bring in the mail were all my responsibility. However, as Karl brought all of his upset feelings around our very unpleasant trip departure times to Jesus for healing, Jesus brought insight into the painful childhood memories from which the feelings came, and over various times of prayer, brought healing. I am glad to say that leaving on trips is

now a truly joyful time for us! Karl now tends to shoulder MORE of the burden of prepping for trips than I do, particularly since now that I've become a pastor, we tend to leave on trips right after worship on Sunday, which nearly always means that my attention has been elsewhere before then. And now, instead of spending the first several hours of a long drive *trying* to be civil to one another, we enjoy that "Woo hoo! We're away!" feeling, and we luxuriate in long uninterrupted times of thinking and praying and dreaming together. Sticking with the process of bringing the upset feelings to Immanuel for healing has eliminated what was a consistent joy-killer and made space for a consistent joy-building time in our lives.

A second example is that Karl has become much less fearful and much more relational. Regular practice of connecting with Jesus and regular times of deliberately seeking healing from Jesus has removed many sources of triggered fear, and has helped Karl to develop a much more consistent relational baseline emotion state. And in fact, his tested Myers-Briggs typology even changed from slightly Introverted to slightly Extroverted! It's not that either I or E in its true manifestation is better than the other – but in Karl's case, it had been a sort of false "Introvert" label, created by wound-based defenses that had caused him to isolate himself out of fear. But when interactions with Immanuel brought healing and growth, his true more extroverted self could shine through.

And the last example is the most amazing and wonderful. Karl currently enjoys a subtle but real experience with Immanuel. By that I mean that when he deliberately thinks of a positive memory and practices appreciation, he can consistently get a sense of Jesus' tangible presence with him, even though it's not dramatic. And he regularly feels Jesus attuning to him in his joy and in his distress, and even finds Jesus to be more consistently attuning to him than well, me... since Jesus is never preoccupied and subtly non-relational due to his workload. Anyway, Karl would enjoy having an even more tangible, dramatic sense of Jesus' presence, but he's quite happy with what he's got now. And many of you have heard him describe that.

But what most people don't know is that in the first year of our marriage, Karl and I got in to an intense discussion about having a "personal relationship with the Lord." This was something that seemed perfectly natural and understandable to me; I never had dramatic visions nor heard audible words, but I nearly always, since my elementary school years, had a sense that God was with me, knew me, and cared about me, and would hear my prayers and respond in some way for my good and the good of the Kingdom. Karl however, had never experienced anything that he recognized as a "personal relationship with the Lord." In fact, that had been a painfully disappointing part of his spiritual journey, but he had comforted himself by believing that people who said they had that kind of intimate, warm and fuzzy relationship with God were deluded fanatics or off-balance attention-seekers. However, I'm glad to say that after initially being annoyed with me, he couldn't honestly dismiss me and my experience of God that way. Instead, he took the more brave and painful path of facing the pain of his disappointment and feeling neglected by God.

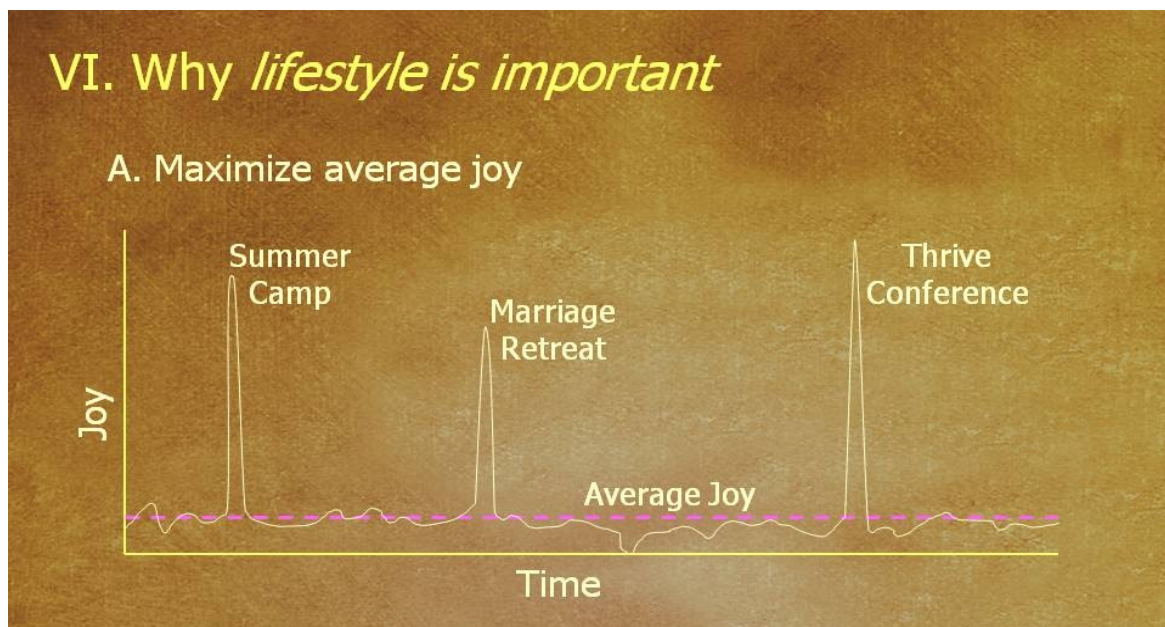
And thus began a new phase of his journey, hoping against hope that such a connection with God was possible, and possible *for him*. And aren't we all glad that he did! There were many milestones along that journey – many, many times of seeking Immanuel's presence and comfort and healing as triggered feelings would stir up... believing in faith that the negative feelings about God were in fact *triggered feelings, distortions* based on painful experiences without adequate help at the time they happened, and *not* an accurate assessment of God's true character.

It was practicing the Immanuel lifestyle in **faith** that led to Karl's Immanuel experience in **feeling**.

