



Forgetting Caused by Suppression/Avoidance: “Where did kindergarten and first grade go?”

(©Copyright 2002 K.D. Lehman MD, New 3/23/2002, Last Revised 9/4/2026)

This is a case study from my (Karl’s) personal experience. It provides an example of forgetting caused by prolonged suppression/avoidance.

I. Forgetting caused by prolonged suppression/avoidance:

Most people know about repression and dissociation as psychological phenomena that can cause a person to “lose” memories for traumatic events. However, many do not know about prolonged suppression/avoidance as a subtle, quiet phenomena that can cause people to lose the conscious, explicit autobiographical content for traumatic memories.¹

Recalling, thinking about, and talking about an experience will strengthen the neurological connections that carry the conscious, explicit autobiographical memory content. For example, the memories from my childhood that are still clear and strong even after fifty to sixty years are for events that occurred during family vacations, memories from Christmas mornings, and other events from childhood that I and my family have frequently remembered and talked about. In contrast, when we do *not* recall, think about, or talk about an experience, the neurological connections that carry the explicit autobiographical content are *not* activated, refreshed, and strengthened, and the memory progressively weakens and fades. For example, one of my siblings will occasionally tell a story about something that happened to all of us during a childhood family vacation – an event that was just as striking/interesting/entertaining as other events, *from the same vacation*, that I still remember clearly – but I have no memory of what they are describing. And it always turns out that these are experiences that they have repeatedly recalled, thought about, and talked about with their friends and kids, but that I have *not* activated, refreshed, and strengthened.²

The most dramatic example of this forgetting caused by lack of activating, refreshing, and strengthening occurs when we deliberately, repeatedly “look away” from the painful memories for small-t traumatic experiences. With this variation of forgetting, it’s not just that we don’t recall, think about, and talk about certain memories because some reminder or need does not repeatedly bring them to mind, but rather that we *deliberately avoid* recalling them, thinking

¹ *Explicit* memory is what we all think of as “memory.” Explicit memory *feels* like “normal” memory. When we recall events through the explicit memory system, it feels, subjectively, like “I’m remembering something from my personal past experience.” In contrast, *implicit* memory is all memory that does *not* include the subjective experience of “I’m remembering something from my personal past experience.” When implicit memories are activated, we recall memory material but it does *not* feel, subjectively like explicit memory. Since implicit memory does not *feel* like what we think of as memory, we usually do *not* have any awareness that we are remembering or being affected by past experience when implicit memory material comes forward. For additional discussion of explicit and implicit memories (including examples), see chapter two (pages 17 through 21) in *Outsmarting Yourself*.

² This is also what happens to thousands and thousands of minor autobiographical memory events and details, such as the experience of going shopping for groceries on October 23rd of 2007, or the details of what you had for lunch on May 16th of 2011.

about them, or talking about them because reconnecting with these memories is painful and we don't know what else to do with them. And when we continue this suppression/avoidance for a long time, most of the explicit autobiographical content from these small-t trauma experiences is permanently lost.

Initially available to voluntary recall: Initially the autobiographical content from these memories is available to our normal explicit-memory voluntary recall. For example, in my dyslexia story described below, if you had talked to me a few days after one of my experiences of being unable to read and offered to give me a new pair of binoculars in exchange for a description of the painful details that I was suppressing/avoiding, I could have chosen to press through my suppression/avoidance in order to recall and describe the autobiographical details. However, under normal circumstances we subtly-but-persistently avoid recalling, thinking about, or talking about these memories, and the explicit autobiographical content increasingly fades due to straight-forward neurology.³

Traumatic experiential-learning content remains: It is really important to note that even when almost all of the explicit autobiographical content has been permanently lost, the implicit-memory traumatic experiential-learning content, including distorted, erroneous beliefs (lies) and their associated emotions, will still remain and can be triggered.

Small-t traumatic memories: This suppression/avoidance forgetting can only occur with small-t trauma, with original autobiographical memories that are comparatively weaker due to their comparatively lower intensity. In contrast, with most large-T trauma the autobiographical details are remembered with unusual clarity because of the unusual intensity of the experience. (I cannot think of any examples of Large-T trauma for which most autobiographical details have been forgotten due to prolonged suppression/avoidance.) And with severe/extreme large-T trauma, the too-intense experiences get repressed or dissociated.

