



Chapter Ten

Saving Joy Skills From Extinction

Many skills have headed toward extinction. Spear hunting, cleaning game, spinning, sharpening saws, milking, penmanship, canning, hand sewing, top spinning, baking, woodworking and even kite flying were all skills that almost every child learned or at least watched and understood. As useful as these simple skills were at some point in history, most will not be missed. However, there is a set of specific brain skills needed for human identity that depend upon human interaction patterns for successful propagation. No single human interaction provides more opportunities for relational skill propagation than eating meals together. We are designed to bond around food. A century ago, children and most workers had time off at noon to go home for a meal with their families. They already enjoyed a cooked breakfast together and would have an evening meal together as well. They would sit at the table facing each other and talk with no television or radio. There was usually only one light and heat source in the house so fall,

winter and spring evenings for the whole family were spent in the same room. This is a huge amount of face-to-face interaction time with family in which to learn relational skills. Those interaction patterns have changed dramatically in the last one hundred years, and it is likely that family interaction time for children now is less than one percent of what it was. Children now do not even know someone who lived and trained their social skills one hundred years ago. With the relational environment shrinking to less than one percent, common skills that previously existed are now facing extinction.

Shelia's story

My daddy was only a part of my life as a living member until I was four and a half years old. His absence remained a palpable "presence" even though we hardly spoke of him. What remained of my family after Grace's and my daddy's untimely deaths were my emotionally absent mama, two older brothers, my fraternal twin sister and me.

My mama was low-joy and ill-equipped, so my daddy's parents played a significant role in our upbringing. With my daddy's death, these grandparents represented the connection to any joy and relational skills from his side of the family. While they did provide for some of our basic needs, such as regular meals, extra money, clothing and a place to learn about God, they were not able to teach us necessary relational skills. My grandpa molested me soon after my daddy died, and my grandma was often overcome with fear and anxiety. They blocked relational joy for me through both their words and actions on the many weekends we spent together.

Back at home after our weekend getaways, I fought with my twin sister Ella in an attempt to deal with my rage at Mama, which was unspoken. I was so afraid that Mama would kill herself that I walked around on egg shells for fear any disruption would send her over the edge. "It's not that bad" became my defense against just how awful it really was for me.

When I was eight years old, my mama came home with a man named Jerry and declared she had married him. He was an evil man and a predator loose in our house. He was a mean drunk. He hit my mama and verbally assaulted her as well. He whipped me with a belt so hard that I had bruises up and down my legs. He also violated me sexually. Ella was the quieter one, whereas I was a real smart aleck so he attacked me. He wreaked havoc on our family for six years. He left when Ella and I were fourteen. By this time, my brothers were married and out of the house. Ella and I took over paying the bills, and when we were fifteen, Ella

secured a job at a local shoe store. I joined her a few months later, and we worked there the remainder of our high school years. We had to work to supplement the two social security checks she and I received each month.

I was quite successful at school, but I rarely, if ever, felt any real joy. Most of what I accomplished was designed to build my mask of strength and hide who I believed I really was. I was too preoccupied with fear and worry to have any real fun. Somehow I managed to perform academically and landed in the top five of my senior class. I was a varsity cheerleader in spite of the fact that I could never get my jumps up high or the moves sharp enough. Cheerleading was my sister's forte. I felt clumsy and inept. I was not the cheerleader type, but I owned a varsity letter jacket, which "proved" I was good at something.

Ella and I wore our strong masks well, so my mama decided that since we "had everything under control," it was okay to run off with a truck driver. She left Ella and me to live alone for many weeks. We did not know if she were alive or dead until she unexpectedly returned one day in January. She missed Thanksgiving and Christmas that year, but I was so happy to see her when she returned that I never spoke of what she had done to us.

My mama felt so fragile to me that I ignored and suppressed my rage toward her and instead began to direct it at myself. This anger turned inward resulted in an undeniable self-hatred. My internalized rage soon resulted in a deep depression.

I fought with Ella. We hit each other, pulled each other's hair, scratched each other and destroyed each other's things. We would make up quickly and pretend we had never been mad at each other. We had no idea how to return to joy. I was adept at playing the role of possum in our relationship, which has always made me feel and look pathetic. Building joy together was not in our minds. We needed our pseudo-identities and pseudo-maturity to survive and "look good." Even though we pretended nothing had happened, this pseudo-shalom was no comfort. I cried myself to sleep most nights.

Without joy, shalom, return to joy and protector skills from my family or church, school provided a hope for some escape. It would still be many years before I would learn about joy. My life had been a witness to the devastating lack of relational joy all around me.

In recent years, Ella and I have talked about the details of our childhood and its impact on our relationship both as children and now as adults. We've cried together and expressed our love and appreciation for each other. We've made some progress in our ability to communicate

about difficult memories and the painful feelings associated with them. We've also been able to disagree on some details about our childhood and fill in the gaps for each other. I've learned that the best way for me to continue to heal is to be tender toward my own weakness and to respond tenderly to my siblings and my mama.