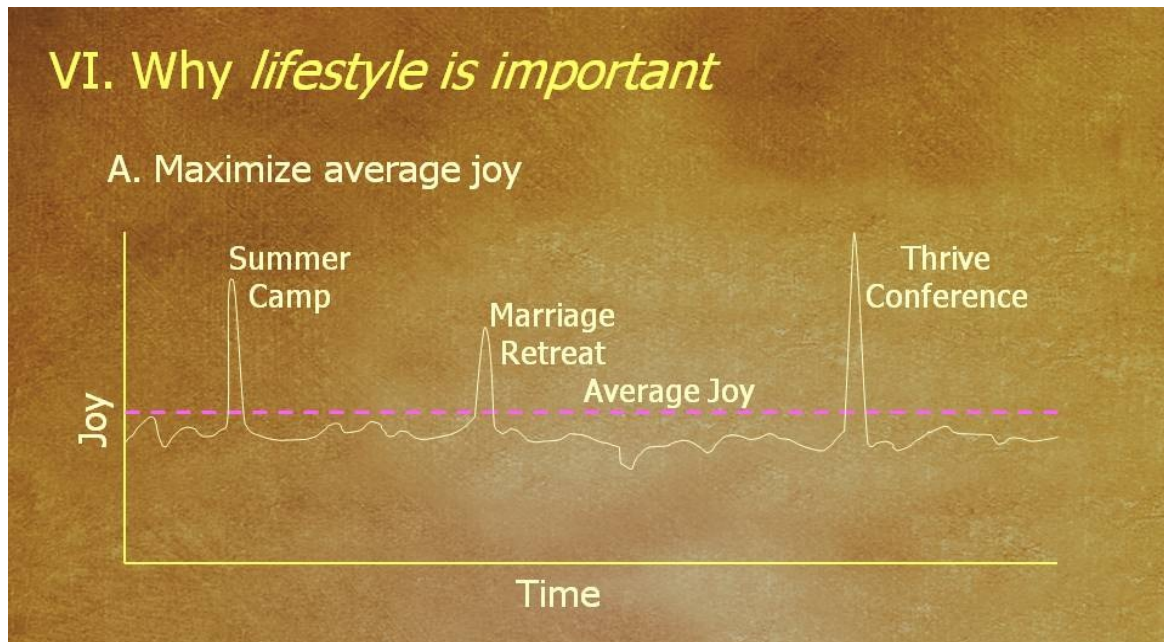
[I also made some extemporaneous comments about another huge change in Karl over the years of healing and growing with Immanuel: from a triggered inability to hear my heart about not wanting to be his private practice administrator for the rest of my life – that that was NOT a satisfying use of my time and gifts – to being able to hear me and pro-actively support my sense of leading to become pastor of our church. Given that this church and neighborhood and his parents being in leadership here are the context of so much of his childhood pain, it's clear that something deep inside is in a new place of freedom and joy!]

(Slide 17.0) VI. Why *lifestyle* is important: The more common human response is to just apply these principles, tools, and exercises on occasional special occasions, such as summer camps, marriage retreats, or THRIVE conferences. Or to just apply these principles, tools, and exercises when in crisis. In contrast, the Immanuel *lifestyle* and the relational connection/*relational joy lifestyle* is deliberately practicing these skills as part of everyday life. The Immanuel *lifestyle* and the relational connection/*relational joy lifestyle* is deliberately building these behaviors into habits. **(Slide 17.1)** *The Immanuel lifestyle and the relational connection/relational joy lifestyle is deliberately practicing these skills and deliberately building the habits of including these behaviors as regular parts of every day life.*

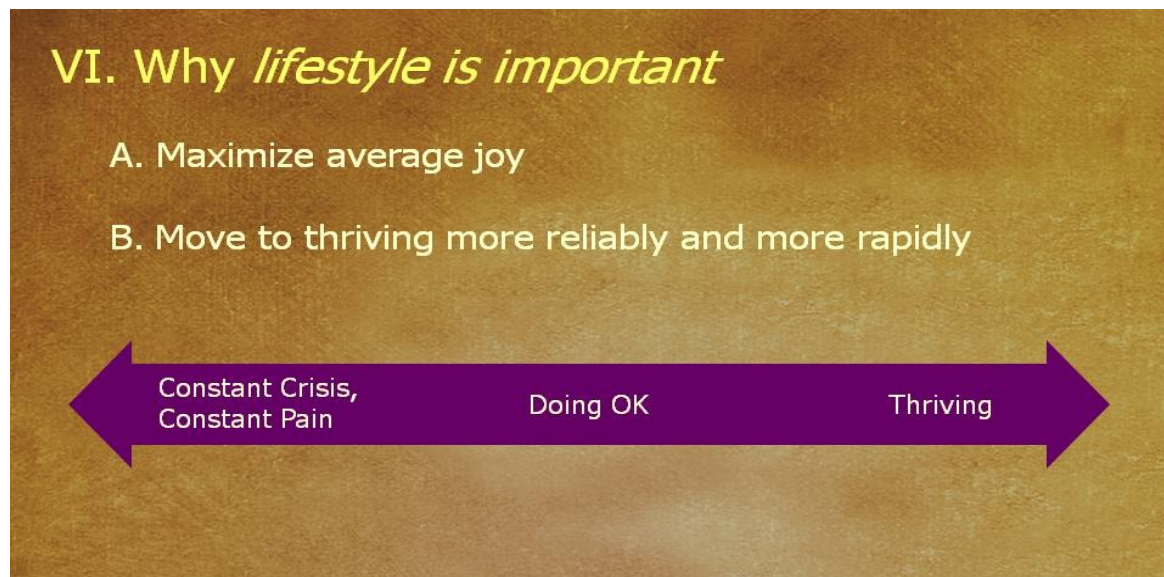
(Slide 18.0) A. Maximize average joy: One benefit of building these lifestyle habits for the average day, is that this will dramatically increase your average joy level. **(Slide 18.1)** Occasional mountain top experiences at summer camps, marriage retreats, or THRIVE conferences are nice, but these don't do much for your average joy level if you come back from the mountain top and quickly sink back to a baseline that includes a lot of time being subtly triggered with your relational circuits mostly off. **(Slide 18.2)** Your average joy level is still low, and this is your day-to-day reality, which means that most of your life will be spent at a joy level that is not so good.



