



Getting To The Core

Discovering God's Plan For Healthy Relating

By Dr. David Hawkins

INTRODUCTION

God designed us for relationships from the very beginning. First and foremost, he designed us to be in relationship with Himself, and it is within the context of human relationships that His image is most powerfully reflected in us. It is no accident that we find these words in the early pages of Scripture: "It is not good for the man be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

Given the number of stories and amount of instruction pertaining to relationships throughout Scripture, it's clear that God knew we would need a great amount of wisdom to navigate how to live in community with one another. In fact, when Jesus was asked what the two greatest commandments were, His response was to love God and love one another (Matthew 22:37-39). It sounds so simple, but as we experience pain and hurt in life, our relationships often become broken, and we struggle to love each other well.

We usually can sense when things are not right in our relationships. God created us with an innate need to live in authenticity, intimacy, vulnerability and trust with Him and with others. We were designed with a desire for whole and healthy relationships. But when we encounter trauma and emotional challenges, our interactions become anything but healthy. We try to protect ourselves, like a person in a suit of armor readying for attack. Unfortunately, the armor we put on to shield ourselves actually weighs us down and prevents us from responding to the world in a healthy way. In our attempt to protect our emotions, we view life and relationships through a lens of fear and apprehension.

But what if you could respond to daily relational challenges with confidence and resilience? What if your feelings served to offer you insight into how to best address every situation that arose in your life? What if you could see each obstacle clearly, could understand the issues at hand and had a toolbox of powerful responses to communicate effectively?

I have good news. There IS a better way to respond to the challenges you face in life and experience more fulfilling relationships. We call that process Getting To The Core.

Getting To The Core is a model for dealing effectively with your inner emotions and subsequent behavior. As you learn to function from your Core Self—that part of ourselves designed to assess circumstances with clarity and spontaneity—you become able to respond appropriately and effectively to every situation. The Getting To The Core Model offers you a way to understand what you are thinking, what you are feeling, and provides you with a path to respond effectively to your Self and to others. It is a path of peace and integrated wholeness, and you are never too old to learn it!

Join me in the following pages as I offer you a way to experience wholeness, healing and healthy relating as God designed.

GETTING TO THE CORE

Getting To The Core may sound a bit more intimidating than it really is. Getting To The Core is nothing more than learning to be fully tuned in to your thoughts and feelings, and learning to make healthy choices from that awareness. And as a result, you gain the ability to relate effectively to your Self and to others.

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in this process. In order to experience healthy relationships and break our old patterns of relating, we must be fully submitted to God and His Spirit working in us. On our own, our default is often selfishness, jealousy, and anger. But the fruit of the Holy Spirit produces “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). We must cooperate with Him in order for our relationships to change as we learn more about our Core Self.

So, let's learn more about what Core Self functioning looks like—and what it doesn't look like.

Late for Dinner

When we encounter hurt or disappointment within a relationship, our knee jerk reaction is often a “fight or flight” mentality that debilitates the relationship further. This leads to great pain and distance within the relationship. I'd like to offer you a scenario that will highlight what I am talking about.

Let's imagine that I plan a special dinner for my wife, Christie. I've made all of the preparations and I'm excited about serving her a grilled salmon dinner, with fresh cut green beans and garlic-mashed potatoes. I've gone all out and have even created a beautiful tablescape complete with candles. She had told me that she would be home at 5:30, so the scene is set and I'm eagerly awaiting her arrival.

I watch the clock tick past 5:30 and then 6:00, and Christie is still not home. I decide to call her, but she doesn't answer her phone so I leave a message. I wonder if she has simply forgotten that I'd be making dinner or if something has happened to her. But mostly I feel annoyed and neglected.

At approximately 6:15 I decide to call again, but again there is no answer on her phone. I leave another message, and this time I'm more curt and abrupt. The food is cold and I feel hurt and angry.

At 6:30 she walks in the door, acting as if nothing is wrong. I'm flooded with emotion and thoughts about how to handle the situation. I rehearse asking her why she is late, but also want to tell her how upset I am at her insensitivity. I know that I should ask her how she is, but I'm flooded with my own anger.

I haven't yet learned about Core Self Integration, and I'm not only overwhelmed with my anger, but, I also have residual feelings from when she has been late before, and from my personal past of being rejected and hurt by others.

"Where have you been?" I ask accusatorily. "I expected you an hour ago. I can't believe you're this late. I made a special dinner for us!"

"The traffic was horrible out there," she says, glancing over at the dining table. "I completely forgot about the dinner."

"Why didn't you answer your phone?" I ask, my irritation showing.

"You know me," she said. "I don't always have my phone handy, especially when I'm driving. I'm sorry I forgot about dinner, but you could at least be sensitive to my challenges with traffic."

