

Supplementary material, Chapter 35c: Memory-anchored Distortions, Hindrances, and Blockages

As just mentioned in the previous chapter, and as illustrated by many of the story examples throughout the book, distortions, hindrances, and blockages that are anchored in underlying traumatic memories are very common and very important. We *all* have them, they are *everywhere*, they are surprisingly difficult to spot, and they exert huge-but-sneaky negative effects on our relationships with God. In fact, these memory-anchored blockages are so common and so important that I have devoted this entire (long) chapter to discussing them at greater length.

As the reader will probably remember from Chapter 21 (pages 260-261), best learning results come from explanation of theory in combination with laboratory/experiential data. (The combination of explanation and experience together is *300%* more effective than either of these two pieces alone.) So I am going to try to give you this ideal combination of theoretical explanation and experiential data.

Theoretical explanation: The really short summary with respect to theory is that lots of distorted perceptions and emotions from unresolved painful experiences get transferred onto the Lord. Some aspect of your interactions with the Lord in the present stirs up an old memory of a painful experience with _____ (fill in the blank – your father/your grandfather/your uncle/your older brother/being separated from your parents/your pastor/images from a movie/your first grade home-room teacher/a babysitter/a playground monitor/your Jr High principle/your highschool soccer coach/an unkind health-care provider/your scout leader/a drill sergeant/an employer....etc, etc, etc, etc.) The “invisible” implicit memory content from the trauma quietly slides forward into the present, and your Verbal Logical Explainer (or VLE) quickly convinces you that your (distorted) negative thoughts and feelings are actually accurate and valid in the present, and that they are really about the Lord. As I’m sure you can see, finding and resolving these memory-anchored, distorted perceptions and emotions will improve your relationship with Immanuel.

Furthermore, other hindrances and blockages, such as persistent guilt and tenacious bitterness, can be anchored in underlying traumatic memories. Finding and resolving these memory-anchored hindrances and blockages will also contribute to improving your relationship with Immanuel.

That’s the *two paragraph* summary. For a *seventy page* version of this same theoretical framework, with a *lot* of supporting evidence to convince you that it’s valid, see the first six Chapters of *Outsmarting Yourself*.

Laboratory/experiential data: As just mentioned above, the second component of the ideal teaching/learning combination is “laboratory,” or experiential data. The most powerful way to provide this experiential data would be to set up a psychological-spiritual lab in which you could be triggered so that memory-anchored hindrances impair your relationship with God, and then get healing to resolve the underlying trauma and observe the corresponding benefits.

Unfortunately, this would be very difficult logistically, as well as messy and painful. The good news is that we can use true-story examples instead. Stories are not as powerful as the first hand experience you would obtain in my imagined psychological-spiritual lab, but they do get logged into our brains as right-hemisphere, experiential data, and they are less messy, less painful, and much easier to apply with respect to logistics.

Also, I want to convince you so deeply that you actually change your behavior – even with household chores that are never finished, overtime hours at work, and kids that need to get to soccer practice, I want you to be so convinced that you actually start to build ongoing healing into your lifestyle. And research regarding learning *and actual behavioral change* shows that in order to do this, I have to convince you much more thoroughly than you perceive to be necessary. Therefore, I will now commence saturation bombing, which will continue for the next thirty-five pages. I apologize in advance for giving you more than you think you need. Hopefully you will thank me later.

I. True-story/Case-study Examples:

A. God and my 18-month-old separation trauma (God, the parent that did not come or help when I called): As described earlier,¹ there were many distorted perceptions transferred onto God from my 18 month-old separation trauma, such as, “He won’t come,” “He won’t give me what I need,” and “I can’t trust His heart for me because there’s no excuse for allowing this.” These distorted perceptions would get triggered and feel true when I would call to God for help, but then not (quickly) receive the help I wanted. As also describe earlier, I was blessed with an initial healing breakthrough while in the triggering furnace of our car-repair nightmare, and since then I have been watching for and taking care of splinters. The good news is that these distorted perceptions regarding the Lord’s character and heart have steadily resolved as I have worked with the Lord to resolve the underlying trauma. And, again, this is the point of this whole series of stories.

The truth is that the Lord is *always* with me, and that He is especially with me when I’m in distress. And even though I was often not able to initially perceive His help, the truth is that the Lord has always cared for me when I called to Him. Now, as I have been resolving the underlying trauma, I have been more and more able to *feel* (and walk in) the truth that God is always with me and that he will be faithful in caring for me. In fact, I have been more and more able to *actually perceive* the Lord’s constant Immanuel presence and his faithfulness in caring for me.

B. God “loves” me and has a horrible plan for my life: I grew up in the turbulent 1960's in a church with a heavy emphasis on social-justice and radical discipleship. The zealous young

¹If you are using the material from this chapter as a stand-alone resource, see Chapter 16 (pages 171-174), Chapter 21 (pages 255-257), and Chapter 29 (pages 401-407) for the details regarding my eighteen-month-old separation trauma, and also for a description of the healing work to resolve these traumatic memories.

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. We were especially warned against the dangers and evils of materialism, and we were constantly challenged to take any measures necessary, no matter how drastic, to make sure that the money and comfort of middle class America did not become idols that were more important than God. To my young mind it felt like every other sermon was on "Take up your cross and follow me,"² and that the ones in between were distributed equally between "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off," "If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away," "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine," 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 and give the money to the poor. . . . Then come, follow me."³ Furthermore, I realized that our leaders were reading out of the Bible as they were preaching these sermons, and mostly from the parts that were red. They weren't just making this stuff up – most of the frightening, overwhelming material they were presenting was coming directly from the words of Jesus. Uh-oh. Not good!

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* the sacrifices that came with radical discipleship, 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. 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 remember thinking about what it would be like to gouge 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 and give the money to the poor. . . . Then come, follow me" passage. I had no idea where one went in response to the "Then come, 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.⁴

During this same time in my life, small-group fellowship meetings were often held in our

²Mark 8:34.

³Mark 9:43, Matt 18:9, Matt 10:37, Gen 22:1-19, and Luke 18:18-25, respectively.

⁴At first the whole scenario felt *totally* overwhelming—it seemed like the shame would be unbearable, and I was frightened by the prospect of slowly starving to death. I was somewhat relieved when I figured out that I could hide under people's porches during the day, to escape the embarrassment of everybody seeing me running around the neighborhood naked, and then I could come out at night and scavenge food from people's trash cans. **Consider deleting footnote to help story keep moving forward more smoothly**

living room, next to my bedroom. My bed was right by the door, and I often overheard what was being said as I lay in bed waiting to fall asleep. On a number of occasions, one person especially talked about how God had taken away her jobs, boyfriends, and other treasures so that she wouldn't have any idols – so that nothing would be before God in her life. When I think back on this, my perception is that she totally missed the dynamic of the request on God's part, she missed the appropriate place for free will in the equation, and she didn't talk as if she perceived God as her friend. That is, she did *not* seem to be saying, "I *want* to love God more than anything else, and I've been asking him to help me dismantle idolatry in my life. Even though it's been very painful, I'm *grateful* that he has removed the things I was wrongly 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.

Not surprisingly, I struggled with being afraid of God 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 for a greater good, I felt that God was pathologically insecure and controlling—I felt that he spent a lot of his time prowling around snatching things away from his children, demanding that we give up anything that might be precious to us in order to prove our "love," allegiance, submission, and obedience. Furthermore, I was afraid that if I lacked the courage and strength to *voluntarily* surrender my treasures, God would simply confiscate them in order to "keep my priorities straight."

For example, as I grew older I wanted very much to get married, so I feared that God would demand that I remain single in order to prevent me from loving *someone* 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 that God would take these treasured possessions to prevent me from loving *something* more than him; and doing well in school was very important to me, so I feared that God 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 important possessions, like my pocketknife and my pet turtle. My hope was that God would follow the focus of my attention, and erroneously conclude that the knife and the 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."

Somehow I got stuck in a fear-based place, and totally missed the foundation of love and relationship, from which I could have willingly and joyfully embraced a life of radical

discipleship. To my young mind, it seemed like God cared more about making sure I didn't have any idols than he actually cared about me. The saddest part of this story is that there were more than thirty years during which the unresolved traumatic content from these childhood experiences powerfully distorted what I perceived to be true about God's character and heart, and these distorted perceptions hindered my ability to perceive and connect with the Lord's living presence.

The good news is that Jesus helped Charlotte and I to find and resolve these traumatic memories. It all started with a client in crisis, and the clients' family making unreasonable, impossible demands. This was an intense, difficult situation, but instead of calmly, diplomatically explaining that their demands were unreasonable and impossible, I found myself painfully triggered into anxiety that just wouldn't go away. And even though I did not start out with any conscious awareness of my childhood church-trauma memories or any intention of working on distortions regarding the Lord's character and heart, as I focused on my anxiety about the unreasonable, impossible demands from my client's family, I eventually ended up in these childhood church memories about radical discipleship and idolatry. (I think you can probably see how "unreasonable, impossible demands producing intense anxiety" might be connected to a four year old child hearing, "...pluck out your eye," "...cut off your hand," and "sell all you have [and walk into the ally naked].")

I had always had conscious memories of these teachings and events from my childhood experiences with the church, but I had never before realized how they had been traumatic. However, as Charlotte and I prayed through them together, I suddenly recognized and felt how confusing, overwhelming, and terrifying these experiences had been. And then – here's the good part – as we asked the Lord for healing and truth, the toxic content suddenly resolved. The balanced, appropriate adult understanding of these teachings and events suddenly made sense and felt true, and the distorted, terrifying, traumatizing childhood perceptions suddenly ceased to feel true.

Now (ever since these memories have been resolved), my usual, spontaneous, baseline perception is that God is actually good, and that he is someone I would actually *want* to follow and want to be with.⁵

Short summary: 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 distorted perceptions were anchored in memories of

⁵I still believe that I should love the Lord with all my heart and all my mind and all my strength, and that I should love and obey the Lord before all else; but now it also feels true that I *choose* this and that the Lord is trying to bring me to this place in the most gentle way possible, as a loving Father. I realize that he might allow pain in this process, but only if it's the only possible way to accomplish a greater good. And even in the painful situations, I am a *willing* participant.

overhearing small group meetings and from age-inappropriate radical discipleship sermons, and they resolved when these traumatic memories were resolved.

C. Those who have been betrayed and abused by men (“Jesus will be like all the other men”): In addition to my own experiences with receiving dramatic Immanuel benefits as I have resolved memory-anchored hindrances, I have also observed many others receiving similar benefits as they have resolve memory-anchored hindrances. In fact, most of the recipients I have worked with have experienced dramatic, progressive benefits with respect to their God connections as they have persisted in resolving memory-anchored blockages.