In contrast, **(Slide 19.0)** if you deliberately practice skills and build lifestyle habits that increase your joy level during your day-to-day life when you're *not* at summer camp or a THRIVE conference, **(Slide 19.1)** then your average joy will increase dramatically, which means that most of your life will be spent at a joy level that is a lot more satisfying.



(Slide 20.0) B. Move to thriving more reliably and more rapidly: Another benefit of building these behaviors into *lifestyle habits* is that you will move to thriving much more reliably and rapidly.



Those who live in the crisis zone have constant pain to motivate them. They are usually pretty open to plans that include *deliberate, regular* healing and growing work to help them get out of the constant pain of the crisis zone. However, as soon as they get just enough benefit to crawl out of the crisis zone they join most of the rest of us in the “mostly okay” zone.

And those of us living in the middle, “mostly okay” zone can often become (marginally) comfortable resting in mediocrity. The intense pain of an occasional crisis or disaster will prompt occasional healing/growth work, but this is slow and unpredictable. I want our movement from the mediocre middle to the thriving zone to be much more reliable and rapid. And this comes from deliberately building an Immanuel *lifestyle* and a relational connection/relational joy *lifestyle*. This comes from engaging in joy-building behaviors as deliberate, regular *lifestyle habits*.

Over the long haul, I believe that deliberate, habitual, *lifestyle* behaviors, motivated by “the joy set before us,” have a much better outcome than occasional behaviors motivated by the fires that infrequent crises lite under our behinds.

(Slide 21.0) C. When you need it most, it’s hardest to do: Yet another benefit of building these behaviors into *lifestyle habits* it that you will actually be able to use them when you need them the most.

(Possible Kayak analogy, if time permits, as an example of needing over-practiced skills and deeply ingrained habits for times of difficulty. When you’re not in difficulty, you think, ‘Yeah, yeah. I know this. Why am I wasting my time with practicing my roll, *for the five-hundredth time?*’ But when you’re in a really difficult situation – upside down in the middle of rough rapids – the over-practiced skills and deeply imbedded habits will save your butt.)

When you are in deep doo doo relationally, and you desperately need to recognize that you are triggered, take responsibility for your triggering, get your relational circuits back on, take care of immediate relationship repair needs, and then resolve the underlying trauma, *these life-giving skills and behaviors are very hard to remember and implement*. As explained at length in *Outsmarting Yourself*, the relational circuits that you need to help fix the problem are often off-line.

For example, when I’m triggered and my relational circuits are off, it’s hard to *feel* the good memories of being connected to Charlotte. Or you could say it’s hard to remember the good feelings of being connected to Charlotte. And I don’t even feel desire to be connected to Charlotte. (If time permits, can add example of cortical color blindness, and refer to *Outsmarting Yourself* for those who want more details). And if Charlotte is a part of what’s triggering me, then it feels true that she’s bad and wrong, that my pain is her fault, and that I need to stop the pain by making her change. And when my relational circuits are off, the behaviors for trying to make her change that come easily and spontaneously include blaming, complaining, accusing, judging, and punishing. These non-relational attempts to make Charlotte change usually just make things worse, and then I withdrawal in discouragement, despair, and self-pity.

If a couple gets stuck here and it goes on long enough, they drift apart, forget why they ever wanted to be together in the first place, and look elsewhere for joy (for example, other friendships, and even other romantic relationships), and for pain-management pseudo joy (ice cream, shopping, romance novels, video games, sports, pornography, etc). Unfortunately, it’s too easy to get stuck in this miserable relationship mire because, as just mentioned, when you’re triggered, miserable, and non-relational, it’s hard to remember or implement the skills and behaviors that could fix the problem. When worst comes to worst, the marriage eventually ends (and as we all know, this is all too common).

On the other hand, if you have faithfully practiced relational connection/relational joy lifestyle skills and if you have developed deeply ingrained relational connection/relational joy habits, it can turn out very differently. For example, when Charlotte became the pastor of our church, I would periodically get stuck in a really miserable triggered place and we started sliding into the relational death trap that I mentioned earlier. Every once in a while Charlotte would hit several weeks in a row during which she was particularly swamped, and in addition to often being absent because she was working until 9:00 at night (or sometimes 10:00, or 11:00, or even midnight), she would often be triggered and emotionally absent even when she was physically present.

And this really triggered my childhood memories of not getting enough joy. There was some truth-based lack of joy and attachment pain in the present, but when I wasn't triggered Charlotte and I could talk about this and work together to find solutions. However, when I was triggered I was much more miserable than could be explained by the situation in the present, it felt totally true that all my pain was being caused by bad Charlotte who was not giving me enough joy, it felt somehow true that she had most of the power, and it felt like the most reasonable and natural thing in the world for me to blame her, judge her, and find ways to punish her to try to make her change. And when this would just trigger her and make everything worse, I would get even more miserable, and withdraw into a tangle of loneliness, anger, discouragement, and self-pity. And if we had gotten stuck in this place, the story would not have turned out well.

Fortunately, I practice these relational lifestyle skills all the time and these relational lifestyle behaviors are deeply embedded as habits. Even though it *felt* totally true that it was all Charlotte's fault, and that she just needed to stop being a bad, absent, negligent wife that didn't take good care of me or give me enough joy, I could also see the checklist warning signs that told me I was intensely triggered and that my relational circuits were off. And even though I didn't feel like it (in fact, my natural desire was to punish Charlotte by staying angry and deliberately withholding relational joy), I use the Immanuel tools for getting my relational circuits back on line, I connected with Jesus, I talked to him about my pain, I received His attunement, and I asked for help.