"Challenges with traffic?" I mutter. "I've worked hard for over an hour to make a nice dinner. But, forget it. It's cold now."

I storm out of the room as we settle in for a very tense evening.

Does this scene sound familiar? What happened here and how do we handle the situation more effectively next time?

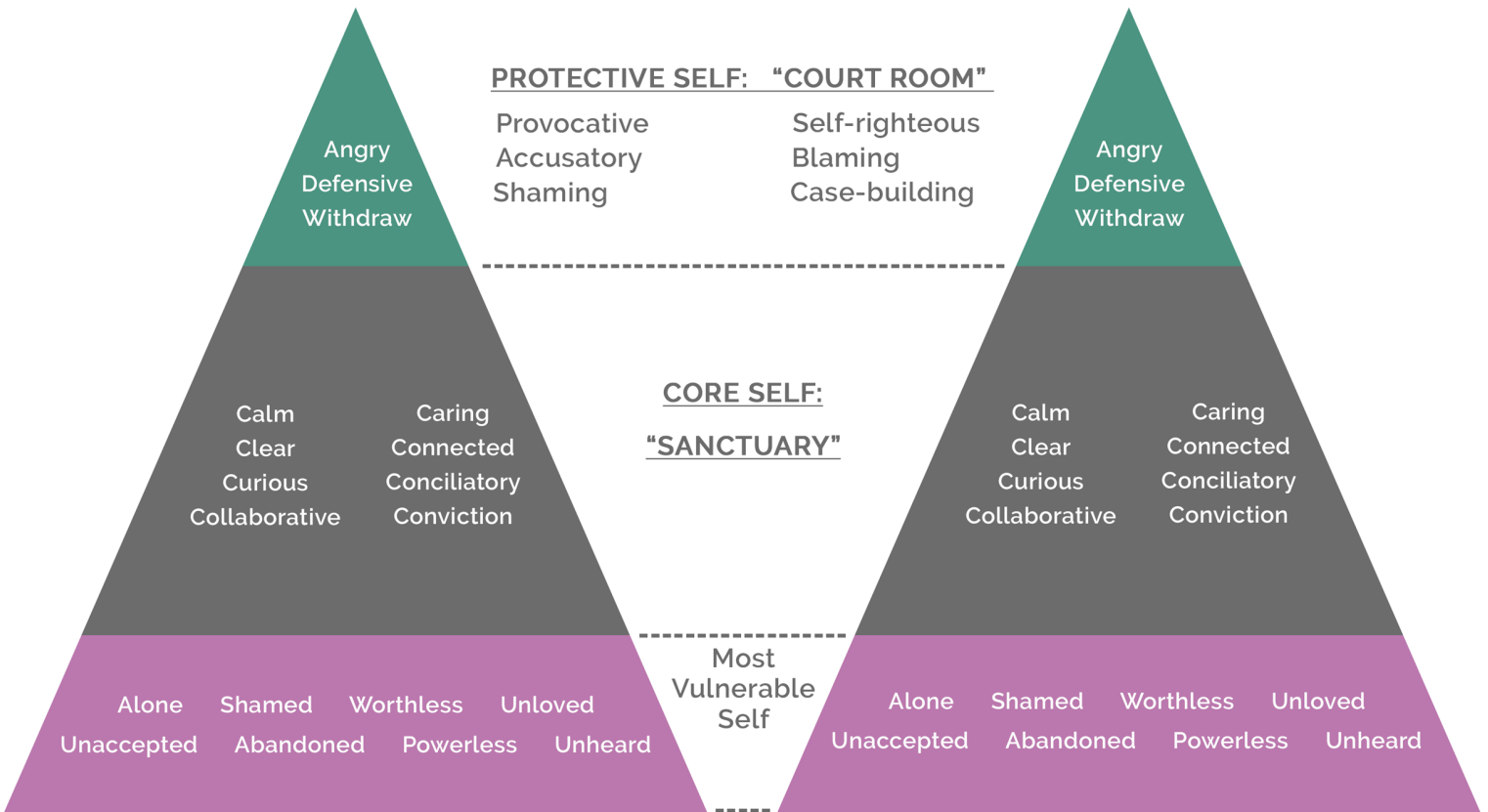
Dinner Debriefing

This scene is played out by millions of people every day. Two different people, both with their own feelings and needs, are unable to hear or be emotionally available to the other because they are overwhelmed by their own feelings and mindset. Studies show that it takes only minutes for our brains to shift into "fight or flight," but it can take hours to calm down.

Take a moment to review the Core Self Handout and then we'll review exactly what happened and why.

CORE SELF HANDOUT

Emotions are contagious!