For example, a number of these recipients had been betrayed and abused by men, and therefore had intense, memory-anchored fears about allowing Jesus to be more tangibly present in their lives because he is a man. (With one of these clients, whenever I would suggest anything that included perceiving Jesus’ tangible presence, she would get an immediate, spontaneous, involuntary wave of fear that he would molest her if she allowed him 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. You don’t have to be a board-certified psychiatrist to see how this would be a hindrance to their relationships with the Lord.

The good news is that this fearful resistance to allowing themselves to perceive God’s Immanuel presence has progressively subsided as they have persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

The details with respect to the healing process have actually been quite striking: 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. “Oh! Jesus is not my father! My father is over here (gesturing to her left side), and he’s yelling at me. But Jesus is over *there* (gesturing to her right side), and he’s helping.” Even though Jesus was a man, just like the perpetrator, 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 has collapsed *even though there were still many memories of being abused by men that were not yet resolved.*⁶

D. God, the parent that didn’t intervene when my brother was sitting on me: I don’t get messy or dangerous when I’m angry. In fact, I would say that I manage my anger very well. I don’t hurt people, I don’t threaten people, and I don’t yell at people – I don’t even raise my voice. I don’t smash things, I don’t drive recklessly, I don’t drink or use drugs, and I don’t kick the dog. But when I get triggered into memory-anchored anger my relational circuits go off, I am unpleasant to be around instead of being a source of joy, I swear at inanimate

⁶Having the positive experiences with Jesus, *inside* the man-trauma memories, seems to uncouple Jesus from the remaining man-trauma memories that are not yet resolved.

objects (part of being unpleasant to be around), and my discernment is impaired. Furthermore, my triggered anger really bothers Charlotte and it impairs my connection with the Lord – both of these last two pieces making it an especially important and strategic target for ongoing healing work. Therefore, I have been deliberately working to find and resolve the roots of my triggered anger for a number of years now.

The way I do this is that I watch for episodes of triggered anger, and when I'm experiencing one of these episodes I ask the Lord for guidance and help, I carefully observe my thoughts and feelings, and then I talk directly to the Lord about whatever I notice.⁷ When I pause to make these observations regarding my thoughts and feelings, I almost always notice painful thoughts and emotions associated with the anger. (Or maybe I should say that I almost always find painful thoughts and emotions *underneath* the anger.) I also almost always discover that at least part of my triggered anger is directed towards the Lord – for allowing the problem in the first place and/or for not protecting me in the middle of the problem and/or for not promptly rescuing me from the problem.

For example, during several recent episodes of triggered anger, I was eventually able to recognize that my anger was flaring up in response to a combination of painfully intense feelings of being thwarted and intensely unpleasant feelings of being helpless and powerless. I also noticed that part of my anger was definitely directed towards the Lord – for not rescuing me by quickly fixing the problem. And then, as I talked directly to the Lord about my pain and anger and continued asking for guidance and help, I noticed that I repeatedly had the thoughts (and even said, out loud), “I’m being *tormented*,” and “This *&%%\$# _____ (fill in the blank) is *tormenting* me!”

Now, I recognized this as interesting and odd, even in the midst of my anger, because I had the clear sense that the source of my pain was *consciously, knowingly, deliberately tormenting me*. However, the problems that were triggering me were things like malfunctioning accounting software that had wasted an hour of my time or a release mechanism that obstinately refused to let me open the hood of my own car. My VLE tried to appear a little less crazy by quickly transferring my anger from the actual software to the lazy, careless, incompetent programmers who had written it, and by quickly transferring my anger from the actual release mechanism to the blankety-blank-blank obsessive-compulsive German engineers that needed to make things so safe that I couldn’t open my own hood. But even when I was focusing my anger on the programmers and the engineers, it still seemed a little odd that I perceived them to be *consciously, knowingly, deliberately tormenting me*. Furthermore, as I continued to focus on my thoughts and feelings and to ask the Lord for guidance and help, the details of my anger towards the Lord also became more clear – I had

⁷It is actually quite easy for me to recognize triggered anger because *intense* anger is almost always triggered for me. Furthermore, I have learned to recognize a certain subjective feel that is always associated with my triggered anger. Therefore, all I have to do is watch for episodes of intense anger, and then take a moment to check for the familiar triggered-anger feeling.

the distinct impression that God knew I was being tormented, but that he was just sitting there – *not doing anything* – not *stopping them*, not *helping me* – not intervening or helping in any way. And this made me absolutely furious.

Finally, as I stayed with all of these pieces and kept asking God for guidance and help, a memory suddenly came into my awareness: I'm laying on my back on the floor of my bedroom, and my older brother is sitting on top of me with his knees pinning my arms to the ground. This episode had started like so many others – a mostly good-natured tussle over some minor issue. It had developed, like so many others, into a more serious wrestling match. And it had ended, like every single wrestling match I had ever gotten into with my older brother, with me pinned to the floor and him sitting on top of me. I would squirm and thrash with every trick and every bit of strength I had, but he was so much bigger than me that I never, ever, ever got out from under him. Even at this point in the process we were mostly still having fun – we might even both still be laughing. But then I would decide that I had had enough of this particular kind of fun and tell him to get off of me, while he thought it would be fun and funny to sit on me a little bit longer. Sometimes he would even add a little something extra, like pretending that he was going to let a big wad of spit drop onto my face.

Now, my older brother is actually a really nice guy, and he was even pretty decent as a kid. He never hit me hard enough to really hurt me, even when we were fighting, and most of the time he was one of my best friends. When I think back on these experiences of being pinned to floor, I realize that he didn't have any idea how it felt to always, always, always lose. I think it was probably more fun to always, always, always win. And he didn't know what it felt like to be pinned to the floor when it wasn't fun any more, but then not be able to do anything about it because this had *never* happened to him. All this to say that he wasn't being malicious, but rather that he had minimal mindsight with respect to how quickly my experience could go from being fun to feeling really bad.

So, back to being pinned to the floor. My brother would linger for another minute or two, thinking it was fun to enjoy the taste of victory just a little bit longer, and then suddenly I would be in a rage. One minute I was still thinking it was sort of fun to see if I could escape. The next minute I was tired of losing and being hopelessly pinned down *again* – this is when I would first tell him to get off of me. And then one minute later, while he was still savoring the taste of victory, I was furious that he hadn't immediately let me up.

At this point it would get even worse. He would be afraid to let me up because I was so angry (and because I was yelling threats in between my repeated demands that he get off of me immediately). So he would continue to sit on me while I would thrash and yell. The feeling of being totally restrained *against my will* was intensely unpleasant – I would feel utterly trapped, intensely, painfully thwarted, and absolutely powerless and helpless to do anything about it. There is an expression, "impotent rage" – the particularly intense anger that a person feels when someone is deliberately hurting them but they are totally powerless to do anything about it. That's where I would end up.

This, as you probably already realize, brings us to the odd piece that I had been noticing

during some of my episodes of triggered anger. Now, looking back on these memories, I can see that John would keep sitting on me because he truly didn't know what to do; but as a kid, my perception would be that he was *knowingly, consciously, deliberately tormenting me*. Furthermore, I was angry at my parents for failing to intervene. There were actually reasons for why they didn't realize what was happening, but from my child perspective I assumed that they knew I was being tormented, and it was unacceptable and infuriating that they just sat there *without doing anything* – without *stopping him* or *helping me*.

Eventually I would calm down. I think I could tell that John wasn't having fun any more – that he wanted to let me up, but was truly frightened regarding what I might do – and somehow this would enable things to shift so that I could calm down. And then he would finally let me up.

These experiences clearly contributed to my collection of childhood trauma, and when some situation in the present (such as an especially persistent software glitch or car repair problem) would cause me to feel stuck, thwarted, and powerless, it would trigger the toxic content from these memories. The perception that I was being deliberately tormented would get transferred onto the hapless initial source of difficulty, and the perception that the people in charge must have known and should have intervened would get transferred onto the Lord.

The good news is that I was able to sense the Lord's presence with me as I recalled and connected with these memories. I could perceive that Jesus was with me and *glad to be with me*, I somehow knew that he understood what I was experiencing, I could feel that he cared about my suffering, and these realities brought healing. Even though he didn't stop my brother or help me escape, the distorted perception that he was failing to intervene – that he was just sitting there watching while I was being tormented – no longer felt true. And this positive shift came forward into the triggered-anger situations in the present as well – it no longer felt true that Jesus was just sitting there watching, not doing anything, while I was being thwarted by faulty software and stubborn hood-release mechanisms.

E. Maggie, delivery trauma, and Jesus-the-mean-doctor: The *Maggie: Labor & Delivery Trauma* live ministry session provides another example from my work with others. When Maggie was nineteen years old and delivering her first baby, she went through much of her labor in the middle of the night, alone, in a delivery prep room in the hospital. The whole experience was totally new to her, and nobody explained what was happening or told her what to expect, so in addition to the intense pain of her increasing contractions she was also frightened and confused. Furthermore, Maggie's doctor provided only the absolutely necessary technical skills – he came in for a few minutes every two to three hours to check her progress, and he performed the actual delivery; but otherwise he provided no understanding, encouragement, sensitivity, or other resources that would have given her relief and eased her burden. He could have made her experience a lot easier, but he chose not to. Maggie's overall assessment is that her doctor was not just tired, but also mean and hard. The whole painful, frightening experience was more than she could successfully process, and was therefore traumatic.

As described in Chapter 21/23, Maggie had distorted perceptions of God's character and heart that were anchored in these traumatic memories. Whenever these memories would get triggered, the component of the ordeal that had to do with her doctor would get transferred onto the Lord. For example, at one point she was working with a client situation that was extremely difficult, and the painful intensity just kept going on and on and on (just like the long labor with her first delivery). Furthermore, she sensed God's presence and knew that he could intervene to give her relief and ease her burden, but this didn't happen (simulating the situation with her doctor). As the memories for her labor and delivery trauma were triggered and came forward as invisible implicit memory, the perceptions that were true about *her doctor, in the memory*, began to feel true about *the Lord, in the present*. Instead of being able to hold onto the truth that God is still good and loving, even though he did not intervene in the way she wished he would, it felt increasingly true that the Lord was deliberately withholding appropriate assistance *because he is mean and hard*.⁸

The good news, as always, is that these memory-anchored distortions can be resolved. Jesus helped us to uncover the underlying traumatic memories, and as Jesus worked with Maggie to resolve the trauma the distorted perceptions regarding the Lord's character and heart resolved as well. The initial, distorted perceptions were replaced with, "God is good and trustworthy" and "He's much smarter than I am, and he knows—he has a purpose for what he's doing."⁹

F. God, Dad, and the car trunk: This story begins with one of those particularly miserable moments in life. I had been working intermittently on an especially difficult essay for more than a year, and had already invested somewhere between fifty and one-hundred hours. When my laptop locked up and I had to reboot the system, I was upset, but thought I had only lost the work from the last hour or so since I had last saved the document. I immediately pulled up the original document, intending to figure out what had been lost and hoping to recapture much of the lost material while it was still relatively fresh in my memory. But there was nothing there. At first I was baffled, and then I was horrified. Not only had my computer failed to make an automatic backup of the material I had just been working on, it had also somehow replaced the original file with a blank document. (We still have no idea how this happened.) Blank. Nothing. Just the file name.