Over the course of several of these episodes of misery, it became increasingly clear that I was getting triggered to childhood memories of not getting enough relational joy. My pain was real and legitimate, but most of it was actually coming from memories as opposed to the present. I went to memories of being at this same church in this same neighborhood, with my parents being in leadership and being gone a lot because they were intensely engaged in many crisis ministry situations. And when Charlotte would get particularly overwhelmed and exhausted, this would also trigger memories of my Mom being overwhelmed, exhausted, and emotionally unavailable after having an extended bout with mono, going through her third pregnancy, caring for three small children, and then developing low thyroid.

Each time I would connect with Jesus and go to the underlying memories, I would get some healing, and the crazy triggered stuff would immediately drop off of Charlotte as I could feel that she was not really the source of my pain. And after three or four of these episodes of miserable triggering it seems as if most of the underlying memories have been resolved. These episodes of my feeling increasingly miserable, perceiving that my misery is being caused by Charlotte not giving me enough joy, and then judging, blaming, accusing, and punishing her to try to make her change, are pretty much gone. Now when Charlotte gets

really busy and overwhelmed, I actually help and support her instead of feeling like she is neglecting and abandoning me and then getting increasingly miserable, angry, and judgmental. I'm pretty sure that I can speak for both of us when I say that we're glad to have gotten out of the relational death trap with no lasting damages.

(Slide 22.0) VII. More examples of specific healing that directly benefits connection with God: Some people are in LOTS of pain, and are almost constantly in pain. With respect to these people, Dr. Wilder frequently reminds us that we should not focus all of our attention on working with painful memories. In order for these people to thrive instead of living in constant crisis, they need *balance* – they need to spend *some* time shoveling away at traumatic memories, but they *also* need to be very deliberate about building the habits of spending time with Jesus in the context of positive memories, of working on maturity skills (such as self-calming), and of growing joy capacity. And they need to deliberately build adequate relational joy into their lives.

On the other hand, there are many of us that function well enough most of the time, and only do trauma healing work when we encounter rare crises. (And even during times of crisis, we can often avoid doing actual healing work and just focus on managing the pain until the crisis is over.) For these people, we need to make space in our lives for regular healing work. We need to find ways to work on the underlying trauma when we are intensely triggered, and we need to make space for regular healing work *even when we are not in crisis*. We need to deliberately build habits of working on blockages and healing trauma – we need to deliberately include regular work on blockages and trauma as part of our Immanuel lifestyles.

One of the biggest reasons we need to build regular healing into our Immanuel lifestyles is that traumatic memories hinder our connections to God, and, conversely, resolving traumatic memories will bless our ability to perceive and connect with God's tangible, personal, interactive, attuning presence.

That's the theory.

Now, to convince you at the right hemisphere, visceral, emotional, "I believe it," "It *feels* true" level, I'm going to share as many true story examples as I can fit in during the rest of our time.

(Slide 22.1) A. Examples from others who have been blessed with steady progress as a result of regular healing. I have facilitated for many people who have experienced steady progress with respect to their God connections as they persisted with regular Immanuel approach work over time. In fact, this pattern of steady progress with persistent Immanuel approach work has been true for almost everybody I have ever worked with.

At the beginning of their Immanuel approach journeys, these people had a wide variety of blockages – *conscious* negative associations with God, traumatic content being *unconsciously* transferred onto the Lord, low capacity, infant maturity coming forward as part of the traumatic memories, bitterness, self-pity, demonic interference, and dissociated parts carrying very specific memory-anchored blockages. And many of them had complex tangles of a number of different blockages all mixed together. When I would first start work with the people who had complex blockage tangles, it would often take thirty to forty-five minutes (and sometimes more than an hour) of advanced Immanuel intervention troubleshooting just to establish the initial connection with Jesus, and every step of the healing work would be slow and difficult and bumpy. **(Slide 22.2)** However, **Immanuel sessions have gotten**

progressively easier over time as these people have regularly, persistently engaged with God to resolve their blockages, and as they have regularly, persistently spent time with God building capacity and trust.

(Slide 23.0) 1. Betrayed and abused by men: For example, a number of these recipients had been betrayed and abused by men, and so had intense, memory-anchored fears about allowing Jesus to be present. These people especially had child places in their hearts that were afraid that Jesus would betray and abuse them just as most of the other important men in their lives had betrayed and abused them. However, this fearful resistance has progressively subsided as they persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

Furthermore, each time we would finally get to the place at which the recipient would allow Jesus into one of her man-trauma memories, she would immediately realize that Jesus was separate and different from the perpetrator – Jesus was a man, just like the perpetrator, but she could immediately see *and feel* that Jesus was good, safe, and on her side. It is particularly encouraging to note that as these *positive experiences with Jesus* have accumulated, the transference of man-trauma onto Jesus collapsed *even though there were still many memories of being abused by men that were not yet resolved*.

(Slide 23.1) 2. Traumatized by authority figures: Authority trauma provides another example. A number of these recipients had been traumatized by authority figures who blamed and punished them whenever anything went wrong. And since all of their other traumatic experiences always included *something* going wrong, these people had intense, memory-anchored fears about allowing God into any of their traumatic memories. These recipients especially had child places in their hearts that were afraid that Jesus would blame and punish them just as most of the other important authority figures in their lives had blamed and punished them. However, this fearful resistance has progressively subsided as they persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

Furthermore, each time we would finally get to the place at which the recipient would allow Jesus into one of her authority trauma memories, she would immediately realize that Jesus was separate and different from the perpetrator – Jesus definitely had authority, just like the perpetrator, but she could immediately see *and feel* that Jesus was good, safe, and on her side. And again, it is particularly encouraging to note that *as these positive experiences with Jesus have accumulated, the transference of authority-trauma onto Jesus collapsed even though there were still many memories of being blamed and punished by authority figures that were not yet resolved*.