As you look at the Core Self Handout, you'll notice that both Christie and I operated from our Protective Self. Failing to "hold" my feelings of hurt and abandonment, I became angry (always a secondary emotion), accusatory, shaming and blaming. Because "emotions are contagious," she functioned from her Protective Self as well, defending herself and becoming accusatory in response.

In short, we had a fight!

She felt misunderstood and hurt in response to my attack. I felt hurt and abandoned because she was seemingly insensitive to the work I had put into making a special meal for us. Neither of us talked about what we were really feeling, instead we opted to attack and defend ourselves. We functioned from what I call "The Courtroom," where we battled and both lost an opportunity to stay connected.

We had a fight that could have been avoided, and as you learn more you will be able to not only avert fights, but experience true connection and intimacy.

FIGHTING, FLIGHTING, FREEZING OR FLOW

Rather than responding to stress with confidence and creativity, most of us rely on dysfunctional patterns of relating. Let's look a bit closer at how many of us respond to stressful situations. Most of us respond in one of three destructive ways:

1. *Fighting*: When we function in our Protective Self we respond to the person by whom we feel hurt with aggression. We throw angry words at them and accuse them of intentionally hurting us. We shame, blame and argue with anyone threatening us.
2. *Flighting*: Instead of fighting, many choose to flee the situation, which is equally destructive. We run from the stressful circumstances in order to avoid conflict, telling ourselves that this is preferable to fighting—which is actually not likely to be the case. Issues are avoided, leaving elephants in the room which will cause even more problems down the road.
3. *Freezing*: Finally, there are those of us who “go numb.” We retreat inwardly so that we can avoid a shaming lecture. We may create an inner dialogue that goes something like this: “I can't wait until they quit yelling at me.”

Thankfully, there is another option: you can function in flow with everyone in your world. When you are in flow you are centered, you are submitted to the Holy Spirit, and you understand and are in control of your emotions. This gives you the ability to hear others without feeling threatened by what they say and do. We'll talk more about what flow looks like in a bit.

In order for you to give up these three destructive patterns, you must learn a better way of relating. Before we learn that way, let's familiarize ourselves with the parts of our personality that will be instrumental in the change process.

CORE SELF FUNCTIONING

As you review the Core Self Handout you'll notice three aspects to the Self:

- 1. *The Protective Self:*** This primitive part of our personality is best suited for war, not intimate relating. This part of our brain signals when we are experiencing extreme danger. Unfortunately, we often respond to everyday stressors as if they were "life and death" situations. Feeling threatened, we defend ourselves, often hooking the Protective Self of the other person. Or we become accusatory and threatening towards others. We build our case in order to overpower others, but then end up feeling threatened and threaten back.
- 2. *The Core Self:*** This part of our personality, empowered by the Holy Spirit, responds effectively to situations, by utilizing such skills as calmness, clarity, compassion, creativity and concessions, leading to CONNECTION. From our Core Self, we can remind ourselves that we are safe, and we are able to accurately and effectively process demands made upon us. We can problem-solve, asserting ourselves in a healthy way so that we improve our chances of getting what we need. With practice we can even notice the other person acting in a threatening or accusatory manner and choose not to join the fight. What we simply cannot get from others we can learn to get through ourselves and through God.
- 3. *The Most Vulnerable Self:*** Our Most Vulnerable Self is that part of us capable of relating in the most intimate way—"into me see," leading to intimacy. We are transparent, humble and open with others. When our Most Vulnerable Self influences our Core Self, we are able to understand our feelings, process them, and make healthy decisions based upon them. We can think of E-motion as "energy in motion," something valuable that informs us about what we need in any particular situation. We may choose to stay in the conversation with the other person or may choose to temporarily withdraw to tend to our feelings.

As we better understand these three aspects of our Self, we can move into a place of Cohesive Functioning. We can learn to sit with our feelings, responding effectively to today in a "real time" manner. We can begin to listen to our feelings, and understand what that e-motion, or "energy in motion" is telling us. We do not continue to overreact to situations, but rather we listen to others, listen to God, relate with ease and take good care of our Self. Life is good.

EXILED FEELINGS

Sadly, most of us have learned to push away our feelings long ago. You may have learned as a child that "it's not safe to cry." Perhaps no one was there to listen to your pain and so you exiled your more vulnerable feelings of hurt, sadness and fear. Over the years you may have hidden your pain and replaced sadness, fear and hurt with more "acceptable" feelings, such as anger and frustration. These feelings, however, disconnect us from others and are not our truest feelings.

Psychologists have discovered what Scripture has long told us: anger is a disconnecting emotion, even if it is a legitimate emotion. Scripture tells us to "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger." (Ephesians 4: 31) We are told to guard our tongue, for it is like a spark that sets a forest ablaze. Who of us haven't experienced that?