Most of us have this: My perception is that most of us have a lot of small-t trauma for which most/all of the explicit autobiographical content has been lost through this “looking away,” suppression/avoidance forgetting process.

Very brief compare and contrast:

- Not just “normal” traumatic memories – the most common type of traumatic memories, where the recipient has always been able to voluntarily recall lots of explicit autobiographical details. Even with these “normal” traumatic memories, the trauma content can get triggered forward without conscious connection to the autobiographical content. But it's usually easy to make the connection with focusing on the triggered trauma content, asking the Lord for guidance regarding the underlying trauma, and then noticing whatever comes forward.⁴
- Not dissociated memories – memories that are “lost” (dissociated) in a matter of seconds following the traumatic experience, that require work to bring down dissociative barriers

³ The synapse connections carrying the actual autobiographical content, along with the hippocampal-librarian connections carrying the information regarding where to find the material and how to retrieve it, all progressively weaken since they are not being reinforced by repeated activation. In contrast to the autobiographical content, the implicit-memory toxic trauma content does not weaken/fade because it is reinforced every time it gets triggered.

⁴ Most examples from the supplementary chapter, “Memory-anchored Distortions, Hindrances, and Blockages,” would be examples of these most-common, “normal” traumatic memories.

and/or require working with internal parts, that eventually include a lot more recovered autobiographical details, and that are sometimes associated with a lot of other dissociative phenomena.

- Not repressed memories – memories that are “lost” (buried) over several hours to several years, that can be completely buried even though they carry large-T trauma, and that include a lot of autobiographical detail when they are recovered.
- With these suppression/avoidance small-t trauma memories, traumatic experiential learning content comes forward fairly easily when you focus on triggers, but most explicit autobiographical content has been permanently lost. Even with lots and lots of work, you only ever recover a handful of faint, vague scraps.
- Very similar to memories for pre-autobiographical trauma, except that suppression/avoidance small-t trauma memories are for events that occurred during later childhood or adulthood. (Recipients have normal autobiographical memories for other events from the same time period).

For additional discussion: For additional discussion of the different types of traumatic memory, including additional discussion of small-t trauma with forgetting caused by prolonged suppression/avoidance, see “Different Types of Traumatic Memory.”⁵

II. “I can’t solve the problem,” “I can’t figure it out,” “I’m stuck” triggers:⁶ The adventure described in this case study began with working on my “I can’t solve the problem,” “I can’t figure it out,” “I’m stuck” triggers. For as long as I can remember, I have gotten intensely triggered when I can’t solve a problem – when I have tried everything I can think of and am still stuck. I get especially triggered when I have asked the Lord for help and I don’t perceive any response.

Facilitating emotional healing sessions has been an especially effective trigger for this particular target. For the first couple of years when I was learning to facilitate emotional healing work, I seemed to have an anointing for setting people on fire (that is, for helping them find and connect with the underlying trauma that was driving their issues). But then I would often struggle when it came to removing blockages and actually resolving the trauma. The result was that I experienced many sessions where, after 60 to 90 minutes of hard work, I had tried everything I could think of and the person receiving ministry was still stuck in painful unresolved trauma.⁷ Furthermore, I had usually been asking and asking and asking God for help, but had not perceived any guidance, direction, or help of any kind. At which point I would usually be intensely, miserably triggered:

- I would usually feel like I was doing everything I could, but that I just couldn’t figure it out/fix it/make it work/get the job done.
- My mind would fill with thoughts such as “I can’t do it,” “I can’t figure it out,” “I’m stuck,

⁵ Available as a free download from the “Kclehman Website Archives” section of the Resources page of www.immanuelapproach.com.

⁶ As described in “‘I Can’t Do It,’ ‘God Won’t Come’: Complicated Tangle with Many Different Roots,” there were lots of other trauma roots contributing to these triggered reactions. But for this case-study focusing on trauma with explicit autobiographical content lost from prolonged suppression/avoidance, I am focusing on just the trauma around not being able to read in kindergarten and first grade due to dyslexia.