(Slide 23.2) 3. Despised and ridiculed for their faith: Being ridiculed for faith provides yet another example. Several people I have worked with were despised and ridiculed by their parents and other family members for having religious beliefs, and especially for talking about their faith experiences. So these people had intense, memory-anchored fears about perceiving God's tangible presence, about establishing an interactive connection with God, and especially about describing these experiences. These recipients had child places in their hearts that were afraid of being despised and ridiculed for experiencing God's presence, and that were especially afraid of being despise and ridiculed for *talking about* perceiving and connecting with God. However, this fearful resistance to the whole

Immanuel approach process has progressively subsided as they persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

Furthermore, each time the recipient would finally be able to spend time with Jesus, her desire to spend *more* time with Jesus would grow, her loyalty to Jesus would grow, and her courage and capacity would grow. And once again, it is especially encouraging to note that *as these positive experiences with Jesus accumulated, the recipient would begin to respond with, “I will spend time with the Lord, **and talk about it**, regardless of the consequences!” even though there were still many despised-and-ridiculed-for-her-faith memories that were not yet resolved.*

Now (spring of 2015), after many hours of persistent Immanuel approach work, these people almost always connect with Jesus quickly and easily at the beginning of each session, and the healing work almost always flows smoothly and easily. Furthermore, most of these recipients have also been experiencing increasingly easy, frequent, and rich connections with Jesus outside of sessions. For example, one of the women in our Friday mentoring group, who initially had great difficulty with perceiving or connecting even in sessions, now reports, “Every morning, when I wake up, one of the first things I become aware of is Jesus next to me. I have an image of His face, right beside me, and I sense His presence. Even before I get out of bed I am aware of Jesus’ loving, friendship presence with me.”

(Slide 24.0) B. More examples from my own journey: Now I would like to share some more true story examples from my own journey.

(Slide 24.1) 1. God and my two year old separation trauma: As described earlier, there were many lies transferred onto God from my two-year-old separation trauma, such as, “He won’t come,” “He won’t give me what I need,” “I can’t trust His heart for me,” and “There’s no excuse for allowing this.” These would get triggered and feel true when I would call to God for help and not (quickly) receive the help I wanted. And these lies about God resolved as I resolved the trauma.

(Slide 24.2) 2. More blockages from my two-year-old separation trauma: As described earlier, in association with my two-year-old separation trauma, I got stuck in a place where I had a lot of anger and bitterness towards God, and a place where I refused his company and comfort: “If you don’t have my mom with you, then go jump off a cliff!” This really got in the way of being able to connect with the Lord, and my ability to perceive and connect with God improved dramatically after I resolved this trauma-anchored stuck place.

(Slide 24.3) 3. God and the car trunk: This story begins with one of those particularly miserable moments in life. I had been working intermittently on a particularly difficult essay for more than a year, and when my laptop locked up and vaporized the whole document I lost between 50 and 100 hours of writing work. (For uses when more time/space are available, longer intro paragraph in full essay is better).

Writing is usually a slow and painful process for me, and this particular essay was one of my slowest and most difficult writing projects. People who write quickly and easily may not understand this, but losing this whole document felt like coming home from a trip and finding that my house had burned down, or like being told that something was wrong

with the material the dentist had used for my fillings, and that I needed to have *all* of them redone. This was a truth-based loss that would be upsetting by any standards, but I was also *really* triggered.

This experience especially stirred up lies around the overall theme “I don’t feel safe in the Lord’s care.” Some of the lies I recognized from groups of childhood memories that I had been working on for some time, but one component of the triggering was quite new. In addition to the familiar thoughts and feelings from memories I had identified in previous emotional healing work, I felt a strange and intense confusion or disorientation – like I had been stunned – like I was in shock. I remember saying to myself, “It feels like someone just hit me on the head with a sledge hammer,” and I couldn’t think clearly enough even to start trying to reconstruct the document. Even a day later, when I sat down and opened my laptop to try and recreate the document, the disoriented “stunned” feeling would come back so intensely that I would just sit there and stare at the screen.

The file disappeared on a Friday, and I spent the weekend alternating between working with special recovery software to salvage fragments of the essay⁸ and working with Charlotte to do emotional healing work for all my triggers. By the end of the weekend lots of good stuff had happened – I had found and resolved a number of minor traumatic memories that contributed to several of my longstanding thematic lies, but the overall sense that I wasn’t safe in the Lord’s care still felt somewhat true, and we hadn’t found any memories that included the confusion and disorientation. As I focused especially on this shocked, stunned confusion and disorientation, an interesting childhood memory suddenly came into my mind – a memory that I had always been aware of, but that had never seemed important.

I was standing in the alley, behind our garage, watching my father as he was talking with a friend and doing something to our car. I was especially fascinated by the car trunk, which my father had left standing open. I had never seen inside a car trunk before, and somehow, to my three year old mind, it seemed like some kind of mysterious cavern that must certainly contain amazing and wonderful things. Unfortunately, I walked up to the back of the car at the same time my father reached up to close the trunk lid. He had his face turned towards his friend so that he didn’t see me, and at the moment I peeped over the edge of the trunk he slammed the lid. I can still remember the dull “thunk” the edge of the trunk lid made as it hit the top of my head. The blow wasn’t especially painful (compared to other childhood injuries I had survived), but it surprised and frightened me so that I started screaming and crying immediately. Dad was horrified when he realized what had happened, and Mom came running when she heard me screaming. I think everybody was especially upset because there was a lot of blood (scalp wounds bleed a lot), but fortunately my hard head was equal to the task of protecting my brain.

⁸Just in case anyone is wondering how we could recover fragments of a file that had been “lost” and replaced by a blank file: even when a file has been “erased” or “lost,” there are still fragments of previous versions scattered about the hard drive. Special software can find and recover these “invisible” fragments as long as the computer hasn’t overwritten them with some new file.

I had always remembered these details, and had often told the story to friends and cousins – proudly letting them feel the lump across the top of my head that I carried as a souvenir. My conscious memory had always been that the whole incident wasn't that big of a deal once Mom and Dad cleaned up the mess and put an ice pack on my head. It always seemed like a moderately physically traumatic, but emotionally unimportant, childhood adventure.