Writing is usually a slow and painful process for me, and this particular essay was one of my

⁸Maggie is a mature believer with a deep knowledge of the Bible, so her cognitive adult mind was (just barely) able to hold onto the truth that her subjective perceptions must be distorted and untrue. However, as the underlying trauma became increasingly triggered, "God is deliberately withholding appropriate assistance because he is mean and hard" *felt* more and more true.

⁹A special value with respect to this example is that the live session, along with a follow-up interview six months later, is available on DVD. (*Maggie: Labor & Delivery Trauma*, Live Ministry Series DVD #19, can be purchased from the "Store" page of www.immanuelapproach.com.)

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 been using for my fillings for the past thirty years, and that I therefore needed to have *all* of them replaced. This was a truth-based loss that would be upsetting by any standards, but I was also triggered. I was really triggered. I was really, *really* triggered. Even as I recognized the initial waves of intense triggering, I realized that this was a *wonderful*¹⁰ opportunity for me to get healing. But I was having difficulty “considering it pure joy...”¹¹ (I think I sat there for about 15 minutes, holding my head in my hands and swearing with intensity).

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 essay¹² 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 previously seemed important.

I was standing in the alley, behind our garage, watching my father as he was talking with a

¹⁰Feel free to imagine “*wonderful*” spoken with a variety of interesting voice tones and inflections.

¹¹“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3)

¹²Just 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.

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 surprises. 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.

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 had 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 bring the lid down. 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'm out of the way."

As all these pieces came forward I suddenly realized that my three-year-old mind had spontaneously connected God and Dad, assuming that whatever was true about God must also be true about Dad, *and vice versa*. 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. But 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 it also obviously incorporated a lie as my three-year-old mind concluded that

the same must also be true about God.

At the moment 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 felt something shift, and the erroneous perception regarding the Lord no longer felt 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 – it felt true 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. Prior to this healing, whenever this traumatic memory would get triggered I would have the distorted perception that God was *not able* to protect me. And when this trauma was resolved, this associated distorted perception resolved with it.

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 as a teaching example, I realized that something wasn’t completely peaceful and calm. When I focused on this lingering disquiet, 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 to write out this experience as a teaching example, 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.¹³

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.

Short summary: If the longer story is told elsewhere, can use this as a short summary: As described earlier, when I got my head slammed in a car trunk I lost my faith in God being omniscient and omnipotent. Whenever this memory got activated, it would feel true that God was not omniscient or omnipotent, and I wouldn't feel safe in his care. And these memory-anchored lies resolved when I resolved this traumatic memory.

Note: this story also provides another example of “accidental” discovery and resolution.

G. My first perception of Jesus' tangible presence: As you probably remember,¹⁴ the session in which I first perceived Jesus' tangible presence provides an excellent example of the way in which memory-anchored blockages can get in the way of connecting with Jesus, and of how resolving these hindrances can hugely bless our relationships with Jesus.

In the first part of the session, I went to the memory of an incident in which I lied because I was afraid of humiliation and rejection, I went to the memory of an incident in which I didn't

¹³If you are using material from this chapter as a stand alone resource, see Chapter 11 for an Immanuel Approach discussion of the question, “Why does God sometimes choose to allow bad things to happen, even when he is able to protect us?”

¹⁴If you are using material from this chapter as a stand alone resource, see chapter 29 (pages 396-400) for a description of this emotional healing work.

go to the aid of another kid on the playground because I was afraid of getting hurt, I went to the memories of 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, and I went to the memory of an incident in which I stole a piece of bubble gum because I didn't want to be taunted and rejected. The Lord then showed me that these incidents were all examples of turning away from his presence in my heart in order to protect myself, and he showed me that I needed to bring all of this to him so that I could be forgiven and get it out of the way. So I did, and thereby resolved all of these memory-anchored hindrances.

In the next part of the session, the Lord reminded me of a scheme that several of my "friends" had come up with to help me get rid of my conscience. I had agreed to "practice" breaking rules until my conscience stopped protesting, so that I could go along on their adventures without being tormented by guilt. My participation had been so unenthusiastic that the plan quickly petered out, but as I focused on these 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 this, and thereby resolved this memory-anchored hindrance.

There was still time left in the session, so I asked for more guidance, and the Lord then led me to memories of others stealing from me. As I remembered these many experiences of feeling powerless, vulnerable, and violated when people stole from me, angry thoughts welled up inside of me and I realized that I still had judgments and bitterness toward these people. So I prayed to confess, renounce, and release judgments and bitterness, and thereby resolved these memory-anchored hindrances.

As you probably remember from Chapter 29, I was then able to perceive Jesus as a tangible, personal, attuning presence for the first time in my life. Furthermore, I didn't even have to guess with respect to possible connections between resolving these memory-anchored hindrances and finally experiencing the Lord's tangible presence – Jesus directly, explicitly showed me that these blockages in my heart and mind and spirit had been in the way of being able to perceive his presence. Jesus showed me that he had always been with me (for the first time in my life, this actually *felt* true); and he showed me how this pile of blockages, *most of which were memory-anchored*, had previously prevented me from seeing this truth.

Note that these issues were not memory-anchored *distorted perceptions* about God's character and heart, but that they were definitely memory-anchored *hindrances* to perceiving the Lord's presence and connecting with him. Also, even though these hindrances weren't distorted perceptions caused by implicit memory being transferred onto the Lord, and therefore weren't resolved by simply resolving the traumatic implicit memory content, the traumatic content in the anchoring memories still had to be resolved before the associated issues could be resolved.¹⁵

¹⁵Actually, issues associated with specific memories can *occasionally* be resolved *even when the trauma in the anchoring memories has not yet been healed*. However, it is much, much easier to resolve associated issues when the trauma in the anchoring memories is resolved first.

II. It's not so obvious in real life: I want to pause at this point in my large collection of true-story examples to make a really important point: *these trauma-anchored distorted perceptions and hindering issues are not so obvious in real life.*

In my experience, these phenomena are easy for us to see *after* the underlying traumas have been healed and the blockages have been resolved. However, *prior* to finding and healing the underlying traumatic memories, it is amazingly difficult for us to see these memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues.¹⁶ Prior to healing and resolution, the distorted perceptions that are still anchored in underlying trauma just feel true, and our VLEs do an amazing job of convincing us that our memory-anchored hindrances, blockages, and distorted perceptions are somehow reasonable. Furthermore, when we don't understand these phenomena or know what to do with them, we just try to ignore them and move on with life as best we can. And I'm sure these difficulties are real because I have personally experienced both of them: prior to resolving the memory anchors presented in these examples, *whenever I was actually triggered* the memory anchored distorted perceptions just felt totally true and reasonable; and prior to developing our current Immanuel Approach principles and tools, I didn't understand or know what to do with these episodes during which distorted, negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart felt intensely true, so I just tried to ignore them and move on with life as best I could.

While I was still *inside* the triggering, I was *not* thinking: 'Wow! Something is really wrong here! What's this about? What's causing me to have such distorted perceptions and feelings regarding God? I better get help to fix this!' No. Rather, when I was still in the middle of an episode of being triggered, the distorted, memory-anchored content just felt true. If I had any thoughts about the bigger picture at all, I was trying to figure out how to manage life when I was supposed to somehow trust and love a God who seemed to be scary and crazy and deficient in so many ways.

And then, after an episode of triggering was over and the distorted thoughts and emotions had calmed down, I just wanted to move on and not think about it. I would sometimes review some truth-based reference points to reassure myself that my adult, non-triggered perspective was accurate, but I did not understand what the distorted content was or where it came from. The distorted perceptions regarding God's character and heart were troubling and confusing, but once the triggering calmed back down the distorted perceptions would no longer feel true. My best attempt at making sense out of these painful episodes was something along the lines of, "I think and feel all kinds of crazy stuff when I'm upset – it's just crazy." I didn't understand these troubling episodes of upset or know what to do about them, but the good news was that after the immediate upset had calmed back down, the underlying problem (whatever it was) didn't seem to cause ongoing trouble. So why think about it? I was just grateful that the troubling negative perceptions were gone, and happy to move on to focus on something more pleasant and

¹⁶These phenomena are also easy to see when they are presented as teaching examples (from someone else's life) in which distracting, unrelated details are removed, the important points are emphasized, and then explanation is given regarding how the pieces are connected and how the whole picture fits together.

constructive.

Furthermore, as soon as I was feeling better, the memories for what it really felt like to be inside one of these miserable episodes of being triggered would quickly fade. Having a particularly nasty viral flu provides a good analogy: while I'm in the middle of it, it feels intensely horrible and very important. However, two days after I have recovered I don't really *feel* the memories of how horrible it was, and I don't really think about it. What's the point? I just move on with life.

My fear-based relationship with the Lord provides a good example. A number of the memory-anchored distortions that I carried would mix together to create a picture of God that was quite scary, and to the extent that these distortions were triggered forward my relationship with God would be fear-based. This was a really difficult way to be a Christian, but I didn't perceive any other options. (Again, when the distorted perceptions were triggered forward, they just seemed true.) So I was just trying to make the best of it. God had all the power and he was going to cast me into eternal darkness if I didn't cooperate with his system. Eternal darkness didn't sound like much fun to me, so I focused all my energy on trying to cooperate. And, by the way, the Bible seems to teach that we're supposed to love the Lord and trust the Lord, so part of my job was to try to love and trust God in spite of all of these memory-anchored distorted perceptions and beliefs. The mental gymnastics I engaged in as I tried to love and trust this distorted version of God would be funny if they weren't so sad. And when the distorted perceptions were *not* stirred up, and therefore not causing any trouble at the moment, I thought about the whole mess as little as possible. (There was nothing I could do about it, so focusing on this scary, confusing tangle just seemed counterproductive.)