⁷ This was before Dr. Wilder and I had figured out the safety net piece.

and nobody's going to help me.”

- At other times, I would feel like God was present, and even that He was watching me, but that He was not helping. Even as I was begging Him for help – “Please show me what to do. I will do whatever you ask, just please tell me what to do” – I would feel like He was sitting there watching me, but not doing anything. In fact, I would feel like He was unhappy with me for not being able to do it – complaining that I wasn't getting the job done and blaming me for not getting the job done – as if I could just choose to get the job done if I wanted to. He was watching, complaining, and blaming, but not helping me figure out what to do.
- Sometimes I would feel like God was telling me to do a job that He did not give me the tools for – like He was telling me I had to make it work, but He was not giving me the resources and/or assistance that I needed to be able to succeed.
- Eventually, I would sink into immobilizing discouragement. Even when my adult cognitive mind would have ideas, an increasingly intense feeling of discouragement and hopelessness would take over my emotions. “You know you can't figure it out, so why don't you just quit now and save yourself the trouble. You have already tried everything. Nothing works. What's the point?”
- And sometimes I would also get, “There's something wrong with me – I'm just stupid.”

III. Where did kindergarten and first grade go?: The first step in my journey of resolving this trauma around not being able to read due to having dyslexia was discovering that my explicit autobiographical memories for being in the classroom during kindergarten and first grade were totally missing.⁸

During a visit to my parents over the Thanksgiving weekend of 1999, Mom and I were sitting in their living room and discussing the “I'm too stupid” case study. She commented “That really would have set you up for feeling stupid when you couldn't read because of your dyslexia. I can't imagine it wouldn't have affected you when other kids had to read your math problems for you.” She continued to talk about my years at Oakton grade school, describing how she and Dad had become concerned that my reading was so far behind my other skills, but that the teachers wouldn't take them seriously because I was not a problem in the classroom and was doing better than some.

Over the years Mom and Dad had often mentioned my dyslexia, but I never really took them seriously when they spoke about this as something that might have been traumatic. The memories I had about being dyslexic included going through testing at the Northwestern University psychology department, and some vague talk about a reading disability. They said I would not be

⁸ Note that this step of recognizing that my explicit autobiographical memories were missing was not a necessary step for healing. Recognizing that memories were missing was helpful in directing my attention to any triggers around kindergarten, first grade, and dyslexia, but I could have eventually gotten to healing for the underlying trauma without this step. With our current Immanuel Approach principles and tools, Charlotte could have just coached me to focus on the triggers, ask Jesus for guidance and help, describe whatever came forward, lean into connecting with and focusing on any new pieces, and then keep repeating this cycle (that is, asking Jesus for guidance and help, describing whatever came forward, and leaning into connecting with and focusing on any new pieces). Becoming aware of the missing memory content just happened to be the first step in my journey, and provides a good case-study for illustrating the phenomena of lost memory due to prolonged suppression/avoidance.

good at science and math, but I never understood this since these were my favorite subjects. The whole thing never really made sense to me, so I mostly ignored it. These memories didn't feel scary or upsetting, and when Mom and Dad would imply that my dyslexia could have been a significant trauma, I would think inside, "I don't remember feeling like my dyslexia was traumatic—by some fluke or the grace of God it just doesn't seem to have affected me."

On this occasion as Mom began her comments about my dyslexia, I responded internally with my usual "I know you think my dyslexia was important, but it just didn't seem to affect me." But then I began to feel strange as she described more and more of the details from kindergarten and first grade. Eventually I blurted out, "I know you and Dad think the dyslexia stuff affected me so much, but I have no memory of anything you're talking about." As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I thought, "My gosh, it's true. I don't remember anything she's describing." I almost said something like, "Mom, you know I never went to Oakton. I went and stood in the playground before school started for a couple of days and then they transferred me to Central." I had the strange experience of cognitively realizing that this wasn't true, even as it felt so true that I almost spoke the words. Prior to this conversation I had always felt like I had only gone to Oakton for a few days before being transferred, even though I knew I had been there for all of kindergarten. During this conversation, I argued with Mom that I had certainly been transferred to Central for first grade, and I didn't fully believe that I had gone to Oakton for the two full years of kindergarten and first grade until Mom found my report cards and I read them myself.

