



A Case Study in New Memory Access Tools: Working With My Own Two-Year-Old Separation Trauma

(©Copyright 2004 K.D.Lehman MD & C.E.T. Lehman MDiv, New 7/14/2004)

Two-year-old trauma: One of the most important events in my life occurred when I was two years old, and the story of working with the wounds and lies associated with this event provides good examples of many of the things we will be talking about in this seminar. So I am going to start by telling this story in some detail, and then we will refer back to it throughout the rest of the seminar.

Initial triggers, thoughts, and emotions:

*For as long as I can remember, I would get triggered in any situation where I felt like I needed help, I asked for the Lord to come and help me, but then didn't perceive any response. One of the most intense triggers was "stuck" ministry/therapy sessions. I would get especially triggered if I had worked long and hard and was out of ideas, the person was really miserable and having difficulty functioning, and we were running out of time.

I found a number of contributors to my "stuck session" triggers, and experienced significant improvement as I resolved these, but there was an especially miserable core that didn't move. I could always feel it, it was miserable, but it was extremely difficult to get words for what felt true in this place. I wasn't really able to even get words for the lies that felt true in this place until after additional pieces fell into place (as described below). Now I would describe the triggered thoughts as "He won't come/He doesn't want to come," referring to God. Along with these triggered thoughts I would experience a miserable morass of loneliness, rejection, and discouragement. Another part of the triggered thoughts and emotions was a deep confusion about *why* he wouldn't come/didn't want to come.

*For as long as I can remember, I have also experienced a persistent, pervasive insecurity and anxiety in relationships. The anxiety and insecurity would be especially intense in any situation where somebody was actually unhappy with me, but even in the safest and most stable relationships – with my wife, family, and closest friends – I couldn't get rid of this persistent, sneaky insecurity. No matter what I did, and in spite of much objective reassurance, I would still feel this insecurity. It was also very difficult to get words for this place, but eventually I was able to identify the thoughts as: "There's something wrong with me, and no matter what I do or how hard I try, eventually the people that are important to me will go away/send me away/cut me off/not want to be with me."

I have gotten lots of benefit with the usual Theophostic® process – focus on the initial targets, ask the Lord to guide the process, report whatever comes forward, follow the tools that come forward, and apply "trouble shooting" tools as needed – but when I tried to work on these particular targets I just went around in circles (for many months).

I couldn't figure out where this stuff was coming from – I couldn't find the root memories in spite of many hours of work.

The target triggers, thoughts, and emotions certainly didn't resolve.

I now realize that clues were present, but I didn't recognize or understand what I was seeing/experiencing.

Eventually we learned additional information about memory phenomena and stumbled onto additional memory access tools that helped the process move forward:

Resonance triggering from movies and collateral information from my family: I began noticing consistent resonance triggering with movies or books where there was a child who's mother was sick or where there was a child who lost his parents. I noticed especially that I would experience intense emotions every time I watched the scene in *The Kid* where the audience learns that Rusty's mother is sick, and then when Rusty learns she is dying. Initially I was puzzled by my intense emotional reaction because my mother had never been seriously ill and I had never lost my parents. However, as I realized how consistent, persistent, and intense this triggering was, I decided to pursue it further. I described my observations to my older brother, who commented that maybe this was connected to the time when Mom had Mono during her pregnancy with my younger sister. When I asked Mom and Dad about this, they reported that Mom had been so ill that Dad had to carry her to the bathroom, *and* that my brother and I had been sent to stay with friends in another city for three weeks because Mom was too ill to care for us. I had no conscious memory of any of this. To put this in perspective: a two-year-old will experience a three week separation from his parents in much the same way as he will experience his parents dying suddenly – they disappear suddenly, and stay away longer than any possible ability to understand or cope with their absence. By the end of that time I was totally confused about what had happened, and hopeless that they would ever come back.

Previously, when implicit memory thoughts and emotions from this two-year-old's experience came forward during Theophostic® sessions, I would go past these important clues, and then eventually shut the process down because it didn't seem like anything was happening/it didn't seem to be going anywhere (the thoughts and emotions that were coming forward didn't make sense, and I wasn't getting any explicit memory material that I recognized as "memories"). Also, when thoughts and emotions would come forward in response to the movie, I would invalidate and dismiss them: "this is ridiculous – what am I crying for? This never happened to me. I must be just pretending to be like the kid in the movie as a pathetic form of self pity/feeling sorry for myself."

This specific information from my family let me know what I was looking for, and also validated the thoughts and emotions that would come forward. This enabled me to give myself permission to stay with the process and also helped me recognize and understand the implicit memory material that was coming forward.