Anger is a common response for most of us. It is like a "go to" emotion, but really it is not an emotion at all—it is a defensive response, and it's like using a shotgun to kill a fly. Anger protects us, but in the most aggressive manner. Anger covers our more vulnerable feelings. Anger disconnects, pushes people away, and stops us from knowing what is truly happening within us. Anger works to exile our more vulnerable feelings, where we can connect and live in harmony and closeness with others.

Many of us have attempted to live up to the lie of "Stick and stones may hurt my bones but words will never hurt me." Because of this we develop a false self and we live a lie. We withdraw in the face of hurt. We angrily strike out against anyone who hurts our feelings. We freeze when someone violates our boundaries.

As you look at the Core Self Diagram, we can see that the Most Vulnerable Self is able to have feelings and relate to others in a transparent and honest way. By contrast, the Protective Self vows never to let anyone in. When we function with our Protective Self directing our lives, we constantly push away vulnerable feelings, and soon this Most Vulnerable aspect of our Self is essentially immobilized.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

But of course, your feelings are not gone. They are not frozen! Fleeing and fighting are symptoms that your feelings are alive and un-well! Using these coping mechanisms help us do just that—cope. They will not help us to thrive.

Does that surprise you? We have feelings all the time! We feel loss everyday as we experience rejection, abandonment and hurt. Our feelings are bruised, often unintentionally. We are wounded by people who themselves have experienced hurt. As the saying goes: "Hurting people hurt people."

Tragically, most of us haven't learned to truly sit with our own feelings, let alone the feelings of others. In the above scene I failed to sit with Christie's feelings of hurt and rejection and she failed to sit with my feelings of hurt and abandonment. The result: a fight. A cold, hard, miserable fight. Instead of processing our feelings with understanding and making healthy choices, we chose to act out our feelings.

Consider some of the many ways we defensively act out feelings and create chaos and confusion for others:

- Pouting—sulking and withdrawing emotionally
- Blame-shifting—turning the problem onto the other person
- Playing the Victim—telling the other person that YOU are the one who was wronged, not them
- Aggression—making nasty, hurtful comments
- Withdrawing—completely leaving the scene and refusing to talk
- Passive-Aggression—getting 'even' by avoiding the other, refusing to help, giving the 'silent treatment'
- Stonewalling—withdrawing into prolonged silence
- Powering Over—pushing our agenda over the best wishes of another
- Forgetting—repeatedly acting in ways, but disavowing memory for, actions that have been expressly pointed out as harmful
- Deflection—shifting the focus off our behavior

These are just a few of the ways that we attempt to make others be responsible for our pain. What occurs, however, is that we remain disconnected from our Most Vulnerable Self and create even more interpersonal turmoil.

In the space below write out the ways you act out your emotional pain. Remember that any ONE of these dysfunctional patterns of dealing with our pain creates massive chaos in our relationships and fails to effectively solve problems or our pain. Note the patterns you use to deal with your emotional pain and the impact this acting out has on you and those in your life.

MANAGING OUR EMOTIONS: FLOW

Relating in the healthy way that God intends requires managing our emotions and expressing our needs in a way that honors others and ourselves. Does this task sound daunting? It can be, at first. But after a while, cultivating your Core Self Functioning becomes second nature. You can learn to listen to your Most Vulnerable Self just as you learn to listen to the Most Vulnerable Self of your mate. You can feel confident that, whatever the situation, you can respond from a calm, clear and confident place—being in flow.

The effect is beautiful!

As you become more aware of what you are feeling in any given situation, and as you determine your true needs, you can go about getting the majority of your needs met—first and foremost from God and yourself and secondarily, from your mate. You can get them met by asking in clear, concise, conscientious ways. You can also help your mate function more effectively by listening for your hidden emotions and the hidden emotions of your mate.

When you are centered and clear you will not be threatening, and most often will not be perceived as threatening. You will not feel threatened, and subsequently you will be able to think clearly and effectively. Others will want to be near to you and will want to help you get your needs met.

We feel much quicker than we think, and our brains become activated very quickly. Feeling threatened, and unaware of how to calm ourselves, we shift easily back into fight, flight, freeze mode—but that can become a thing of the past. You can move quickly into flow where you manage your emotional reaction and decide how you want to respond.

Sound too good to be true? It's not. Every response is a learned behavior. Now is the time to unlearn the poor responses and replace them with healthy, relationship-building behavior.

As you are centered and clear you will accurately discern who is most able to “be with you emotionally.” Most will be able to be with you and will not only help you, but will allow you to help them.

Late for Dinner Redux

Let's revisit the dinner scene from earlier, though this time let's imagine two people who have learned about their Protective, Core and Most Vulnerable Self.