I have (and have always had) many clear memories of grades two through five. I can remember thousands of details from Central school – from the playground to the library to gym class to drum lessons. I can remember my classrooms – the layout of the windows, chalk boards, fish tanks/animals, student desks, door, and teacher's desk. I can remember the names and appearance of every teacher at Central – including the gym teacher, the music teacher, and the kindergarten and first grade teachers that I never had myself. When Mom recently found my report cards from grade school, I had even correctly remembered the spelling of my second grade teacher's name.

And when I thought about it carefully, I realized that I could remember (and had always been able to remember) many of the **non-classroom** details from my kindergarten and first grade years. I could remember walking to Oakton school, including many of the houses along the way and the bully that used to chase and frighten me. I could remember the candy store we would stop at on the way home and the size, color, cost (five cents), smell, and taste of the fireballs we would buy. I could remember playing in the snow at the side of the street by the corner of Oakton and Ridge. I could remember the playground. I could remember the small wooded area on the edge of the school property. I could remember the place just inside the school doors where they sold war bond stamps.

In contrast, at the time of the initial conversation with Mom I could not remember a single minute of time inside of a classroom at Oakton school. Two years of classroom time were completely missing, except for one very vague memory – a single image – of what I think is my kindergarten or first grade classroom. I had no memories of my kindergarten and first grade teachers. I couldn't even remember their race or gender. My parents tell me that my kindergarten teacher was a white woman, and that she was a dwarf. I have no memory of this. You would think that if I could remember the sex, race, age, height, body type, complexion, hair color, hair style, usual dress, and name of my second grade teacher, I would have at least an image or two of a kindergarten teacher who was a dwarf.

I have had many clients comment “There can’t be something important in here that I just can’t see and/or remember – I’m sure I could feel it.” It still feels very strange and striking to me how unaware I was of all this missing autobiographical memory. When something is missing, you don’t see it. Somehow I always thought I would be able to feel the hole – that I would be able to tell something was missing, as if you walked into a room and there was a large hole in the floor. Instead, it feels much more like walking into a room and not seeing a coffee table. Unless you were aware of other evidence/information that there had been a coffee table/should be a coffee table, you would never think/feel “The coffee table is missing.” My subjective feeling was something along the lines of “There can’t be something in here that is really important but that I can’t see. *I live in here – I can see/feel perfectly well that there is NOT a big hole in the living room floor.* I would certainly be able to feel it if a bunch of important memories were missing.”

IV. Accessing trauma content, autobiographical memory scraps: The second step in my journey regarding this dyslexia trauma was connecting with *and recognizing* the toxic trauma content (that is, the traumatic experiential learning associated with not being able to read in kindergarten and first grade). And also recovering a handful of autobiographical memory scraps.

- Several days after my Thanksgiving conversation with Mom, I was telling one of my friends about this. I made the simple comment “I don’t have any memories of being in a classroom at Oakton school,” and was surprised to feel my voice choking up and tears coming to my eyes.
- Some time during the following week I called Mom to ask her more about my years at Oakton. I immediately experienced intense emotions and almost started crying when she responded, “We don’t know much about your experience at Oakton because we couldn’t get you to talk about it. You wouldn’t say anything about it.”
- Several weeks after this conversation with Mom, Charlotte and I watched a movie about a skinny blonde kid with dyslexia (he looked a lot like myself as a child). I got tearful, on and off, through most of the movie. When they called the kid “stupid” I wanted to jump off the couch and scream “What’s the matter with you people! Why does anybody call a kid ‘stupid’!” When the teacher explained “I put him in the dunce section to motivate him,” I wanted to yell “Can’t you see he’s stuck! He’s doing the best he can!”
- Sometime in the winter of 2000 I came across a story about a handicapped kid who spent 20 years learning to read. I cried through the whole thing.
- In the spring of 2000 Charlotte and I taught Introduction to Pastoral Counseling at North Park Seminary. We were talking about the lasting effects of trauma, and specifically about how “small” childhood traumas can leave lasting impairment. On the spur of the moment I decided to use my own childhood dyslexia as an example of something “small” that could leave lasting wounds and lies. I still didn’t have any specific memories of my own, but as I started to give the example as a general scenario, a specific example just sort of popped out of my mouth: “The average person would not think of dyslexia as being a major trauma. But if you were a six year old kid with dyslexia, if you tried and tried but you couldn’t figure out how to read, if you were called up in front of the class and you couldn’t figure out what was on the board, if you were just guessing and waiting for everybody to laugh at you – maybe hoping to yourself ‘If I get close maybe it won’t be too bad’ – it could be a pretty traumatic experience for a six year old kid. Maybe you would start to believe the lie ‘I just can’t do it – maybe I’m just stupid’.” As I was describing this “hypothetical” situation, a vague image of a