Implicit memory phenomena and Explicit/Implicit memory time line: Around this same time, we learned more about implicit memory, and especially about the explicit/implicit memory time line. Specifically, we learned that implicit memory is available even before birth, but that explicit memory doesn't come "online" until the hippocampus and frontal lobes myelinate – starting at ~18 months, and increasing steadily for years. This information explained why I couldn't find "memories" for the important two-year-old experience, and provided additional help in recognizing and understanding the implicit memory material that I *was* seeing/experiencing. As with the history from my family, this understanding and validation helped me stay with the implicit thoughts and emotions that were coming forward instead of dismissing them.

This additional information and these additional memory access tools resulted in some progress and some benefits, but not complete resolution:

Shortly after talking to my brother and parents about Mom's illness and our time away, I had a session with Dan. As I was talking about the movie, my triggers, and my conversations with my family, an image came into my mind of being on the phone with my parents. I was very small, standing in a room with the phone cord coming down from somewhere above me – definitely the perspective of a small child. I had learned that if you could hear somebody's voice it meant that they must be somewhere nearby – just like with hide and seek. In the image/memory, I was looking around the room, trying to figure out where the voice on the phone was coming from. I could see a sofa in the room, and thought: "Maybe that's where they are! Even a big person could hide behind the sofa."

As often happens, I didn't perceive the importance of these images and thoughts when they first came into my mind, but when I started describing them to Dan, I experienced a sudden wave of intense emotions and started sobbing. I had a similar experience when I talked to Mom on the phone describing my session with Dan, and the thoughts and images that had come to me. As Charlotte observed, 'recreating the original event – you can hear her voice on the phone but she's not here'.

After connecting with these images and emotions during this session, I was finally able to get words for the thoughts and feelings that would sometimes come when I was stuck in difficult therapy sessions, but that I had never previously been able to verbalize. This previous difficulty made sense in light of the two-year-old memory anchoring the triggered thoughts and emotions – the whole experience was pre-explicit memory, pre-verbal, and filled with confusion lies. Once I slipped into the implicit memory package from this two-year-old trauma, I had a hard time thinking clearly, I didn't have words for what was happening, and I couldn't figure out where it was coming from because I didn't get (explicit) "memories".

Another developmental point is that at two years old I had no understanding of realistic limitations for my parents. At two years old, we perceive our parents to be omnipotent. My thoughts and feelings in these memories were that my parents could come to me if they wanted to (being omnipotent), but that they were choosing not to. These were *exactly* the thoughts and feelings I would have towards the Lord – He could come if He wanted to, but He is choosing to not come for some mysterious reason.

During the past year, we stumbled onto several "special" memory access/ministry tools. We call them "special" because they are unusually effective and because they require unusual ministry/relationship/community situations.

"Crock pot Theophostic®" with spouse and/or close friend: After last year's presentation on transparency, honesty, vulnerability, and humility as spiritual disciplines, Charlotte and I decided to experiment with trying to practice these every day in our relationship with each other. By practicing over time, we learned to be more aware of the thoughts, images, and emotions that came into our minds during any time we were together, and to simply report/describe this material as one would in a Theophostic® session – even if it is vulnerable, humbling, painful, or doesn't "make sense" yet. We have named the result "crock pot Theophostic®" because it looks like an extended Theophostic® session on low heat. The result has been similar to watering the ground each day for a couple weeks before plowing. Stuff I had not been able to get to with direct effort in time-limited ministry sessions would soften and

come to the surface with this slow-cook/soak&soften method, with little pieces of memory, insight, and healing coming forward periodically as Charlotte and I continued to do this over months. This slow cook/soak&soften method also caused difficult healing targets to be much easier to work with when we would have more focused emotional healing sessions.

Talking about the traumatic memories with people who were a part of the original memories: I stumbled into this one this spring when my older brother visited for a weekend. One evening, among other things, we were talking about my healing journey with this two-year-old separation experience. As Charlotte and I shared about my healing journey regarding these events, he would occasionally repeat what he had been saying since I first spoke with him about Mom being sick: "I can remember lots of details about being at the Wetzel's, but I can't remember you being there at all." At the end of this evening of good fellowship he went to get ready for bed, and then came back five minutes later. He was crying as he said "it all just came back to me. I can remember you looking up at me and asking, over and over, 'where's Mom?' I kept trying to explain, but you didn't understand, and just kept asking 'where's Mom?' I tried to help, but I didn't know what to do." As he connected with, and talked about his memories, I also connected with more thoughts, emotions, and perceptual memory fragments (brief visual images of looking up at him and asking 'where's Mom'). We were in the ideal situation, where we could pray for healing as thoughts, images, and emotions came forward. We prayed with him, and he got some good healing. Charlotte prayed with me, and I got some good healing.

Several weeks later, thoughts about John's visit came into my mind in one of my prayer sessions with Dan. As I began talking about the evening with John, a couple new visual images, and a new wave of thoughts, emotions, and insights came forward, and I got some more good healing.