Again, let's imagine Christie is significantly late for a special dinner I have prepared for us. This time, however, let's imagine that in the time it has taken her to get home I effectively process my hurt, sadness and fear.

As she walks in the door I greet her warmly and give her time to put her things down and settle in.

"Did you remember our dinner date tonight, Babe?" I ask. "I've been worried about you."

"Oh my goodness!" she exclaims. "No, I got busy at work and completely forgot about it. I'm so sorry. You must feel terrible."

"Well," I continue. "I have been feeling a bit neglected. I also tried to call you because I was worried about you."

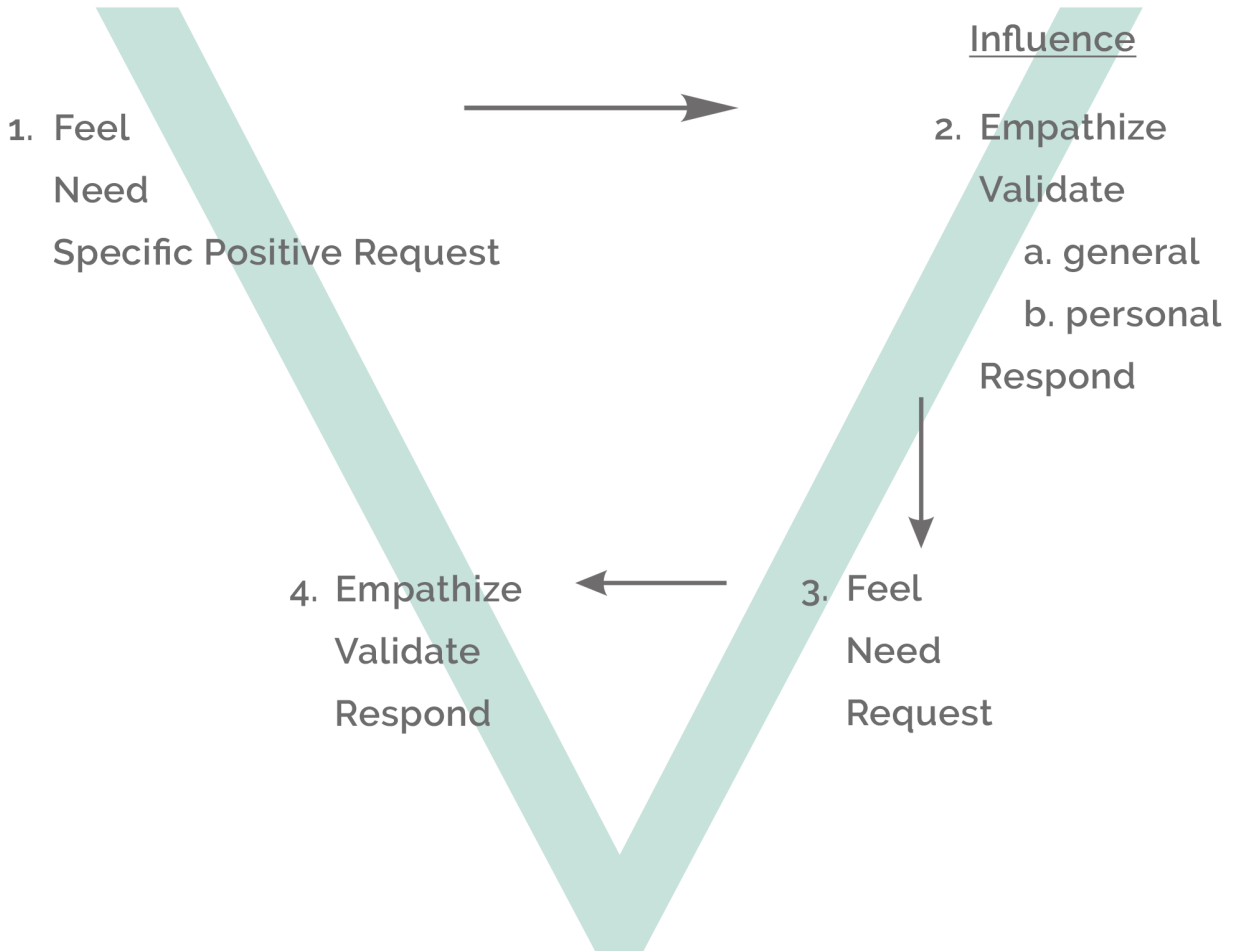
"I left my phone in my purse," she said. "Again, I'm so sorry. You have gone to a lot of trouble and I'm sorry for hurting your feelings. Can I do anything to help you heat up the meal? I'd still love to have dinner with you."

"Sure," I say. "Let's work together and make lemonade out of lemons."