small, skinny, blonde kid standing in front of a blackboard “just came to me.” A wave of intense sadness washed over me and I got so choked up that I had to pause before I could continue speaking.

- Later in the spring of 2000 I got intensely triggered by a particularly difficult session that I was facilitating (trying to facilitate). As soon as we got time, Charlotte and I did more healing work together. I connected with this childhood memory package that carried the most immobilizing discouragement and helplessness that I have ever experienced – like a kid might feel if he had worked on a problem every day for a couple years of school and just couldn’t figure it out. I felt like I had tried everything I could think of so many hundreds of times that I couldn’t even try again– like I already knew it was hopeless, so why even try.
- As described below, during an emotional healing session in June of 2000 I had a brief and vague image of a little kid sitting at a desk with a woman standing over him. Intense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions came spontaneously within moments. I cried intensely for several minutes, and then suddenly became aware of insights and connections that felt very true.

At the end of the first couple of years of work on these kindergarten and first grade memories, I had recovered: 1. A vague image of sitting in a small desk at the rear left side of a class room with the door at the left front of the room and the front wall covered by a large chalk board; 2. A vague image of a skinny little kid standing in front of the class trying to do something on the blackboard; 3. A vague image of a little kid sitting at a desk with a woman standing over him; and 4. A vague image of a middle age woman who is a dwarf, but no memories of any connection between her and school or her and myself. Significantly, I have recovered no additional autobiographical pieces in spite of many years of additional healing work since then.⁹ This is exactly what would be expected for small-t traumatic memories with explicit autobiographical content that has been lost due to prolonged suppression/avoidance. In contrast, much more autobiographical content would have been recovered if I had been working with repressed or dissociated traumatic memories.

V. Healing: The purpose of this case study is to provide an example of small-t traumatic memories with explicit autobiographical content that has been lost due to prolonged suppression/avoidance, so I’m not including details regarding the healing part of the story. But here are some general comments regarding emotional healing work for this kind of traumatic memory:

- Working with suppression/avoidance-forgetting memories is very similar to working with pre-autobiographical (early childhood) memories.
- Not being able to find underlying explicit autobiographical trauma memories makes it especially easy to conclude that the toxic content is really about the triggers in the present, and to correspondingly get stuck fighting with the triggers instead of persisting with looking for the harder-to-recognize underlying trauma *that will present as just a mixture of toxic implicit-memory trauma content and faint/vague autobiographical fragments.*

⁹ As of 2026, additional healing work has included a few more years of regular work with frequent triggers at the front end, and then twenty+ years of occasional work when I bump into splinters.

- Recipients need to be especially deliberate and persistent with “This _____ (details re traumatic content) is *memory*. It really, really feels like it’s about this trigger, but *this is memory*.” Recipients need to be especially deliberate and persistent with inviting and connecting with Jesus *inside* the toxic trauma content *as memory*. And recipients need to be especially deliberate and persistent to work with Jesus in looking at, thinking about, and re-processing the toxic trauma content *as memory*.
- Just as with pre-autobiographical memory, special access tools/resources can be very helpful.¹⁰

VI. No dissociative phenomena: Over twenty-seven years of doing healing work on this material (and many years of getting triggered prior to this), I have observed no dissociative phenomena associated with my kindergarten and first-grade dyslexia trauma.