However, when this memory came forward during the emotional healing prayer time, I became aware of several details that had never been present in previous memory reviews of the incident. (I was obviously *inside* the childhood memory experience in a whole new way.) I remembered images from my peripheral vision at the moment I was peeking over the bottom edge of the car trunk – I remembered seeing Dad reach up to close the trunk lid, and also seeing that his face was turned away because he was talking to his friend. And I remembered being aware of the fact that he was about to close the car trunk, but then I also clearly remembered thinking “I don't need to worry, because Dad can see me even though he's looking the other way. He knows where I am and will make sure I'm okay.” Even as the trunk lid was starting to come down, I remember thinking, “It's okay. He knows everything, he can do anything, and he'll make sure that I don't get hurt. He'll stop it in mid-air and wait until I am out of the way.”

As all these pieces came forward I suddenly realized that my three-year-old mind had spontaneously connected Dad and God, assuming that whatever was true about Dad must also be true about God. I realized that at the beginning of this memory, *both* Dad and God seemed omniscient and omnipotent, and I trusted them to make sure that nothing really bad would happen to me. By the end of the memory this no longer felt true. At the end of the memory, it felt like *neither* Dad nor God were omniscient or omnipotent, and I no longer trusted that they would make sure that I was okay. It wasn't that I came to understand that God would sometimes *choose to allow* bad things to happen to me (which is part of the painful truth in this fallen world), but rather that I came to believe that neither Dad nor God were all-knowing or all-powerful – that neither Dad nor God were *able* to protect me from harm in all situations. This was a truth-based realization about the human limitations of my father, but also obviously included a lie as my three-year-old mind concluded that the same was true about God.

As soon as I realized that my three-year-old mind had made the assumption that whatever was true about Dad must also be true about God, I also realized, *experientially*, that this assumption wasn't true. Instead of “Neither Dad nor God are able to protect me” feeling true, it felt true that Dad is human and limited, but that God *is able* to protect me – that God sometimes *chooses to allow* bad things to happen, but that He *is* all knowing and all powerful, and that He *is* able to protect me in any and all situations if He chooses to do so.

Furthermore, I received some additional healing nine months later. As I was thinking about the original memory and about the emotional healing process in order to write this story up for a case study, I realized that something wasn't completely peaceful and calm. When I focused on this, I identified another lie, and then received another piece of healing as another truth clicked into place.

Throughout my life, whenever I had told this story or thought about this memory, I had always felt vaguely puzzled that I hadn't been injured more seriously. But it had never occurred to me that the Lord may have been protecting me. As I was working on this essay, I realized that I *still* didn't really feel safe in the Lord's care because even though He is *able* to protect me, He *chooses* to let bad things happen. As I focused on this thought, it suddenly occurred to me: "Maybe the Lord did protect me – maybe the minimal damage feels like it doesn't quite make sense because it *doesn't* make sense (at least not without acknowledging supernatural protection)."

I have a degree in physics and a degree in medicine, and when I thought about this part of the memory carefully and logically I realized that my injury *should* have been much more serious. This was back in the early 60's, and our car was one of those big old cars where you could lay several men side-by-side in the trunk. The trunk lid was probably 4-5 feet from the hinges to the closing edge, and swung through a large closing arc. This was also back in the days when cars were made of heavier steel, so the trunk lid was not only big, but also heavy. The bottom edge of the trunk lid was a narrow metal ridge. My dad was 6'2" and over 200 pounds, and he would stretch up, and then come down with both arms and his weight when slamming those old car trunks. I was only three years old, with the thinner skull and small, skinny neck of a small child. From a medicine and physics perspective, I should have suffered some combination of a skull fracture, a concussion, intracranial bleeding, and a broken neck. In fact, I talked to my dad, to check if my memory was accurate or whether I might have exaggerated the physics of the situation. He responded with "I shake every time I hear you tell that story," and he totally agreed that I should have been much more seriously injured.

As I look at it now, what *feels* true is that the Lord did allow a painful, scary event to occur, but that He also protected me from much more serious injury in this particular situation.

This doesn't completely address the complex question of why God sometimes allows bad things to happen, even though He could protect us, but part of the truth regarding whether or not I can trust the Lord to take care of me is that He often *has* protected me, even when I haven't been aware of it.

This story also provides another example of the difference between cognitive information and what *feels* true. Getting the correct cognitive information into my head was not the problem. I had read the Bible from cover to cover several times, and I had read hundreds of other books – from theology to true story accounts of God's supernatural intervention – telling me that God is all knowing and all powerful. I had the correct *cognitive* information about God's omniscience and omnipotence, and I would have argued with you if you had told me that God was not all-knowing enough or all-powerful enough to protect His children. But these truths about the Lord did not *feel* true in any situation where my trauma-associated distorted interpretations were triggered. Buried in the files for unresolved trauma was this three-year-old memory of Dad slamming the car trunk on my head, and when this memory would get triggered these distorted interpretations would *feel* true – it would *feel* true that God did *not* always see me, and that He was *not* always able to protect me. (That is, until the traumatic memory got resolved, and since then the cognitive, biblical truth actually *feels* true, even when I'm in situations that would have previously triggered the memory-anchored lies.)

I don't remember anything about what the inside of that car trunk looked like.

(Slide 24.4) 4. God the psychotic cult leader: As mentioned earlier, for many years there was a place in my heart where I believed that God was insecure, that God was jealous of my ten speed bicycle, and that God was demanding that I sacrifice everything precious in my life in order to prove my allegiance and keep my priorities straight. These lies were anchored in memories of overhearing small group meetings and from age-inappropriate radical discipleship sermons, and they resolved when I resolved these memories.