Now, you may be saying to yourself that this kind of language is impossible. Indeed, if you are unfamiliar with sharing feelings, drifting instead to fighting, flighting or freezing, learning instead to share in flow, your first attempts are likely to feel very awkward. But by sticking with it, you can learn to communicate effectively, averting conflict and making healthy connections. Your relationship will begin to thrive in the ways that God designed it to.

Agree on the topic.

“Can I talk with you?” or “Can you be with me?”



When defensive, slow down or call “Time out!”

“If *Voltage*, use the *V* or *Vault*.”

Negotiate / Brainstorm

Sacred Agreements

Accountability

3 A's: Apologize, Acept Responsibility, Make Amend

A FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON

As I have explained, for many reasons when upset we have a hard time holding onto our feelings. Physiologically triggered, we spew out raw, unrestrained emotion, which can feel to others like we are breathing out fire. And naturally, the recipient of the “fire” becomes frightened.

“She’s fired up.”

“He’s got a short fuse and explodes.”

While it is never fun to sit with someone who has failed to “hold” their feelings, we don’t have to respond to fire with fire. As tempting as it is to join the fray, we CAN respond differently.

Scripture implores us: “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” (1 Peter 3: 9) We are told to “forgive others, just as Christ has forgiven you.” (Colossians 3: 13)

Still, this is easier said than done. But what if you could learn to look beyond the fire-breathing dragon, and see a person who is wounded instead? How might you respond to a wounded animal that is cowering yet ready to strike? I suppose you might have compassion and speak with gentleness.

As you stay centered, you can imagine what feelings might be prompting this person to “breathe fire.” You’re getting the brunt of their fire because of what they’re feeling. They are feeling hurt—and again, “hurting people hurt people.”

A little compassion in these situations goes a long way. Your words of comfort and understanding will typically help someone calm down. Notice in *The Late Dinner Redux* that Christie empathizes with me. Her empathy and understanding calm me down and save the evening. Instead of getting defensive, she disarms me with her understanding. She doesn’t get sticky by reacting defensively. Rather, she takes responsibility for her error, responds in a soothing way and the evening—and relationship—are saved.

MOVING BEYOND THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT WITH BOUNDARIES

People settle down. We must remember that, "This too shall pass." When the emotional fire is pouring out, listen for what you need to learn from it, but remind yourself that you will move beyond this moment.

We can, metaphorically, build a moat around our heart. We can avoid getting "hooked" by the emotion of our mate. We can stand back and listen for the underlying emotion that is hidden by Protective Self anger. In fact, if you practice this, you'll be able to identify the underlying hurt, sadness, fear and other feelings being expressed indirectly by the "fire-breathing dragon."

But we cannot learn how to function from our Core Self without having healthy boundaries. Boundaries are those mental "fences" we erect that indicate to others what we will tolerate and what we will not tolerate. Boundaries are also an important way for us to be good stewards of all aspects of our lives, allowing us to honor God, ourselves and others.

Discussions about boundaries, when they have been absent, are likely to be awkward. No one wants to hear the word "No." Few people want to hear that their mate will no longer tolerate certain behaviors, or that there are going to be repercussions for their actions.

What do boundaries in a relationship look like? Consider the following, typical boundaries in healthy relationships:

- "I'd be happy to listen to you if you spoke with gentleness."
- "I'm having a hard time staying with you right now given how angry you seem."
- "I'm feeling overwhelmed and am going to need to take a break for a few minutes."
- "I can listen to you when I feel respected."
- "Could you say that a bit softer?"
- "I am happy to listen to you as long as I feel safe. If I feel unsafe, I will have to step away from this discussion."
- "I cannot tolerate your angry outbursts. If you were to continue to yell at me, I'm will insist that you get professional help to learn to communicate without anger."
- "I will continue to be your friend as long as I feel respected."
- "I will talk this problem out with you as long as I can remain calm, clear and centered with you."

Notice that each of these statements pertain primarily with me, and very little about you. I am letting you know how I will conduct myself, knowing that I cannot manage you. I want you to know how I plan to engage and interact with you so that you can make good decisions about how you choose to relate to me.

Please understand that the first time your mate hears these words he or she may be shocked. They may continue to bluster in spite of your efforts to hear their truest, underlying feelings. However, with practice they can learn to share in more effective ways.

In each situation, it is critical that I remain clear, calm, consistent, and that I speak with conviction, outlining consequences if my boundaries are violated. A boundary without consequences is a hope, wish or threat, and will likely not be taken seriously. Imagine the anxious mother who repeatedly threatens her child with dire consequences if he or she continues to misbehave, but rarely follows through. The child recognizes the insincerity in her words and acts the way he or she chooses to act.

The same could be said about us as adults if we threaten and threaten and threaten. Notice the impact on the mate who repeatedly says, "I won't put up with this," but then does.