- *Does not suddenly/rapidly connect and disconnect:* Both onset and offset of the negative emotions associated with these triggers is relatively slow. Onset: I have experienced steadily increasing connection to trauma content as I remained stuck in some situation for longer and longer, and as I repeatedly asked God for help but with no perceived response. Offset: The triggered thoughts and emotions have slowly-but-steadily decreased over hours (sometimes even days) as I applied a variety of coping tools, such as calming, prayer, self cognitive therapy, and deliberately focusing on other things. This pattern of relatively slow onset and offset is exactly what would be expected for trauma with explicit autobiographical content that has been forgotten due to prolonged suppression/avoidance. This is NOT the rapid/instantaneous onset and offset that would be seen with dissociative connection and then disconnection.
- *Easily activated with no need for internal family systems work:* I have never needed to negotiate with protector/guardian parts, or do any other internal-family-systems work in order to activate the traumatic implicit memory content from my dyslexia memories. My experience with this dyslexia trauma has been the same as my experience with memories for any other emotional experiences – as I tell the story and increasingly connect with the memory, I also increasingly connect with the emotions that were a part of the original experience and that are carried as part of the memory. And as mentioned above, I also connect easily with my dyslexia trauma content when I watch a documentary about dyslexia, read a story about a kid with dyslexia, or encounter a variety of other triggers that activate these memories.
- *No losing time or confusion/disorientation from dissociative memory barriers:* When I’m talking about these memories, triggered to these memories, or doing healing work with these memories, I never lose time or experience confusion/disorientation due to dissociative memory barriers.
- *No switching or dissociated parts coming forward:* When I’m talking about these memories,

¹⁰ For discussion of special memory access tools/resources that can be helpful for working with both pre-autobiographical memories and memories with autobiographical content that has been lost through prolonged suppression/avoidance, see “A Case Study in Additional and Special Memory Access Tools: Working With My Own 18 Month-Old Separation Trauma,” available as free download from the Kolehman.com Website Archives section of the Resources page of www.immanuelapproach.com.

triggered to these memories, or doing healing work with these memories, I never feel like I am anything other than my adult self blended with child trauma content. That is, I never perceive that a dissociated internal part comes forward, or that I am switching to a dissociated part.

- *No dissociative internal thoughts/voices*: When I'm talking about these memories, triggered to these memories, or doing healing work with these memories, I never perceive thoughts or "voices" from internal dissociated parts.
- *No dissociative disconnection or numbness*: When I'm talking about these memories, triggered to these memories, or doing healing work with these memories, I never experience dissociative disconnection or numbness.
- *Autobiographical content remains*: Even though they are vague and faint, the autobiographical content images remain accessible to my voluntary conscious recall once they first appear (as opposed to coming and going, as would be the case with dissociative content that is recovered and then lost again as the content connects and then disconnects).

VII. "These images don't feel like memories": Recipients frequently comment "These images don't feel like memories," and then ask "How do I know I'm not just making this up? What if this is just my imagination?" I had these same thoughts many times as a handful of faint, vague visual images came forward over the years of working on my "lost" classroom memories. None of these images *feel* like normal explicit autobiographical memories. They feel qualitatively more like the images I get when I read a book and try to imagine the story in my "mind's eye," or the images I get when someone else is describing his or her experience and I am trying to imagine what it would have looked like. Qualitatively, they especially feel like the visual image fragments I get when I work on pre-autobiographical trauma. When visual image fragments from these memories first came into my awareness they would sometimes be very brief and tentative, and feel even more vague, less clear, and less real than imaginary images.