As I developed the Immanuel Approach principles and tools so that I understood these phenomena and knew what to do about them, and as these particular underlying traumas were resolved so that my relationship with the Lord became less and less fear-based, I was increasingly able to recognize, "WOW! I used to have a profoundly distorted, dysfunctional perception of God's character and heart. I'm so glad I resolved those distortions. It is SO important and wonderful that I now have a primarily joy-based relationship with the Lord!" But at the front end, I had almost no awareness that many of my perceptions about God's character and heart were distorted and coming from trauma. The distorted perceptions would slide forward as invisible implicit memory, they would feel intensely, compellingly true, and my VLE would convince me that they were reasonable in light of the brokenness in the world and in light of certain scary and/or confusing passages in the Bible.¹⁷ Furthermore, I had minimal conscious awareness regarding the many ways in which the God I believed in was actually toxic and crazy. As just mentioned above, I perceived that there was nothing I could do about this whole scary, confusing picture. Being aware of it just made me feel bad, so I not only tried to avoid thinking

¹⁷The Bible is pretty big and complicated, with many specific verses that can be confusing and frightening unless carefully understood in the context of the whole body of scripture. My VLE didn't have much trouble finding proof-text verses to support my confusing, fear-based, distorted perceptions of God's character and heart.

about it, I tried to avoid even being consciously aware of it.¹⁸

With respect to traumatic memories and triggers in general, it is usually easy for others to spot our triggered reactions (even when we are blind to them ourselves). However, with memory-anchored hindrances to our relationships with the Lord, even outside observers often have difficulty spotting them. This was certainly the case for me – my crazy, toxic, distorted perceptions about God’s character and heart were *not* obvious to the average outside observer. I was not an angry atheist, carrying a sign that said, “God doesn’t exist and I hate him.” I wasn’t talking to the general public about how the Bible and Christianity sometimes felt crazy and confusing and toxic.¹⁹ I wasn’t abusing substances, I wasn’t breaking the law, and I wasn’t struggling in school or on the job. Rather, I was trying to be the best Christian I could be, in spite of the confusing tangle of distorted perceptions that I tried not to think about: I went to church every Sunday; I read the Bible, cover-to-cover (*even including Leviticus and Numbers*), multiple times; I taught Sunday school and led Bible studies; I gave ten percent to the church, and contributed to many other charitable organizations in addition to my tithe; I volunteered to help disabled shut-ins; I was part of a program that visited men in prison; I picked up litter and separated recyclables from the rest of my trash; I got A’s in all my classes; I was always a responsible employee; I paid my bills on time and didn’t cheat on my taxes; I was kind to children and animals; I was faithful to my wife; I didn’t steal, bear false witness, or break any of the other commandments;²⁰ and I even took out the garbage and washed the dishes.

It seems hard to believe that I could lead a life of consistent Christian discipleship – that looked good from the outside and that I perceived to be genuine from the inside – while carrying this huge pile of memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues. Nevertheless, these memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues, that profoundly undermined my actual connection with the Lord, were *real and powerful* as well as *amazingly invisible*.

The point here is that I don’t want you to be thinking that these memory-anchored hindrances are like elephants, crocodiles, lions, moose, and grizzly bears that are huge, dramatic, easy to spot, rare, and mostly encountered by somebody else in an exotic location far, far away: “Wow! Look over there! That 3,000 pound bull moose sure is easy to spot!” Or, “Hey! Look at that huge, dramatic, rare grizzly bear – we came all the way to Alaska just to see it.” Or, “I read this story about a missionary far, far away in the wilds of Africa – when he rode his bicycle to the farmers

¹⁸Also, letting myself be aware of the reality that I often perceived God to be crazy, scary, and bad would definitely get in the way of trying to love and trust him.

¹⁹If you were in the very small circle of my closest friends, and had heard me sharing about the confusing, frightening perceptions that sometimes felt true regarding the Lord, it would have been easy for you to see that I had seriously distorted perceptions regarding God’s character and heart. But no one else would have been aware of this.

²⁰Except for stealing the one five-cent piece of cherry bubble gum – both the beginning and end of my career as a shoplifter. (If you are using material from this chapter as a stand alone resource, see chapter 28 (page 374) for a description of this incident.

market, he had to watch out for elephants and crocodiles and lions!” With this mistaken understanding, you might respond internally with something like, “Dr. Lehman’s examples are sure dramatic and obvious. I’m glad that Immanuel Approach healing can resolve this kind of problem for Dr. Lehman and those other people who run into the big, dramatic memory-anchored blockages.” Or maybe even, “I had one of those dramatic memory-anchored distortions – once, many years ago. I’m sure glad I don’t need any of that healing work any more.”

Please don’t make this mistake. Most of the memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues that undermine your connection with the Lord will be more like the dogs and cats and squirrels and mice and house sparrows that commonly run around the neighborhood you live in – they are all over the place, they don’t seem special or important, and instead of spotting them from a half-mile away you can walk right by them with hardly even noticing them.

I’m convinced that EVERYONE has implicit content anchored in unresolved memories that hinders their connection with God.²¹ Furthermore, I’m convinced that we all underestimate this phenomena.

In my experience, **the best way to find and resolve these sneaky, easy to miss, ubiquitous distortions and hindering issues is to embrace a lifestyle of 1) watching for triggering in your life; and 2) making space for regular Immanuel Approach healing work to address the triggers that you notice.** Find ways – *Make* ways – to get regular Immanuel Approach healing.²²

And now, let us return to the large pile of true-story examples. (Resume saturation bombing.)

III. More true story examples:

H. God, the absent playground monitor: Throughout my grade school experience, there was frequent bullying and constant scary behavior on the playground. I have many, many memories of either experiencing or watching verbal abuse and/or emotional abuse and/or physical abuse. On one occasion I even witnessed one of my friends being sexually abused, *in the middle of the playground, in the middle of the day.* Whoever was supposed to be keeping

²¹Of course EVERYONE means everyone *but you* – all of your family are included, all of your friends are included, and everyone else in the room is include, but by some mysterious exemption clause, everyone does not include you (humor intended).

²²If you are using material from this chapter as a stand alone resource, it is important to realize that there are other pieces that should be included in a full Immanuel Approach lifestyle, such as learning to recognize when your relational circuits are off and taking responsibility for getting them back on, so that you can spend more and more of your time in a place from which it is easier to connect with Jesus. See Chapter 35b/38 for additional discussion of the Immanuel Approach lifestyle.

the playground safe was definitely not doing their job. And just as with many of my other childhood traumatic memories, the aspect of the trauma having to do with “The people in charge aren’t providing adequate protection” has gotten transferred onto God. For many years, whenever I experienced or witnessed threatening or bullying behavior, the toxic content from these memories would get activated and my distorted negative perception would be something along the lines of, “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 people from being terrorized by ‘bullies.’”

The good news is that these distorted perceptions regarding God’s character and heart have been steadily resolving as I have been working through this pile of underlying grade school playground-trauma memories.

I. Those who have been wrongly judged, blamed, and punished by authority figures

(“Jesus is gonna do the same thing”): Another example from my work with others comes from those who have been wrongly judged, blamed, and punished by people in authority. These recipients describe being traumatized by authority figures who judged and blamed and punished them whenever *anything* went wrong – no matter what the problem was, no matter who was really responsible (usually actually *not* the recipients, who had almost always been children at the time), these people were always judged and blamed and punished. The parent (or other authority figure) did *not* join them in a safe, relational way, the parent/authority did *not* explore the situation by asking non-judgmental, non-accusing questions about what had happened, and the parent/authority did *not* collaborate with them to find a satisfying solution for the problem. No. Rather, they would *always*, immediately be judged, blamed, and punished.

So, whenever a traumatic memory would come forward and I would suggest that we invite Jesus into the memory, their immediate, involuntary, implicit-memory response would be, “No! That will just make it worse!” Since the traumatic experiences in their memories always included *something* going wrong – some problem for which they could be judged and blamed and punished – these people had intense, memory-anchored fears about allowing God (the ultimate authority figure) into any of their traumatic memories. “There’s a problem here – if I let Jesus come into this place, he will just judge and blame and punish me!” These recipients had child places in their hearts that were afraid Jesus would judge and blame and punish them just as most of the other important authority figures in their lives had judged and blamed and punished them.

The good news is that this fearful resistance to inviting God’s Immanuel presence into their traumatic memories has progressively subsided as they persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

And, again, the details with respect to the healing process have been quite striking: 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. “Oh! Jesus is not my mother! My mother is over here

(gesturing to her left side), and she's blaming me. But Jesus is right beside me on *this* side (gesturing to her right side), and he feels unconditionally loving." Jesus definitely had authority, just like the perpetrator, but she could immediately see *and feel* that Jesus was good, safe, and on her side. Furthermore, we have seen the same pattern of rapid collapse as was described earlier with respect to man-trauma memories – as these *positive experiences with Jesus* have accumulated, the transference of authority-trauma onto Jesus has collapsed *even though there were still many memories of being wrongly judged and blamed and punished by authority figures that were not yet resolved.*²³

J. God, the absent highschool gym teacher: When I was in highschool, one of the gym teachers would just throw out a couple of soccer balls and then disappear into his office until the end of the period. And while I was still a short, skinny freshman, some of the bigger kids thought it was fun to have target practice by making me the "goalie," and then playing what I think of as soccer dodge ball. (The objective was to hit me, as opposed to get the ball past me.) If you can remember big kids *throwing a dodge ball* hard enough to be scary, think about what it would have been like with the big kids *kicking a soccer ball*. And instead of two equal teams throwing the ball back and forth at each other, with this form of soccer dodge ball you're the only kid on your team, the ball only goes one direction (toward you), and all of the big kids are on the other team.

Just as with so many of my childhood traumatic memories, these memories had a "the people in charge aren't providing adequate protection" component. For many years, whenever I felt unable to protect myself from people who were being mean to me, the toxic content from these memories would get activated and this particular component would get transferred onto the Lord. My distorted negative perception would be something along the lines of, "God isn't doing his job – he's sitting in his office reading *Sports Illustrated* and catching up on his paper work when he should be protecting me from big, mean people."

Yet again, *the good news* is that these negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart have steadily resolved as I have worked through this pile of highschool gym-class-trauma memories.

K. God, the well-meaning but misdirected, powerless, and incompetent grown-up: When I was a child, it seemed that the adult establishment in general was well-meaning but misdirected, powerless, and incompetent. They were constantly having meetings to talk about all of the problems, but I could never perceive any actual benefits from their many long meetings. They would talk to me about loving my enemies, but they didn't provide any real help regarding my experience of feeling physically unsafe every single day, both on the playground and in our neighborhood. School staff might have a meeting with the parents of a bully, but they didn't protect the identities of the children making the complaints. The bully

²³Just as with man-trauma memories, having the positive experiences with Jesus, *inside* the authority-trauma memories, seems to uncouple Jesus from the remaining authority-trauma memories that are not yet resolved.

would receive no meaningful consequences, whereas the children making the complaints would be severely punished the next time they were alone with the bully on the playground. When various of my possessions were stolen, the teachers and security guards would fill out reports, but they never, ever found and returned the items that were stolen. When I became distressed about larger problems in the world, the grown ups told me to write letters to our congressmen, but I never observed any benefit as a result. And, finally, my parents and the grown ups in our church encouraged me to pray about any and every problem I might encounter. I spent a lot of time praying, but usually could not perceive any tangible benefit.