My talking with him about my experience enabled him to access important memories that had been buried for 40+ years, and then him talking about his memories that were coming forward helped me access more of my images, thoughts, and emotions. We have gone back and forth in this way several times now.

Talking directly about triggered thoughts and emotions to the person who is the focus of the triggering, in the present: I stumbled into this one during a conversation with Charlotte about my anxiety regarding making her an anniversary card. I was triggered, and I could tell that my emotions would connect much more intensely if I made eye contact and expressed my insecurity directly to her (for example, "I'm afraid you will be disappointed and unhappy with me"), as opposed to looking away from her eyes and talking about my anxiety more indirectly. I decided to chose the path of more vulnerability and intensity, and immediately connected with emotions and tears as I did this. I perceived these same dynamics on several other occasions, and I connected with emotions and tears each time I chose to make eye contact and talk directly to Charlotte about the thoughts and emotions that were being triggered. I received especially valuable moments of healing in the situations where we were able to pray together for healing as all of this happened.

Trying this with Charlotte and Dan has been especially effective in helping me connect with my relationship anxiety and insecurity, and information we have recently learned about attachment wounds helped me to recognize that the thoughts and emotions that were coming forward were implicit memories of attachment trauma from the two- year-old separation experience. As with the information about implicit memory, the new understanding about attachment wounds helped me to understand, validate, and stay with the process as opposed to dismissing content I

didn't understand and thereby shutting the process down prematurely.

These new, "special" memory access/ministry tools, and also the new understanding regarding attachment wounds, resulted in new important steps forward in my healing.

Fruit has been steadily unfolding as I continue to work with the wounds and lies associated with this two-year-old separation trauma:

Steadily improving ability to stay with difficult therapy/ministry sessions: In the past, when these wounds and lies got intensely triggered in difficult therapy/ministry sessions, I would slip more and more into the ego state of a miserable, confused, lonely, deeply discouraged two-year-old who couldn't figure out why his parents wouldn't come. I would try to act normal and care for the person receiving ministry as best I could, while internally I would be waiting miserably for the end of the session and the end of the day – wishing I could go to bed and not have to wake up in the morning.¹ Big surprise: I was not effective in trouble-shooting complex therapy sessions when I was being flooded with the thoughts and emotions of a confused, lonely, discouraged, overwhelmed two-year-old.

As would be expected, my ability to stay with difficult therapy/ministry sessions has steadily improved as I have worked on these wounds and lies.

Impact on relationship with the Lord: Deep expectation of being disappointed by the Lord. Deep expectation that He wouldn't come when I called, that He wouldn't come when I really needed Him. I expected to be disappointed and that He would not come. I can feel a difference in my spontaneous emotional response whenever I ask the Lord for anything. I realize that He may or may not give me what I ask for, but I don't have that sense that He doesn't *want* to come, that He doesn't *want* to answer my prayers. I can feel a hopefulness that He may actually answer my prayers combined with the awareness that He may not answer them in the way I wish/expect. In the past (**when triggered) this place would often be triggered simply by asking the Lord for help, by asking the Lord to come. Sometimes not, but often I would feel a deep *expectation* that He would disappoint me.

Decreasing anxiety and insecurity in relationships: I can feel this especially with Charlotte and Dan, my closest friends, but also in many other contexts, such as in our mentoring groups, training events such as this one, or any other setting where I have felt insecurity in the past regarding whether people would be happy with me/want to be with me.

This material is obviously not fully resolved, as you can tell from the emotions that connect while I am talking about this here. An interesting observation that both Charlotte and I have made is that one of the most effective tools for helping me to access emotions from these memories is to talk about this material in front of a group (we still don't understand this one).

Again, we are offering this story as a data point. In my own experience, the basic, usual Theophos-

¹ It's actually quite amazing that my managing, coping defenses could maintain so much of my adult brain simultaneously as this was happening. I'm sure people could tell that something was wrong – I'm sure I looked and felt tired and maybe also discouraged, but I still presented as a competent psychiatrist and could care for all the logical, medical, medication concerns. My emotional, spiritual discernment was totally disrupted with respect to doing Theophostic®-based therapy, but I could still do medical psychiatry.

tic® process and techniques helped, but did not seem able to completely resolve these important issues. In my own experience, it was very helpful to use additional memory access and ministry tools, and to learn additional information about memory and developmental phenomena. Looking back at my own story, I can see ways that I could have used the usual Theophostic® process and techniques more effectively. With more discernment and guidance from the Holy Spirit, I may have been able to get through without these additional tools and this additional understanding. The more we can follow the Holy Spirit, the less we need other resources. The point we want to make here is that in the real world – in my own experience, where my woundedness hindered my ability to follow the Lord’s guidance more effectively – other tools and information proved to be very helpful.