Although the memory images sometimes don't feel qualitatively different from imaginary images (they don't feel more real or more true), I perceive several larger patterns that distinguish them:

- One is that the same images keep coming back. When I repeatedly do healing work when I'm stirred up by dyslexia-trauma triggers, the same images keep "volunteering" themselves. For example, when I focus on the trigger of being stuck in a tough session, on the thought "I'm stuck," and on the perception that God is watching and complaining but not helping, the above images related to having dyslexia in kindergarten and first grade keep "volunteering" themselves.
- A second pattern is that I spontaneously experience certain recurrent thoughts and emotions in association with the vague images. When I focus on the images of being in kindergarten and first grade with dyslexia (even though they are vague and tenuous), ideas will "just come into my head" regarding what a five-to-six-year-old kid might have thought if he had dyslexia and couldn't read. Emotions "just show up" in association with the images and thoughts, and if I try to talk about what's happening I start crying within seconds.
- A third larger pattern is that connections with other pieces of the puzzle – with information and observations from other parts of my life – have increasingly come forward. Insights about

connections come forward spontaneously, and the bigger picture makes more and more sense (as would be expected for anything that is true and real). “Oh my Gosh! This memory has the exact same psychological dynamics as the stuck sessions that trigger me so intensely. The perceptions, thoughts, and emotions towards my teacher in this memory are exactly like those towards the Lord in the sessions that trigger me regarding being stuck as the facilitator. And look at this! The words (lies) I spoke in this memory are the exact same words I have spoken so many times in my life – the same words I have spoken every time I have gotten stuck and given up. And the emotions! These are the same emotions that have welled up from somewhere whenever I haven’t been able to solve a problem – these are the emotions of powerlessness and discouragement that have disabled me whenever I encountered a really difficult problem.”

My image of a little kid at a desk with a woman standing over him illustrates these points. I was focusing on the “I’m stuck in a tough session and God isn’t helping me” trigger. A vague and tenuous image of a little kid at a desk with a woman standing over him spontaneously came into my mind. When the image appeared, even though it was vague and felt, subjectively, like an imaginary image, I immediately knew that the woman was a teacher and that she was telling him he had to do his work. I knew that he was stuck – that he had tried everything he could think of but somehow he couldn’t figure out how to do what he was being asked. I also knew that the teacher was blaming him—telling him that he should try harder and that he was bad for not doing the work, but that she was not helping him figure out why he was stuck. The thoughts “I can’t do it, I can’t figure it out – I’m stuck” and “Why don’t you give me some help instead of just telling me it’s my fault?” came into my mind along with the image. And intense feelings of helplessness, discouragement, and anger came with the image, perceptions, and thoughts.

I also suddenly realized that I have *exactly* the same distorted perceptions (lies), erroneous thoughts (lies), and emotions with respect to the Lord when I am really stuck while facilitating a therapy session – when I have tried everything I can think of and have also asked the Lord for help but do not perceive any help and/or guidance in response to my prayers. I feel like the Lord is standing over my chair and telling me I have to fix it/solve the problem. I feel like I have tried everything I can think of but that there is something missing and/or stuck – that no matter how hard I try I can’t figure it out. I also feel that the Lord cannot be trusted to really take care of me – that He hasn’t given me the tools I need, that He is complaining that I’m not getting the job done, and that He’s blaming me for not getting the job done. The *exact* same thoughts come: “I can’t do it, I can’t figure it out – I’m stuck” and “Why don’t you give me some help instead of just complaining and telling me it’s my fault?” And the exact same emotions come with these perceptions and thoughts – intense helplessness and discouragement regarding my “stuckness” and intense anger at the Lord for choosing to complain and blame instead of helping me get unstuck.

The vague image of the teacher standing over the kid in the desk, the thoughts, the feelings, and the insights about connections all came in a few moments. When I started to describe what I was seeing, thinking, and feeling, I began crying intensely and continued crying for several minutes.

As Charlotte and I stayed with this work regarding my dyslexia in kindergarten and first grade, connections and insights volunteered themselves – not unfolding as the result of discussion and analysis, but coming spontaneously as I focused on the triggers, images, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions and asked Jesus for help. As we continued to test these connections and insights they made more and more sense, and the overall “big picture” fit together more and more clearly.

Furthermore, after this initial experience with the image of the little kid at a desk with a woman standing over him, this same image would often come forward spontaneously when I worked on different pieces of this package.