By this point in my long list of examples, it probably won't surprise you to hear that "The people in charge aren't providing adequate protection or help" aspect of the trauma has gotten transferred onto God. For many years, whenever I would pray about something but then not receive anything that I could recognize as adequate help, the toxic content from these memories would get activated and distorted negative perceptions about the Lord would feel true. "God means well, but he's misdirected, powerless, and incompetent. He says a lot of nice things in the Bible, and he makes a lot of nice promises, but he doesn't actually do anything that makes a real difference."

As always, the *good news* is that these negative distorted perceptions have steadily resolved as I have worked through the underlying traumatic memories.

L. More blockages from my 18 month-old separation trauma ("Jesus, go jump off a cliff!"): As described earlier,²⁴ part of the breakthrough regarding my eighteen-month-old separation trauma was my becoming convinced that *I* must be doing something that was getting in the way of being able to perceive the Lord's presence, connect with him, and receive his help. As also described earlier, I was eventually able to pray, "What am *I* doing that's hindering me from perceiving your presence and connecting with you? What choice do *I* need to make to take the next step forward?" And I was able to offer this prayer *with the internal agreement of the child place from inside the memories*, as opposed to just praying this from my adult, cognitive mind.

The moment these words were out of my mouth, I felt like I was inside the eighteen-month-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!*"

²⁴If you are using material from this chapter as a stand-alone resource, see Chapter 29 (pages 401-407) for a more complete description of these events.

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. It is sobering to realize that this memory-anchored stuck place had seriously hindered my ability to connect with the Lord for *forty years*.

The *good news* is that a number of new factors enabled me to finally 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 might be expected, my ability to perceive and connect with God improved dramatically when this child place in my heart began to welcome Jesus' presence instead of swearing at him and pushing him away.²⁵

Short summary "Go jump off a cliff": As described earlier, in association with my 18 month-old separation trauma, I had gotten 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 – it is sobering to realize that this memory-anchored stuck place seriously hindered my ability to connect with the Lord *for forty years*. As also described earlier, my ability to perceive and connect with God improved dramatically when this child place in my heart began to welcome Jesus' presence instead of swearing at him and pushing him away.

M. 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. As one might expect, all of this got transferred onto God, especially regarding prayer. When I would pray and not perceive adequate answers, the distortions anchored in these memories would get activated and feel true. In addition to my distorted perceptions about God being well-intentioned but misdirected, powerless, and incompetent, it would also feel true that God made lots of promises about prayer but then didn't do so well with fulfilling his promises. And it would feel true that God would then make excuses and blame everybody else: "Your prayer didn't get answered because you didn't have enough faith," "Your prayer didn't get answered because you didn't pray according to God's will," "Your prayer didn't get answered because you are hiding persistent sin," etc.

Blah, blah, blah. *Whatever!* (Spoken with exasperation, weariness, disgust, and rolling my eyes). All I knew was that I expected to get disappointed and then blamed when I asked for help from God.

The *good news* is that these negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart have been steadily resolving as I have been working through my childhood memories of adults

²⁵Note that this is another example of a memory-anchored *hindrance* to perceiving the Lord's presence and connecting with him that is *not* a memory-anchored *distorted perception about God's character and heart*.

who did not fulfill promises. I have also noticed another interesting change associated with these same traumatic memories: *before* healing these memories, explanations for why many prayers don't seem to be answered just felt like excuses. In contrast, as I have been resolving these memories, the *exact same explanations* have felt more and more adequate and satisfying. Another way to say this is that it has been getting easier and easier to trust God with prayer that appears to go unanswered.

N. Jesus, the drugged-out hippie: Living in Chicago and watching TV in the 1960's I saw lots of drugged out hippies, and they became associated with Jesus in my child mind because they often quoted Jesus, they constantly talked about love, they often talked about the same social justice issues that were discussed in our church, and many of them even looked a lot like Jesus. However, I was not impressed by their ability to actually fix the world. They seemed to spend a lot of their time sitting around smoking marijuana, they often looked and sounded dopy ("Oh, wow – yeah man. Groovy!"), their proposed solutions sounded nice but seemed unrealistic ("Make love not war!"), and their observable activities looked nice but seemed ineffective (holding protest signs and handing out flowers). Furthermore, my assessment was that most of these hippies were unemployed – they seemed to expect that someone else would pay the bills and do the hard work of actually running the world.

As already mentioned, these well-intentioned but drugged-out, unrealistic hippies became associated with Jesus in my childhood mind, and this was subtly traumatic because it contributed to my hopeless despair regarding the overwhelming problems that seemed to fill the world. For many years, whenever I would feel overwhelmed and discouraged regarding the many problems in the world, these memory associations would get activated and contribute to my distorted, negative perceptions. It would feel true that Jesus was well intentioned, but also brain-impaired and unrealistic – like he'd been hanging out with his hippie friends and smoking too much weed. "Oh, wow, man. If the middle-class people would just give everything they have to the poor, 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.

The *good news* is that these negative perceptions regarding Jesus have resolved as I have worked through my childhood memories of associating Jesus with drugged out hippies. In fact, many of my perceptions regarding Jesus now come from watching him work in Immanuel sessions – he's AMAZING! It's like watching Michael Jordan play basketball! He's clever, wise, elegant, high capacity, insightful, incredibly well-informed, compassionate, and attuning. He can be fun and funny.²⁶ His relational circuits are always on,

²⁶Remember the story about Jesus using sign language? (See Chapter 28, page 391.) He has a great sense of humor.

he has an absolute mastery of scripture, and his mindsight is incredible.²⁷ As I watch Jesus work in Immanuel sessions, I often have the spontaneous thought: “He’s the most brilliant therapist, pastor, mentor, and spiritual director I have ever seen!”

O. Jesus, the angry activist: Angry activists provided yet another source of trauma during 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 non-relational, they often seemed to blame everything on middle-class Americans, and no matter what we were already doing and already giving, they never seemed to be satisfied – no matter what we were already doing and already giving, they would always demand more. Furthermore, they would often be holding a bible and quoting Jesus as part of their accusations and demands:

“Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home....I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’”²⁸

There was even a movie of the life of Jesus in which he was portrayed as one of these angry activists – he always seemed to be angry, and it seemed like he spent most of his time stomping around Palestine judging and rebuking people.²⁹

Just as with the radical discipleship challenges from the zealous young leaders of our church, this content may have been appropriate for adults. However, it was definitely toxic to me as a small child. (Even for adults, it would have been much better if they could have brought this message without the angry, non-relational judgements, accusations, and demands.)

I’m sure it won’t surprise the reader to hear that this toxic content has gotten transferred onto God, since these folks were explicitly claiming to represent the Lord as they read the *words of Jesus* from the *Bible*. For many years, whenever I would read or hear a certain kind of angry, activist message, these memories would get triggered and negative, distorted perceptions about God’s character and heart would come forward. It would feel true that God was angry and non-relational; it would feel true that he was blaming me for all of the problems in the world because I was a white middle-class American; it would feel true that God was never

²⁷Remember all those stories about how Jesus would know what people were thinking, how he would know what was in people’s hearts, and how he would know people better than they knew themselves? (See, for example, Matt 12:15, Matt 12:25, Mark 8:17, Luke 5:22, Luke 6:8, Luke 7:39-40, John 1:47-48, John 2:23-25, John 6:61-64, John 13:11, and John 13:38.) From what I observe in the sessions I facilitate, it seems that he still has these abilities.

²⁸Matt 25:41-45.

²⁹*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Directed by Pier Pasolini. 1964.

satisfied, no matter what I was doing or how much I was giving; and it would feel true that God was always demanding more.

Once again, the *good news* is that these negative, distorted perceptions regarding God's character and heart have been resolving as I have been working with the Lord to heal the underlying memories.

P. God, the gym teacher that never enforced justice: My grade school gym teacher also made contributions to the pile of trauma that has gotten transferred onto God. This particular gym teacher utterly failed to fulfill his responsibility for establishing gym-class justice. For starters, he didn't do anything about the kids that would repeatedly cut in line. Certain kids got to bat five times while other kids never got to the plate. And these same kids that cut in line would also cheat in many other ways. It was hard to tell whether he wasn't paying attention, whether he didn't care, or whether he wasn't willing to do the hard work of dealing with the difficult kids, but the bottom line was that he never did anything about the chronic, pervasive cheating. *Ever*. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year.

As with so many of my other traumatic childhood experiences, the aspect of the trauma having to do with "the people in charge aren't providing adequate protection or help" has gotten transferred onto God. For many years, whenever I would encounter injustice, the toxic content from these memories would get activated and distorted negative perceptions about the Lord would feel true. I knew what I was supposed to believe with respect to God eventually making all things right, but what *felt* true was that there would *never* be justice. I couldn't tell whether God just wasn't paying attention, whether he didn't care, or whether he wasn't willing to do the hard work of dealing with difficult perpetrators, but the bottom line was that it felt like God would never do anything about injustice. *Ever*.³⁰ In fact, I often struggled with bitterness and hopelessness regarding injustices – I had trouble trusting justice to the Lord, and then just letting the injustices go and forgiving, because I didn't believe that God would *ever* administer justice.

And, yet again, the *good news* is that these negative, distorted perceptions regarding the Lord have steadily lost power as I have worked away at the underlying memories.

Q. God and lots of other injustice: I also had many other childhood experiences of injustices that were never put right. 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

³⁰Just in case you didn't notice, my thoughts and feelings towards God were exactly the same as my thoughts and feelings towards this gym teacher. ****Omit? Unnecessary?****

or lab team and then not do their share of the work, and these slackers (or maybe “academic parasites” would be a better name) were never caught or disciplined. It just seemed to go on and on and on. The slackers, parasites, crooks, bullies, vandals, thieves, and cheaters just seemed to get away with it.

Just as with the gym teacher memories, the aspect of these traumas having to do with “the people in charge aren’t providing adequate protection or help” has gotten transferred onto God. Whenever I would encounter injustice, the toxic content from these memories would get activated and distorted negative perceptions about the Lord would feel true. Again, I knew what I was *supposed* to believe with respect to God eventually making all things right – after all, God claims to be a God of justice, and justice is supposed to be part of the foundation for his throne³¹ – but what *felt* true was that God would never actually enforce justice. *Ever*.