We teach people how to treat us. We are the ones who dictate how a relationship is likely to progress or regress. We set the tone for how people will treat us, and so if we are repeatedly victimized, we must—with courage—look in the mirror and determine if we are voicing a clear, concise, convicting message with consequences that do not reward bad behavior.

A word of caution is in order, however. We dare not consistently tolerate angry, hurtful words. To enable this kind of interaction is to invite emotional abuse—this is intolerable. Learning to disarm and detach from raw emotion is a strategy that must be used wisely. If this strategy is not working and a pattern of abuse has developed, seek outside help from a therapist.

We cannot grow or thrive in a world that is continuously threatening, and so it is critically important that we develop boundaries to keep us safe and cultivate trust. What do you need from others in your world to feel safe? How is your safety threatened and what do you need to do to ensure you are safe to be who you are, feel what you feel and think what you think? Safety and trust are not optional—they are imperative for healthy relationships.

In the space below, write out boundaries you have established in your primary relationships. How have you insisted upon being treated and what consequence have you set in place to firm up your boundaries?

HEALING TRAUMA

It is often easy to be "triggered" by others because of our own unhealed trauma. Some indications of unhealed trauma are symptoms such as overreacting to situations, being overly sensitive, responding out of fear, avoiding situations, constant apprehension and uneasiness, or responding in an aggressive or submissive manner."

Fortunately, you can heal from trauma. You can actually embrace troubling situations and learn from them. I call this process going deep. You can step back from your fears and gently ask yourself, "What is it about the current situation that is so frightening? What is God's truth about this situation? What do I need to give to myself or get from this other person or from God that would help me feel safe?"

You cannot avoid troubling situations, for in doing so you give these people and situations power over you. While I'm certainly not recommending befriending those who harm you emotionally, I'm encouraging you to act within your confident Core Self and make choices from this place.

I want to also recommend a powerful experience called Lifespan Integration, proven to help people heal from trauma. This innovative process, in tandem with a process called Timeline Healing, has been shown to heal trauma. Together with "talk therapy," you can move beyond old hurts and troubling memories and into your confident, creative, collaborative Core Self.

Anyone interested in learning more about Lifespan Integration and Timeline Healing is encouraged to ask one of our trained therapists about this powerful program.

THE THIRD EYE

Another powerful method of cultivating your Core Self is something we call watching with our Third Eye. Because we feel faster than we think, and because stressful situations come at us faster than we can normally prepare, it's wise to be ready for anything. We must be trained, having a healthy response to stress rehearsed so that we don't shift into fight, flight or freeze mode, but are always ready to respond from flow.

The key here is to watch for the SHIFT. Pay attention to what makes you feel threatened and emotionally shifts you into that Protective Self which either reacts harshly or retreats behind a wall. To practice, watch how you interact in your primary relationships. Note when and how you shift from your Core Self to your Protective Self - how you move from being clear, calm and compassionate to argumentative, defensive or accusatory. Notice the change in your body. Feel the difference.

Then, as you notice the shift, ask again those powerful questions:

- What is bothering me?
- Why am I feeling so threatened?
- What am I afraid will happen to me?
- How might I respond more effectively?

There is power in noticing what is happening within you, and between you and your significant others. There is power in knowing what is bothering you and making choices to act more effectively. Keep track of the patterns and act in new, more effective ways.

DO-OVERS: MAKING MISTAKES YOUR FRIEND

You will never be perfect at Core Self Functioning. We make mistakes every day, but we can learn from them. Every challenging situation is an opportunity to consider what bothers you, why and what you can do differently.

Let me tell you of a recent situation in my life.

My wife, Christie was taking classes in Seattle. Her classes ended in the evening and she began socializing with her classmates after class for a short time. I felt threatened, wondering if she would always be faithful to me. In the past I have either ignored my anxiety, allowing it to build internally or made a critical comment (Protective Self).

I decided to do things differently. I felt the shift take place within me and was tempted to say something critical to her. However, I listened to myself, noted the anxiety I was feeling, and decided instead to simply talk to her about my anxiety. I spoke to her in a clear, calm and compassionate way. I owned the problem as mine and asked for her help. I asked if she would mind limiting how much time she spent socializing and we agreed on a time she felt comfortable in coming home. Problem solved.

In this scene I was able to be my own Protector but also was able to ask Christie if she could help me. She was able to be my Secondary Protector. Imagine what can take place in a relationship where both people are able to care for themselves and for each other.

ME, MYSELF AND I

Before we can relate effectively to anyone else we must, of course, have a healthy relationship to our Self. Much has been written about this but very few of us are really mindful about being and staying healthy.