VIII. Not guided imagery, Not practice imagination: To do this emotional healing work I would focus on an initial target trigger. The initial target trigger could contain any component of the memory package. It might be an image from a movie about a dyslexic kid that volunteers itself as a trigger because I start churning emotionally as I watch that particular scene. It might be a difficult therapy session in which I am feeling discouraged and helpless and in which I perceive the Lord to be present but not helping. It might be just the words “I’m stuck, I can’t do it, I can’t figure it out” that volunteer themselves as the initial target trigger by coming out of my mouth 100,000 times in the past 40 years. As I would focus on whichever piece provided the initial trigger, the “missing” pieces would start to come forward spontaneously. When one or more other pieces came forward, I would focus my attention on the original trigger along with these additional pieces and then more “missing” pieces would volunteer themselves.

Note that I would *not* go looking for the missing pieces – I would focus on what I already had, and then new pieces would come forward spontaneously. Note also that I would *not* search for traumatic memories by coming up with an hypothesis and then testing it in my imagination to see whether it felt real (for example: “Picture yourself as a little kid sitting in a desk, imagine that you have dyslexia and can’t read, imagine that you have tried and tried but just can’t do it, imagine that your teacher is complaining and blaming you, imagine thinking..., imagine feeling...”) ¹¹.

IX. This pattern is common: As mentioned above, I think this overall clinical picture is very common. In addition to my own experience, these patterns and phenomena have been described and/or displayed by many of the recipients I have worked with.

X. Twenty-seven years of follow-up (as of August 2026): As already mentioned, ¹² getting stuck while facilitating emotional healing sessions and then not being able to perceive help from the Lord would trigger a number of different traumatic memories, in addition to trauma around not being able to read in kindergarten and first grade. ¹³ The good news is that all of these traumas have been mostly resolved. In places where I formerly would get triggered to a tangled morass of lies and emotions coming from all of these underlying trauma, I usually now feel faith in the Lord’s presence and goodness, and feel confidence that the situation will work out as I continue to listen to the Lord’s guidance and to use the tools He has given me. And this, of course, results in being able to think more clearly, in being able to perceive the Lord’s guidance more

¹¹ Research indicates that an *imaginary, fictitious* scenario (including visual images) will begin to feel subjectively more and more real and true if a person repeatedly imagines the fictitious scenario in a setting where it is presented as a possible/probable real scenario. Over time the person can forget the original source and come to believe the images are a real memory. This is an important reason to *not* suggest specifics or use imagination tools to “search” for traumatic memories. See “Discerning Truth in Memory” for additional discussion of these very important points (available as a free download from the “Special Subjects/Advanced Topics” section of the Resources page of www.immanuelapproach.com).

¹² See footnote #6, above.

¹³ Again, see “‘I Can’t Do It,’ ‘God Won’t Come’: Complicated Tangle with Many Different Roots” for discussion of the many other traumas that were also activated by these triggers. Available as a free download from the “Case Studies” section of the Resources page of www.immanuelapproach.com.

consistently, and in being able to help recipients navigate past their stuck places much more consistently. There are still a few splinters here and there, but the triggers around getting stuck in emotional healing sessions have been almost completely resolved as I have persisted with a *lifestyle* of regular Immanuel Approach healing work.

XI. Relationship to “I’m too stupid” case study: Some of you may be wondering how this case study relates to the “I’m too stupid” case study. My current perception is that the battering ram in the basement memory had to do with being afraid to think boldly: “It’s not safe to have a good idea and act on it” and then “I’m stupid because I never have good ideas.” These lies made it easier for me to get stuck in difficult, complicated situations by making it difficult for me to hink outside of the box and by contributing to an expectation of failure. They also affected my baseline identity and self esteem. I have been getting stuck less often since the healing described in the “I’m too stupid” case study. As described in that case study, I start with more confidence, I persevere longer, and I am able to think more creatively. My rope is longer and more flexible, and I come to the end of it less often, but there are still times when I get stuck. This case study is about the perceptions (lies), thoughts (lies), and emotions that continue to be triggered when I have tried everything I can think of and am still stuck.