Fortunately, God’s healing power once again proves stronger than the brokenness in the world. As I have been getting healing for this memory-anchored hopelessness that justice will never come, it has been easier and easier to trust that God will ultimately care for justice. As I get healing for the childhood memories of injustices that were never addressed, it’s getting easier and easier for me to trust that God actually is a God of justice, and that he will take care of the injustices against me so that I can let them go.³²

IV. Lack of capacity – another factor contributing to these distortions being so hard to see:

At this point I’d like to take a break from our long list of true-story examples to talk about how lack of capacity contributes to these memory-anchored distortions being so hard to see in real life.

Let me start with a strange, funny, sad story. A number of years ago a young mother came to one

³¹Psalm 89:14

³²I realize that there are/were certainly much greater injustices in the world, but the implicit memory content that would come forward onto God was from my *personal* childhood traumatic memories. And my disproportionate focus on injustices against myself is typical for child maturity. I wasn’t personally traumatized as a child by the HUGE injustices of slavery or human trafficking or sweatshops in Asia. But I *was* personally traumatized by petty theft, bullying, and vandalism. I did feel personally traumatized by corrupt politicians and businessmen that were not just destroying nature, but doing it in ways that were illegal and that I felt utterly powerless to stop. And I did have personal painful experiences with the academic parasites in my science classes. Note also that this observation regarding the injustices that would most easily upset me is yet another clue that my reactions were really triggered responses, coming from my kid memories, as opposed to just being normal adult responses to injustice in the present.

****necessary? Omit?***

of my colleagues, with a puzzled expression on her face and asking for advice.

“The strangest thing happened to me the other day. I walked into the bathroom and discovered my six year old daughter in the process of cutting her own hair. She’s looking in the mirror, she’s holding a scissors in her right hand, there’s a lock of freshly cut hair on the floor at her feet, and there’s a big chop out of her bangs. I was startled, and popped out with ‘What are you doing! Why are you cutting your hair?’ And, to my amazement, she responded immediately with, ‘I’m not cutting my hair.’ I said, ‘You still have the scissors in your hand!’ She whipped the scissors behind her back, and replied, ‘No I don’t.’ Further astonished by this second unexpected turn of events, I observed, ‘That’s a bunch of your hair, on the floor right there in front of you.’ My daughter quickly covered the offending lock of hair with her foot, and responded, ‘No it isn’t.’ Finally, I pointed out, ‘But there’s a big chop out of your bangs, right there – look in the mirror.’ And immediately covering the missing patch of hair with her left hand, she offered a final, bizarre denial, ‘No there isn’t.’

I was a little bit offended – I mean, how stupid does she think I am? But mostly I was baffled. She’s usually very truthful, and this whole episode just mystifies me. What on earth is going on here?”

The answer, of course, is “lack of capacity.” Somehow, in the moment of being surprised, this child perceived that she was being caught in the act of doing something wrong, and her instantaneous, involuntary, non-conscious assessment was that the shame, parental displeasure, and punishment would be unbearable if she acknowledged what she had just done. When a person simply doesn’t have the capacity to deal with a certain aspect of reality, she will immediately, unconsciously, reflexively look away from that reality. And if you try to press her to face the reality she can’t handle, she will engage in denial, even to the point of the kind of bizarre behavior just described (especially if she is a kid).

In my experiences with the distorted perceptions regarding the Lord that I describe in these true-story examples, many of them were just too scary and/or hopeless. It was overwhelming to really see them and to recognize the implications.

For example, my childhood perception was that I needed to cooperate with God’s plan, obey his rules, and submit to his authority or I would be cast into the fires of hell for eternity. I mean, that’s the *ultimate* scary. Compared to getting thrown into hell for *eternity*, getting beaten up by bullies was a piece of cake. And part of the plan I was supposed to cooperate with – part of the rule package I was supposed to obey – was to believe that God is loving and good. Unfortunately, to the extent that these memory-anchored distorted perceptions were triggered forward, it would seem like God was oppressive, disappointing, unpredictable, crazy, frightening, and, . . . well, . . . BAD. Uh oh! Uh oh! Danger! Danger! I knew that this was definitely the *wrong* answer. In addition to making it very difficult to believe that God was loving and good, I was pretty sure that perceiving God to be oppressive, crazy, frightening, disappointing, unpredictable and bad was incompatible with “trusting him for salvation” and other stuff like that – stuff that I knew was necessary to stay out of hell. So I developed a whole variety of mind games to avoid seeing/knowing/acknowledging that there was a part of me that believed all the wrong things

about God.

And this wasn't the only crazy-making, impossible, terrifying, hopeless problem. For example, I believed I was supposed to give everything I had to the poor and take care of the least of these, but that I was also supposed to be a good steward of everything I'd been given. On the one hand, if I held anything back, and thereby didn't provide food and clothes and shelter for one of the least of these – into the eternal fires of hell for me, along with the rest of the goats.³³ On the other hand, if the master came back and discovered that I had taken the resources he left me with and given them all away – off I would go, into the outer darkness, along with the miserable servant who buried his talent. (I mean, that guy just buried his talent, and could at least return the initial investment. Jesus' story didn't even include a servant who would have had to say, "I'm sorry sir, it's gone. I took the money you entrusted to me and gave it all away." Wow! He would have *really* been in trouble!)"³⁴

As a child, I couldn't understand the complexity and the contextual factors that would allow these two apparently opposite pieces to fit together, and my distorted perceptions regarding God's character and heart made it seem possible that he might indeed perpetrate this kind of craziness. To the extent that I ever let myself see or recognize or acknowledge how these pieces seemed impossibly incompatible, it just seemed terrifying and overwhelming. "It's hopeless – I'm doomed!" So I just tried to focus on the positive stuff as much as possible, and to avoid thinking about (or even really seeing) the crazy, inconsistent, terrifying, hopeless stuff.

Furthermore, in addition to these particularly crazy-making, impossible, terrifying, hopeless problems, there were also many smaller aspects of my distorted perceptions and beliefs that would pile together, and in combination lead to implications that were too painful, frightening, and overwhelming to really see or acknowledge. For example, "I can't really trust God to take care of me because he's not paying attention," "God means well, but he's not really competent or realistic," "God won't come when I need him and call for his help," and "God allows bad things to happen that are way beyond my capacity" would all pile together and lead to the implication: "I'm on my own, and the world is way too big, way too scary, and way too evil for me to be able to handle it. Unbearably bad things will happen, and there's nothing I can do about it. *I'm doomed!*"

My guess is that a lot of believers have child places in their hearts that carry memory-anchored distorted perceptions about the Lord, but that they hide this from themselves because the implications feel too scary and/or overwhelming and/or hopeless.

The good news is that as we experience an interactive connection with the actual, living presence

³³For Jesus' teaching about caring for "the least of these," which includes the "sheep" being welcomed into heaven while the "goats" are cast into hell, see Matt 25:31-46.

³⁴For the parable about the servants and the talents, which ends with one miserable servant being cast into the outer darkness, see Matt 25:14-30.

of Jesus, we discover that he is good and safe. We discover that we can talk to him about our confusion and fear and doubts and distorted perceptions, and that he is compassionate and helpful as opposed to offended and angry. As we work with Jesus to find and resolve the memory-anchored distortions that we are currently able to handle, our capacity and faith in his goodness steadily grow. And the more these grow, the more we are able to see and acknowledge and resolve the trauma and memory-anchored distortions that have previously been too big and too scary to look at.

V. Even more true-story examples: Okay, it's time for more saturation bombing – more true story examples of specific memory-anchored distorted perceptions and hindering issues.

R. God and memories of performance-based worth: A couple of years ago I was working (again) on my longstanding stress and anxiety about not working hard enough. I have had this lifetime, thematic worry that God thinks I'm not getting enough done for him – that God is unhappy with me because I'm not working hard enough, because I'm not giving enough, and because I'm not saving the world quickly enough. During the last several years, as I have been working on the two books, this has especially expressed itself as chronic, oppressive stress and anxiety when I'm writing – the constant, burdensome perception that God thinks I should be writing more, writing faster, and writing better.

Eventually, as I kept asking the Lord for guidance and help regarding these negative perceptions, I went back to many, many childhood memories of perceiving that worth, approval, friendship, security, importance, acceptance, popularity, and happiness were all 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 musical talent (and I was without musical talent).

And everybody knew that it was good to win and bad to lose. No matter what your parents might say about “Just do your best,” etc, the losers always seemed to be unhappy. For example, I noticed that the athletes and families of the fourth 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, it got in the way of feeling safe in God's unconditional love and it got in the way 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 earn God's love, acceptance, and approval.

As I went through each of these memories, I felt the negative emotions from the original experiences as I connected with the toxic content from the unresolved trauma; and then the memories lost their toxic power as I felt Jesus' presence with me in each of these experiences. Since this healing work, I have felt myself move another step forward with respect to feeling safe in God's unconditional love. And it has also been significantly less burdensome to write.

S. God not with me while drowning: When I was 8 years old I almost drowned. I mean, I *really* almost drowned. I had gotten caught in a strong river-current undertow, so that I could no longer get my head to the surface in spite of the most desperate thrashing I have ever engaged in, and by the time I was finally rescued I was seconds from blacking out. I wouldn't be here right now if I hadn't managed to just barely get my hand above the surface, so that a fisherman spotted it sticking out of the muddy water and grabbed it as I was just about to wash past his boat and then under the overhanging bank of the river. Without question, this was the most intensely terrifying experience of my life. And part of this traumatic experience was that I was not aware of God (or anyone else) being with me in any way.

The whole experience was totally overwhelming, and I refused to ever talk about the event, even when my parents tried to help me process it. But the toxic content from this trauma would get triggered forward any time I was in certain kinds of painfully stressful situations. For example, when I was on call in the ER during my residency, whenever things would get really intense I would get this horrible sense of dread, I would have this increasing sense of being overwhelmed, and I would have this intense, persistent fear that something would happen that I wouldn't be able to handle. One detail is particularly interesting: the words that would always come into my head on these occasions were, "I'm going to get sucked in over my head and drown." (At this time in my life I had no awareness that I was being triggered, so my VLE told me that this was just a figure of speech; but it all made sense later in my healing journey when I worked with this near-drowning memory and made the connection to my miserable times on call in the ER.)

Just as in the original experience, whenever this trauma package would get triggered it would feel true that I was all alone in the difficult situation. In the original near-drowning experience, I did not sense God with me, and it never even got on the screen that I might call out to him for help. This same thing would occur when this trauma package would get triggered – to the extent that I was blended with the underlying memory, I would not sense God (or anyone else) with me, and it would not even occur to me to call out to God (or anyone else) for help.

The *good news* is that this particular memory-anchored hindrance has been resolving as I

work away at the underlying trauma (and all of it's splinters).