(Slide 24.5) 5. God the first-grade teacher that didn't know I was dyslexic: For many years I would often struggle with feeling like God was unhappy with me for not doing enough, and that he was blaming me for not trying hard enough, but that He would never give me the help I needed to actually be able to do what he asked me to do.⁹ We eventually discovered that these distorted beliefs were anchored in memories from first grade, when I couldn't read and my teacher knew I was smart but didn't know I had dyslexia. So she was constantly frustrated with me for not being able to read and she assumed that it was because I just wasn't trying, but she never actually gave me the help that I needed to get around the dyslexia. And these lies and the associated negative emotions that had gotten transferred onto God resolved as we worked through the memories.

(Slide 25.0) 6. God the absent playground monitor: Throughout my grade-school experience, there was frequent bullying and constant scary behavior on the playground. And it certainly seemed to me that whoever was supposed to be keeping the playground safe wasn't doing their job. And these perceptions got transferred onto God: "God isn't paying attention and he's not doing his job – he's sitting in the teacher's lounge drinking coffee when he should be protecting vulnerable children from being terrorized by bullies." And these negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart have steadily resolved as I have worked through this pile of grade-school playground memories.

(Slide 25.1) 7. God the absent highschool gym teacher: In highschool, one of the gym teachers would just give us a couple soccer balls and then disappear until the end of gym class. And when I was still a short, skinny freshman the bigger kids thought it was fun to have target practice by making me the "goalie," and then playing soccer dodge ball (the goal was to hit me, as opposed to get the ball past me). Again, the perceptions regarding the gym teacher in these memories got transferred onto God: "The Lord is sitting in the teacher's lounge drinking coffee when He should be on the soccer field, actually doing his job." And these negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart have steadily resolved as I have worked through this pile of highschool gym class memories.

(Slide 25.2) 8. God the well meaning but misdirected, powerless, and incompetent grown up: I often felt like God was well meaning, but just misdirected, powerless, and incompetent. He said a lot of nice things and made a lot of nice promises in the Bible, but

⁹See the case study "Dissociation, Repression, Denial, and Avoidance: 'Where did kindergarten and first grade go?'"

he didn't actually do anything that made a real difference. Eventually we discovered that this went back to memories of my perceptions of the general adult establishment when I was in grade school. They had meetings with each other and talked to us about loving our enemies, but they didn't provide any real help regarding my experience of feeling physically unsafe every day on the playground and in our neighborhood. And these perceptions that God was well meaning but misdirected, powerless, and incompetent have steadily resolved as I have worked through these memories regarding the adults from my childhood.

(Slide 25.3) 9. God the politician: My perception as a child was that a lot of the politicians – the people that seemed to run the world – made a lot of promises but then didn't do very well at fulfilling them. There were lot's of promises, minimal real results, and then always endless excuses and blaming others. And all of this got transferred onto God, especially regarding prayer. It felt like God made lots of promises about prayer, but it didn't actually work in the real world, and then he always made excuses and blamed everybody else. And these negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart have steadily resolved as I have worked through my childhood memories of adults who did not fulfill promises.

(Slide 26.0) 10. Jesus the drugged out hippie: Living in Chicago and watching TV in the 1960's, I saw lots of drugged out hippies. "Make love not war!" "Oh, wow – yeah man. Groovy!" Many of them talked about social justice and quoted Jesus, and lots of them even looked sort of like Jesus. And all of this would sometimes get transferred onto God. I sometimes felt like Jesus was well intentioned, but just stupid and unrealistic – like he'd been smoking too much weed. "Oh, wow, man. Just give everything you have to the poor and everything in the world will turn out fine!" I feared that he would tell me to do stuff that was well intentioned, but totally clueless and unrealistic. The really bad news being that I would have to obey him because that's what being a Christian is all about, and then my life would totally fall apart.

And once again, these negative perceptions regarding Jesus have resolved as I have worked through my childhood memories of associating Jesus with the drugged out hippies.

Also, it's important to note that these perceptions of Jesus from my childhood are totally different than the Jesus I see every day in Immanuel sessions, and totally different than the Jesus I now perceive every day in my personal spiritual experience.

(Slide 26.1) 11. Jesus the angry activist: It often felt true to me that God was angry and demanding, that he was blaming me for all of the problems in the world because I was a white middle-class American, and that it was my responsibility to fix everything (and that I was never doing enough).

We traced these distorted thoughts and feelings back to memories of angry activists, once again from my 1960's childhood. Often I just saw these people on TV, but we sometimes had angry activists preaching at our church on Sunday morning or speaking at other church meetings. These people were angry and demanding, they often seemed to blame everything on middle class Americans, they always seemed to demand more, and they never seemed to be satisfied. And sometimes they would be saying all of this while

holding a bible and quoting Jesus. There was even a movie of the life of Jesus where he always seemed to be angry, and it seemed like he spent most of his time stomping around Palestine, rebuking everybody.

And once again, the good news is that these negative, distorted thoughts and feelings stopped bothering me as we resolved the underlying memories.

(Slide 26.2) 12. God the gym teacher that didn't enforce justice: I have often struggled with bitterness and hopelessness regarding the lack of justice in the world. And the problem hasn't been that I don't see God enforcing justice immediately – the problem was that it would feel true that God would *never* enforce justice. I knew what I was supposed to believe, but what felt true was that there would *never* be justice. I could never trust justice to the Lord, and then just let it go and forgive because I didn't believe that God would *ever* administer justice.

This theme of not being able to trust God to administer justice went back to many childhood memories of injustice. For example, I had a gym teacher that didn't do anything about the kids that would repeatedly cut in line. Certain kids got to bat five times, and other kids never got to the plate. And these same kids that cut in line would also cheat in many other ways. Either he wasn't paying attention, or he didn't care, or he wasn't willing to deal with the difficult kids, because he didn't do anything about it. And, interestingly, my thoughts and feelings towards God were exactly the same as my thoughts and feelings towards this gym teacher.