Here are a few of the basic steps to being healthy and staying in your Core Self:

- *Know what I feel.* Yes, you must have ready access to your feelings and be able to discern what your feelings are telling you. Loneliness, for example, tells us we need companionship. Fear tells us we need safety. Are you able to access and care for your feelings?
- *Know what I think.* You must be able to listen to your feelings and connect them to your thoughts. What is it I'm thinking? How am I viewing the world and is it healthy? Are my thoughts in alignment with what God has to say about this? Am I seeing things clearly and am I able to make a plan for how to move forward?
- *Know my needs.* Am I able to articulate what I need? Can I develop a plan for knowing my needs and set out to have them appropriately met by God, myself or others? Are my needs realistic and appropriate?
- *Know my boundaries.* How are you doing at setting and managing your boundaries? Since we teach people how to treat us, we must ensure that we are giving others very clear messages about our needs. We must continuously reinforce our boundaries to keep us safe and healthy.

In the final analyses, we can only fully depend on God and ourselves. This doesn't mean we have to take on a negative mindset about this, but we must be realistic. People will let us down. They will leave us, hurt us and fail us in some way. We must be prepared for this and ensure that we are seeing people realistically, guarding our expectations and ensuring that we're not trying to get something from others that we must get from God or ourselves.

Are you caring well for your Self? How much are you including God in the process, and are you seeking Him for His wisdom for your circumstances?

HEALING WITHIN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

It has been said that we would have no animosity for others if we truly understood them. I also believe this is true for how we view ourselves. In other words, as I empathize with my mate I am able to truly love her. As I empathize with myself, I'm able to truly love myself.

Consider the emotional power of being truly known and accepted. Consider the impact of someone taking the time to know what you are feeling, considering your feelings, and expressing a sincere desire to help you meet your needs.

No longer enemies, you are "in this together to work things out." No longer feeling a need to erect walls, you are willing and able to be transparent with others. You are learning how to tend to your wounds and subsequently are able to tend to the wounds of your mate.

God created us to be in relationship and wants us to relate to each other in healthy, effective ways. We know this for several reasons.

First, God is relational. He sent His son, Jesus to walk this Earth and become friends to us. He can still be known today and can be a friend to us in our journey.

Second, God has given us a mate to journey with us. In the Creation story we read how God created us to have a "helpmate" to not only be a friend but also to help us in our struggles. He tells us that we have partners who can journey with us as friends and helpers.

Finally, God has given us the opportunity to heal in marriage. Yes, marriage can be an incredible place where we can grow up. We bring "emotional baggage" into our marriage, but we can grow beyond our traumas, emotional struggles and immaturity. We can learn to function in a healthy and effective way.

You may argue with me that your marriage is the place where your wounds are created, not healed. Maybe so. But I still suggest to you that with an understanding of Core Self Functioning, you can learn from every difficult encounter with your mate. You can begin to notice what is happening, and you can make healthier choices. "It takes two to tango and tangle." If you step out of the difficult dance, you will allow God to begin a healing process.

Not only can we heal in our marriage, but we can also help our mate to heal. Yes, it is incredible. By listening for the places where our mate is triggered, and by being gentle with them and responding to what they are trying to say (ineffectively), we can assist them in getting what they need. We can help care for them while encouraging them to care for themselves more effectively.

HEALTHY RELATING: STAYING IN THE CORE!

While we may have spent a lifetime developing wounds and scars, we can shed all of that and learn to live and love well as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us. Have I convinced you that it is possible to relate effectively? Have you caught the vision that healthy relating is not dependent on being with the perfect mate, being free from all past trauma or living in some fairy tale? No, healthy relating is about being aware—noticing what you are feeling, why you are feeling it, and making healthy choices based on your feelings with God's help.

While “loving yourself” has become a cliché, there is no more important practice. It is not selfish to love yourself well. In fact, it is your responsibility to take good care of yourself, and as you do this you will be able to care for others more effectively. When we care for ourselves, functioning from our Core Self, we feel safe and loved, and are then able to love others in the way that God designed.

Are you able to let go of fighting, flighting and freezing? Yes. Are you able to cultivate your Core Self so that you can cultivate your true and authentic Self, relating the way God intended? Absolutely, but it will take work, practice, more work and more practice. But, I can help you get there—and stay there!!

If you're ready to partner with me in this exciting journey, contact us at 206.348.5247 or info@marriagerecoverycenter.com to learn about the next Getting To The Core Workshop near you. Blessings to you and Healthy Relating!

Dr. David Hawkins is the founder of the Marriage Recovery Center located near Seattle, Washington. He and his staff are passionate about helping couples find hope and healing for their relationships. Whether your marriage is in crisis, or you long for a deeper relationship with your spouse, the Marriage Recovery Center will help you gain the tools you both need to experience a healthy and fulfilling marriage.

Learn more at www.marriagerecoverycenter.com