Note: All trauma includes the absence of connection, the sense of being alone, and certainly the absence of any sense of God's presence. (If you *do* feel God's presence with you, a painful experience *doesn't become trauma*.) So any time we get triggered, to the extent that we are blended with the underlying traumatic memory we will re-experience the lack of connection with God as part of the traumatic content. In this sense, any time we get triggered to any traumatic memory we experience a memory-anchored hindrance that makes it more difficult to connect with God. I think this aspect of my near-drowning trauma was especially tangible, intense, and significant because my intense panic caused my relational circuits to be unusually blacked out. More *good news* is that as soon as we establish an Immanuel connection from inside of a traumatic memory, this aspect of the trauma algebra changes and the toxic content begins to resolve.³⁵

T. Those who have been ridiculed for their faith: Those who have been ridiculed for their faith provide yet another example of a memory-anchored hindrance to connecting with God.

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.³⁶ So these people had 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.³⁷

The *good news* is that these memory-anchored hindrances have progressively subsided as we have persistently worked to resolve the underlying traumatic memories.

U. God, the first-grade teacher who didn't know I was dyslexic: As I have mentioned at several points earlier in the book, I have dyslexia. In my current adult life, my dyslexia is a pretty small burden – I read more slowly because of my dyslexia, having dyslexia makes it

³⁵This is yet another example of a memory-anchored *hindrance* to perceiving the Lord's presence and connecting with him that is *not* a memory-anchored *distorted perception about God's character and heart*.

³⁶Sadly, intellectual, cynical fathers seem especially prone to ridicule their children for expressing or displaying any hints of childlike faith.

³⁷This is yet another example of a memory-anchored issue that is *not* a *distorted perception about God's character and heart*, but certainly a memory-anchored *hindrance* to perceiving the Lord's presence and connecting with him. Also, the fear of perceiving God's presence, the fear of connecting with God, and the fear of talking about their experiences, taken together as a package, are especially troublesome in hindering the whole Immanuel approach process.

easier to lose my place in my notes when I'm giving a presentation, and I frequently mis-dial phone numbers – but these are issues I've learn to deal with, and I hardly think about them on the average day. However, in first grade it was a much bigger deal. The dyslexia prevented me from learning to read, but it had not yet been identified. In combination with *not* knowing I had dyslexia, the teacher *did* know that I was smart, so she was constantly frustrated with me for not being able to read and she assumed it was because I just wasn't trying. Unfortunately, the result was that I constantly had the sense that the teacher was unhappy with me, that she thought I should be trying harder, and that she wanted me to be doing something differently; but I never got the help I needed to actually get around the dyslexia.

These memories have often been triggered in the context of my efforts to serve the Lord, and when this has happened the toxic content would come forward so that these negative perceptions would feel true with respect to God. It would feel true that God was unhappy with me, it would feel true that God thought I should be trying harder, and it would feel true that God wanted me to be doing something differently. However, I could never figure out exactly what I was doing wrong (other than not trying hard enough), or what I should do differently (other than try harder). Furthermore, it always felt like I somehow needed more help, but that the Lord would not give me this help that I needed to succeed.

It's pretty easy to see how these memory-anchored distortions would get in the way of a secure attachment, joy-based relationship with the Lord.

The *good news* is that these memory-anchored distortions have been resolving as I have been working away at the underlying memories from kindergarten and first grade.³⁸

V. God, the triggered father: My father was (and still is) a wonderful father in many ways. For example, if he became convinced that something was the right thing to do, he would do it. It didn't matter how dangerous or difficult it might be, he would just do it. He also modeled delaying gratification and doing hard things when these were needed – that's just what you did if you were part of the Lehman family. These are maturity skills that all the Lehman children now have, and I am grateful for these huge social intelligence assets. He had (and still has) many other strengths and virtues as well. And, finally, I'm sure he would have given his life if this ever would have been necessary to protect one of his children or if this would have been required as part of serving the Lord.

However, he also had wounds and weaknesses, and one of the most costly to me was that he would get triggered to anger and judgment that were frightening to me as a child. To put this in perspective, these were not big, messy, noisy, obvious episodes of dangerous or violent behavior. Dad never yelled, he didn't swear, and he didn't hit. He just got angry and

³⁸For additional details regarding my kindergarten and first grade dyslexia trauma, see *Outsmarting Yourself*, and also the case study “Dissociation, Repression, Denial, and Avoidance: ‘Where did kindergarten and first grade go?’” (This essay is available as a free download from www.kclehman.com.) ****is this footnote necessary? Omit?****

judgmental in a way that frightened me, as a sensitive child. Furthermore, as an inherent part of being triggered reactions, these episodes of anger and judgment were unpredictable and unreasonable.³⁹

For example, on a Friday afternoon when I was maybe ten years old, a friend and I were leaving my house carrying squirt guns. One of the adults from our church saw us heading out, realized that we were on the way to a church activity, and told us that we needed to leave our squirt guns at home. I ignored her and kept on walking, never giving it a second thought – there was no rule in the Lehman household about squirt guns and church activities, I had no intention of using the squirt gun to cause trouble, and this person did not have any kind of delegated authority over me. In fact, there was an explicit guideline in our church community that adults did *not* have the right to make this kind of rule or set this kind of limit for kids that were not their own children; and I not only knew this rule, but also knew that my father had been one of the leaders involved in establishing it. Furthermore, I had spent my entire life earning the trust of my parents – I did my chores, worked hard in school, stayed out of trouble, and was generally a cooperative and obedient child. There was no rule in the Lehman household about squirt guns and church activities *because it was not necessary* – my parents appropriately trusted me with this kind of judgment call.

Unfortunately, it triggered this person to have my friend and I ignore her demand, and she went straight to my father and told him about the incident. More unfortunately, the way she described the situation triggered deep pain from Dad's childhood about his parents being disrespected, which resulted in Dad charging out of the house, loaded for bear.⁴⁰ So my friend and I were half way to church, oblivious of the storm that we had stirred up, when Dad came charging out of a side alley and confronted us as if he had just reviewed video surveillance of us committing a series of felonies. He wasn't yelling or swearing, but he was intensely angry and outraged, and he definitely frightened both my friend and I as he interrogated us and demanded that we hand over our squirt guns. After stomping our squirt guns to smithereens with his size 13 boots, he finally stalked away with a scowl, leaving us in a daze.

This was one of the more dramatic episodes, and there were only a handful of these more dramatic episodes throughout the course of my childhood, but there were also many minor incidents with the same thematic content. The bottom line was that when Dad was triggered,

³⁹Triggered reactions are *always, inherently*, unpredictable and unreasonable. Some trigger in the present just happens to match an aspect of the original memory, and then a reaction comes forward that does not fit in the present. The triggered response is not a logical response to anything in the present, hence it will always be unpredictable (unless you already know about this particular trigger). And the triggered response will include a large amount of pain from the past coming forward in response to a small trigger in the present, hence it will always be unreasonable.

⁴⁰I know I am correct regarding Dad's part of the story because he and I have discussed this incident in detail.

he would be unpredictably, unreasonably, frighteningly angry and judgmental. And the sad result was that I lived with a chronic sense of anxiety that I would accidentally set off one of these reactions, and then be judged and cut off relationally.

There were a number of triggers that would cause this toxic content to get transferred onto God, and, ironically, the biggest was scripture. For many years, whenever I would read or hear certain scripture passages, the toxic implicit memory content from these experiences would come forward and get transferred onto God. For example, whenever I would read or hear the story about Moses hitting the rock and then not being allowed into the promised land,⁴¹ it would feel intensely true that God is unpredictably, unreasonably, frighteningly angry and judgmental. “Whoa! One moment of frustration, and God nukes you! This guy is *not* someone you want to work for!” And whenever I would read or hear the story about Jesus rebuking Peter,⁴² it would feel intensely true that the Lord is unpredictably, unreasonably, frighteningly angry and judgmental. “You voice a totally understandable concern – out of innocent, clueless ignorance as far as I can tell – and Jesus nukes you. Wow! *Not* someone you want to have as a friend!”⁴³

And, as always, the *good news* is that these memory-anchored distorted perceptions have resolved as I have resolved the underlying trauma.

Note: *Before* resolving these underlying traumatic memories, when certain scripture verses would trigger the memories it would feel *absolutely, one-hundred percent true* that the offending verses were really the problem. (I had *zero* awareness that most of the content and intensity of my negative reactions were really coming from the underlying trauma.) It seemed like the obvious, only interpretation of these offending verses was that God is scary, unreasonable, and unsafe – it seemed like the obvious, only interpretation was that God gets unpredictably, unreasonably, frighteningly angry and judgmental. And *nothing* I did enabled me to come to a place of peace with respect to these verses. Certain verses about hell were the worst offenders, and I spent thousands of hours wrestling with these passages. I read through books and books and books that attempted to explicate these disturbing passages, and I listened to many, many sermons that endeavored to address them; but before I dealt with the underlying memories, these many explanations just felt like hopeful excuses that I wished I could believe but that didn’t feel true.

However, *after* finding and resolving the underlying traumatic memories with Dad, many of the explanations for how these passages could be compatible with a loving God suddenly felt

⁴¹Num 20:2-12.

⁴²Matt 16:21-23.

⁴³Note that I am projecting myself onto Moses and Peter – I’m picturing myself, trying as hard as I can to do it right, and making a totally innocent mistake out of ignorance. And then I perceive God to be reacting to my innocent mistake with unpredictable, unreasonable, frightening anger and judgment. ****necessary footnote? Delete?****

believable, valid, reasonable, satisfying, and adequate. And in some cases, understanding just clicked into place spontaneously – after looking at certain passages for more than fifty years and always understanding them in only one way, I was suddenly able to see alternative (acceptable) ways to interpret them. Furthermore, any of the passages that weren't spontaneously reinterpreted or adequately explained just stopped bothering me. They just didn't feel important any more (after irresistibly drawing my attention for fifty-plus years). I still have a whole shelf full of books about judgment and hell, but I haven't opened one of them since finding and resolving these underlying memories of being traumatized by Dad's triggered anger and judgment.

W. Bible trauma – memories of being directly traumatized by scripture: Possibly add this? See “Scraps” document for ideas re specific scriptures.

VI. Resolving memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues is usually “accidental”:

Now I would like to talk about yet another really important reason for embracing a *lifestyle* of ongoing healing work.

As mentioned earlier, these memory-anchored distortions, blockages, and hindrances are easy to see *after* the underlying trauma has been healed and the blockage has been resolved, but amazingly difficult to spot *prior* to finding and healing the underlying traumatic memories. A related point is that these phenomena are usually identified and resolved *accidentally*. That is, resolution of one of these memory-anchored hindrances usually does *not* start with, “Oh my! Look at this distorted perception regarding God's character and heart! I know it feels totally, compellingly true, and that I shouldn't really be able to see that it's a triggered distortion, since my VLE should be covering up the triggering with confabulated explanations, but somehow I can mysteriously recognize that it's really just toxic implicit memory from underlying trauma.”⁴⁴ Let's go get the traumatic memory anchor so that the distorted perception resolves.” Rather, these memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues are usually resolved unintentionally, in the course of working to heal traumatic memories for other reasons.