(Slide 26.3) 13. God and lots of other injustice: There were also many other memories of injustice in my childhood. There were kids in my neighborhood and in my school that stole things from me, and nothing was ever done about this – the offenders were never disciplined and there was never restitution. There were bullies that were never caught or disciplined. There were vandals that were never caught or disciplined. The grown ups around me often talked about corrupt politicians and corrupt businessmen, and it seemed clear that these crooks were never caught or disciplined. There were kids at school that would join my group or lab team, and then not do their share of the work, and these slackers/academic parasites were never caught or disciplined. It just seemed to go on and on. The slackers, parasites, crooks, bullies, thieves, and cheaters just seemed to get away with it. And this chronic sense of hopelessness with respect to injustice all got transferred onto the Lord.

But, fortunately, God's healing power once again proves stronger than the brokenness in the world. As I have been getting healing for the pain of feeling so powerless and wronged and violated in these many memories, it has been easier and easier to trust that God will ultimately care for justice. As I get healing for the traumatic memories of injustice from my childhood, it's just getting easier and easier for me to trust that God will take care of it and that I can let it go.

(Slide 26.4) 14. God and memories of performance-based worth: I had a really beautiful breakthrough just in the last several months. It started with working (again) on my longstanding stress/anxiety about not working hard enough, not getting enough done for God, not saving the world quickly enough. Most recently this has especially expressed

itself as chronic, oppressive stress and anxiety when I'm writing – the constant, burdensome feeling that I should be writing more, writing faster, and writing better.

Eventually I went back to many, many memories throughout my childhood of worth, friendships, security, importance, popularity, happiness, etc being dependent on performance.

In the world of my childhood, it seemed that everybody knew that it was better to be better. Everybody knew that it was good to be fast and bad to be slow (and I was slow). Everybody knew that it was good to be smart and bad to be stupid (and I perceived myself to be stupid, in that I couldn't read). Everybody knew that it was good to be good at sports and bad to be bad at sports (and I was bad at sports). Everybody knew that it was good and cool to be artistic and bad to be without artistic talent (and I was without artistic talent). Everybody knew that it was good and cool to be musically talented and bad to be without talent (and I was without musical talent).

And everybody knew that it was good to win and bad to lose. No matter what everybody said about "Just do your best," etc, the losers always seemed to be unhappy. For example, I noticed that the athletes and families of the 4th place contestants in the olympics were miserable. I mean, these people were *the fourth best athletes in their particular sport in the whole world*, and all they seemed to perceive and feel was that they were losers. Unless you beat *everybody* else, and were the absolute best, you would eventually be a loser and miserable. I felt like I had to win and be the best in order to be okay, and the unfortunate reality was that I wasn't very good at many of the games kids play. I spent a lot of time losing.

This all got transferred onto my relationship with God, and not surprisingly, got in the way of feeling safe in God's unconditional love, and of having a joy based relationship as opposed to a fear based relationship. Whenever this stuff would get triggered (which was a lot of the time), I would feel like I had to work harder and do more in order to be faster, smarter, and better.

As I went through these memories I felt the negative emotions from the original memories, but I then also felt Jesus' presence with me and the memories lost their toxic power. And since this session, I have felt another step forward with respect to feeling safe in God's unconditional love (*even when I'm working on a writing project, or some other effort to help save the world*). And it has also been significantly less burdensome to write.

Once again, **(Slide 27.0)** the good news is that **this ongoing process of steadily, persistently shoveling out specific memories that had been getting transferred onto God has progressively, profoundly changed my right hemisphere, experiential faith. What actually feels true about God's character and heart. My daily experience is increasingly one of actually feeling God's presence being with me, as a provider, as a protector, as a trustworthy friend, and as a loving Father.**

(Slide 28.0) VIII. Practical thoughts – dosage matters!: To put it simply, the amount of benefit you receive from your Immanuel approach lifestyle will be proportional to the amount of time you spend actually engaging in Immanuel lifestyle behaviors.

Take nutrition and diet as an analogy. If you eat one apple, one carrot, and one serving of chicken each week, and then the rest of the time you eat chocolate, doughnuts, and Pepsi, you will still feel terrible *even though you are including fruits, vegetables, and lean protein in your diet*. In contrast, if you have fruits, vegetables, and lean protein at every meal, with just a little bit of something sweet for dessert, you will feel much better. And the difference between these two scenarios is a difference in dosages. There are no new concepts or qualitative differences in the second scenario – just a difference in quantities.

Exercise provides another analogy. If you start each week with a walk around the block first thing on Monday morning, but then you spend the rest of the week sitting on the couch watching television, you will feel terrible *even though you are getting regular exercise*. In contrast, if you walk for thirty minutes each day, and also get up to stretch and move around for a minute or two every couple of hours during the day, you will feel much better. And again, the difference between these two scenarios is a difference in dosages.

Similarly, the Immanuel lifestyle will produce significant benefits only when you spend sufficient amounts of time engaged in Immanuel lifestyle habit behaviors. If you are spending a lot of your time watching movies full of anger, fear, and violence – movies that consistently turn your relational circuits off. If you are spending a lot of your time playing video games in which the primary activity is to kill “bad guys” – video games that consistently turn your relational circuits off. And if you are spending a lot of your time surfing the internet in ways that very quietly turn your relational circuits off. But then you take only five minutes each day to try to feel grateful and connect with God, it will be like eating one carrot each week in combination with a pound of chocolate, two dozen doughnuts, and a case of Pepsi. It will be like walking around the block once each week in combination with sitting on the couch for eighty-four hours of television.

An *effective* Immanuel lifestyle requires practical, concrete choices that steadily move towards the right dosage balance. You need to be steadily decreasing the amount of time you spend engaged in behaviors that turn your relational circuits off, and you need to be steadily increasing the amount of time you spend engaged in Immanuel lifestyle habit behaviors that turn your relational circuits on and that facilitate connecting with the Lord.

It is not always simple or easy. And it takes persistent discipline over time. But the fruit is overwhelmingly worth it.

We invite you, we encourage you, and we implore you to join me in practicing the skills and building the habits of an Immanuel lifestyle.

May the Lord bless you richly,

Karl D. Lehman, M.D.
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