My own experience once again provides a good example. For most of my memory-anchored blockages, I started with just identifying that I was triggered, with no recognition that there was a connection between the particular packaged of triggered material and my relationship with the Lord. I would then go into an Immanuel session as part of the ongoing healing component of my Immanuel lifestyle, and I would only discover the connection to distortions/issues hindering my relationship with God as I bumped into them, *accidentally*, as part of the healing process. In fact, in some sessions I didn't recognize the connection between certain, specific toxic content in the traumatic memories and certain, specific distorted perceptions about the Lord until the end of the

⁴⁴As described previously, deliberate avoidance and unconscious lack of capacity make it especially difficult to look at, acknowledge, and directly address distorted perceptions regarding God's character and heart.

session. With still other sessions, I didn't make the connection until days or weeks or months later, when I noticed a positive change in my relationship with the Lord and then traced it back to the healing work.⁴⁵

This observation that *accidental* discovery and resolution is the usual pathway brings us back to the importance of an emotional healing *lifestyle*. You probably will *not* notice memory-anchored blockages that hinder your connection to God, and then deliberately, proactively go after them because you recognize them as such important, strategic targets. If you're waiting for this aspect of the picture to be clear before you get started, most memory-anchored distortions and hindering issues will just never get resolved. Again, **the best way to find and resolve these memory anchored distortions that hinder your connection to God is to embrace a lifestyle of 1) deliberately watching for triggering in your life; and 2) making space for regular Immanuel Approach healing work to address the triggers that you notice.** Then, as you regularly do healing work, you will occasionally stumble onto (and resolve) traumatic content that includes distortions/issues that hinder your relationship with God.

The "God 'loves' me and has a horrible plan for my life" case study provides a perfect example. I started the resolution part of the story with noticing that I was triggered about a client's family making impossible demands, and then asking for healing prayer because I was miserable. Initially, I had no awareness of any connections to distorted perceptions about the Lord's character and heart, and I was not asking for healing in order to improve my relationship with God. After we were well into the session, the Lord eventually led me to the childhood memories of being traumatized by developmentally inappropriate church messages; but I had *zero* awareness that we were headed toward these memories when I noticed that I was triggered and asked for prayer. And when the underlying traumatic memories were resolved, I was grateful for both the resolution of my miserable triggering regarding my patient situation and for the

⁴⁵Caveat: For the past five years or so, I have begun to recognize memory anchored distortions regarding God's character and heart for what they are, *even before they have been resolved*, and then I go after them very deliberately. I will notice, "Wow, I'm really triggered – every single clue indicating triggering is positive." I then deliberately, carefully examine my thoughts and emotions *while I am still triggered*, and notice negative perceptions regarding God's character and heart. And as I explicitly, deliberately consider the possibility of memory-anchored distortions, I can see that the negative perceptions, *that feel intensely true while I am triggered*, happen to be the opposite of what feels true when I'm not triggered. Furthermore, these negative perceptions happen to be the opposite of what I consider to be a balanced interpretation of the whole body of scripture (when I am not triggered). However, this new pattern of finding and resolving memory-anchored blockages has begun to happen only after coming to thoroughly understand the principles and phenomena involved, after identifying memory-anchored distortions as strategic targets and deciding to deliberately watch for them, after learning and *repeatedly* practicing the skill of spotting this aspect of triggered trauma, and after resolving at least 15 different specific memory-anchored blockages with the "accidental" approach. For at least the first fifteen years of my healing journey, I resolved memory-anchored blockages almost entirely by the accidental method.

resolution of my distorted perceptions regarding the Lord; but at the beginning of the session I had zero awareness that the same childhood memories were fueling both of these problems. In fact, it wasn't until many months later that I fully understood how my patient's family *making impossible demands* triggered the childhood memories in which I perceived the church to be *making impossible demands*, and how these same childhood church-trauma memories had been the source of my long-standing distorted perception that God was *making impossible demands*.

VII. I never *wanted* to believe these distorted, negative perceptions: Just in case this isn't already clear, I never *wanted* to believe these negative perceptions regarding the Lord's character and heart. To the extent that I even let myself be consciously aware of these distorted perceptions, truth carried in my non-traumatic memories told me that this picture of a petty, insecure, mean, pathologically controlling, unpredictable, angry, absent, unresponsive, incompetent, uncaring, unreasonable God must somehow be wrong. I fought these distorted perceptions whenever they came forward – through many years of discipleship and personal spiritual growth, 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 the Lord's goodness, and reminding myself of the evidence for God's goodness in my own life. And all this work did yield some fruit – 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 until I finally resolved the underlying traumatic memory-anchors, I had to spend a lot of time and energy using cognitive tools to hold onto the truth and to fight off these negative perceptions regarding the Lord's character and heart.

VIII. Subtle, sneaky negative effects even when not triggered: Another interesting observation is that the underlying traumatic memories affected my relationship with the Lord even when they weren't triggered and active. Even when these memory-anchored distortions weren't active and forward, there were still places deep in my heart that perceived God to be petty, insecure, mean, pathologically controlling, unpredictable, angry, absent, unresponsive, incompetent, uncaring, and unreasonable. On rare occasions when I would immerse myself for hours in true stories about God's goodness and faithfulness, I could actually *feel* the truth that he is loving, good, kind, present, faithful, responsive, reliable, trustworthy, competent, gracious, generous, and that he wants good things for his children. But even while dormant, the distortions anchored in the underlying traumatic memories would usually reduce these truths about God to weak, distant cognitive principles. Even though I knew the truth in my adult, cognitive mind, the lack of agreement and unity with the deep, child memory places in my heart seriously weakened my usable faith.

IX. Improving Baseline Relational Circuit status: As mentioned in Chapter 35b/39, yet another reason for embracing a lifestyle of ongoing healing work is that ongoing, persistent work to resolve traumatic memories will improve your baseline relational circuit status. As you keep shoveling away – resolving more and more old wounds and bruises – you will spend less and less time subtly (or not so subtly) triggered, and you will therefore spend more and more time with

your Relational Circuits on. And having your relational circuits online more and more of the time will make it easier and easier to be aware of and connect with the living presence of Immanuel.

X. Benefits are dosage dependent: Just as with all other aspects of the Immanuel lifestyle, benefits are dosage dependent. That is, the amount of benefit you receive from resolving specific memory-anchored blockages will be proportional to the amount of time you spend actually engaging in Immanuel Approach emotional healing work. If you want to see an increasingly profound improvement in your relationship with the Lord, you need to incorporate regular Immanuel Approach emotional healing into your *lifestyle* and persist with this over time.⁴⁶

XI. Caveat regarding the ongoing-healing component of the Immanuel lifestyle: 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.) Those of us who fit into this category need to find ways to work on the underlying trauma when we are intensely triggered, and we need to make space in our lives for deliberate, proactive, regular, ongoing healing work even when we are not in crisis. As I have especially emphasized in this chapter and the preceding chapter, we need to deliberately build emotional healing work into our lives as habits – we need to deliberately include regular work on emotional trauma as part of our Immanuel lifestyles.

However, some people are experiencing *overwhelming* 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.

XII. Separating the wheat from the chaff becomes much easier: If there is anything valuable mixed in with the memory-anchored distorted perceptions, separating the wheat from the chaff (and keeping the wheat) becomes much easier when the underlying trauma is resolved. The “God ‘loves’ me and has a horrible plan for my life” case-study provides a good example. Now, *after the underlying traumatic memories have been resolved*, I can easily see that there were aspects of the radical discipleship teaching in my childhood church that were distorted and toxic and

⁴⁶If you are using material from this chapter as a stand-alone resource, see Chapter 35b (pages **fill in**) for additional comments regarding the way in which benefits from the Immanuel Approach lifestyle are proportional to the amount of time and energy invested in actually implementing the various components of the lifestyle.

traumatic, but that there was also good. On the one hand, I can easily perceive the ways in which this teaching was toxic to me as a child – I can easily spot the toxic, distorted perceptions and beliefs that were anchored in traumatic experiences caused by this radical discipleship teaching. And on the other hand, I can see and appreciate the profound gifts I received from my parents and church through this same teaching. They not only talked about radical discipleship, sacrificial service, whole-life stewardship, and resistance to idolatry, *they modeled them* – my parents, and the whole church. These are huge gifts – these are huge stones in the foundation of my current, adult faith and discipleship. And they feel so natural and right to me that I hardly even have to think about them, which is part of the gift of having these important components of God’s teaching and plan so pervasively woven into the family culture and church culture of my childhood.

But *before* healing the underlying trauma, the HUGE good pieces were totally mixed in with the toxic memory-anchored distortions. It all just felt true. And the mixture of the toxic pieces all tangled together with the good pieces was a much, much weaker, less life-giving foundation for my faith and discipleship.

XIII. Conclusion: As I’m sure the reader can see, from both the theoretical explanations and the true-story examples, memory-anchored hindrances are very common, they are usually difficult to spot, and they exert huge-but-sneaky negative effects on our relationships with God.

However, as the reader can also see from both the theoretical explanations and the true-story examples, the *good news* is that resolving these hindrances can produce huge benefits. This has certainly been true for me. It’s amazing how much my relationship with Jesus has improved as I have resolved memory-anchored distortions that caused me to perceive that God was petty, insecure, mean, pathologically controlling, absent, unresponsive, incompetent, uncaring, non-relational, and unpredictably, unreasonably, frighteningly angry and judgmental. As I have steadily, persistently worked at resolving the underlying trauma that have anchored these distortions, my right hemisphere, experiential beliefs – what actually *feels* true about God’s character and heart – has become less and less negative. As I continue to persistently work to resolve these memory-anchored distortions, it is feeling more and more true that God is good, kind, gentle, patient, gracious, generous, present, responsive, strong, competent, reliable, trustworthy, caring, relational, reasonable, safe, unconditionally loving, and that he wants good things for his children.

And not only has the *quality* of my relationship with Jesus improved, but it has also become *much easier to perceive his presence and connect with him* as all of the unconscious aspects of my mind have become increasingly convinced that this would actually be a *good* idea. Furthermore, resolving other memory-anchored hindrances and blockages, such as persistent guilt and choices to push the Lord away, have also contributed to being able to connect with the Lord more easily and to improving the quality of our relationship.

I want this for you. Therefore, I recommend, encourage, challenge, invite, implore, and exhort – in fact, I *beg* you to release these same benefits for yourself by embracing a lifestyle of ongoing

healing.