What brought relational skills to the brink of extinction?

There are many reasons why relational skills are not passed effectively from one generation to the next. Acquisition problems arise when the right conditions are not present to get a skill started. Strengthening problems prevent a skill from developing to useful levels like when children can read but with such difficulty that they will never read a book. Implementation problems block people from using the skills they have. Propagation problems prevent people from passing on their skills to others. We have already considered one propagation problem caused by the drastic drop in the number of relational interactions within bonded relationships each day.

There are many social factors that hinder the propagation of gentle protector skills. Some of these are slavery, human trafficking, war, working conditions from the industrial revolution, trauma, BEEPS, loss (attachment pain), moving to cities, single parenting, commuting, education for test scores and data acquisition, raising children in front of televisions, shanty town violence, excessive time with machines, genocide, (exterminations for tribal, political or religious reasons), cultural/religious/political attacks on weakness or family bonds, AIDS, epidemics, controlling groups through anger and fear, pornography, gang violence, child abuse, domestic violence, men dominating women, cultures of narcissism, self-justification, deviant parenting patterns, political correctness, tyrannical governments and various ideologies that reduce the number of tender interactions between the weak and the strong.

Entire cultures can come to despise weakness thus becoming rigid and low-joy. A huge drop in peaceful protector skills follows when cultures begin to exterminate the weak. Nazis viewed the extermination of Jews as the means to remove a weakness. Weaker groups die in vast numbers during political or ethnic mass murders, but the killers do so at the cost of becoming predators and producing generations of damage for those who are not killed.

Environmental and cultural factors leading to fearing, despising, hiding and manipulating weakness block transmission of joy skills. Gentle protector skills do not get passed to the next generation very easily and what is left is our hard-wired predator thinking. Predators also target and kill real protectors making them an endangered species. Tyrants of all kinds hate protectors.

But we might say, "Haven't these problems always been with us?" To a large extent that is true. Joy skills have always been far too rare. The last century, however, introduced some rapid changes that are now bringing joy skills to near extinction. We are faced with threats that have never been present in human history. Not only are conditions becoming far worse for joy-skill transmission, the people who still have the skills to pass along are aging and their numbers are dropping rapidly. We are in a crisis.

Face-to-face interactions are becoming rare

It takes no imagination at all to see the difference between our world and the world one hundred years ago where families ate together and spent much of their time in the same room. It was a world where relatives lived nearby. The cloud did not exist. People spent most of the waking day interacting with people face-to-face. Although there were plenty of low-joy places in the world, and problems with propagating protector skills were common, the sheer number of face-to-face interactions gave the skills a decent chance to spread.

We might not think about it if we have never lived that way, but disability and weakness were cared for by families and communities. Most people could no longer work by the time they were 45 years old, and these older people made themselves useful around the home and community by watching children, keeping gardens, doing crafts and repairs or by entertaining others with stories. The old and the young were constantly interacting in ways that used relational brain skills. The children picked up the skills just by being around them all the time. No interactions were interrupted by a text message from the cloud.

The last century has brought new challenges to the interactions of weak and strong and added a whole new dimension to the problem. The weakness facing every child entering the world is the near total absence of relational ability. Relational ability is something that inherently weak children once learned from the aging who were considered weak in their working ability but who actually had rather strong relational capacity. The old men and women of the village who could no longer go to the fields were left home with the children. Old people whose bodies were not strong enough found their joy from interactions with children in circumstances where care for the weakness of others was a constant factor. There was little entertainment other than what they provided for each other.

Media and entertainment: Entertainment now occupies huge amounts of time every week. Time spent on-line, watching television or movies, playing computer games, texting, listening to music over headphones and preoccupation with email, news sources and computers now adds to the time spent driv-

ing or working. These distractions from interaction with others are not just for adults anymore. Children are watching machines from infancy. Where 60 years ago children spent virtually all of their time interacting with others, playing and comparing abilities, they now spend the majority of their time focused on machines that have no relational skills or awareness of the child's presence. Babies are watching television; they have movies in pre-school, day care, church, at home, and with baby-sitters. The cloud is absorbing our lives.

Even if the child is watching people interact, the child will not be acquiring the relational skills because these skills require mutual mind states that machines and movies in particular cannot achieve. Mutual mind states that are strong enough to propagate relational skills only develop during face-to-face interactions with people who have the skills. Mutual mind states can only develop between two people at a time. No teacher can do mutual mind states with two students at a time. It is both a time and relationship-intensive process requiring many interactions to acquire a clean copy. While the details are available in Life Model Works materials (see Appendix D) and neuroscience literature since 2003, requirements for successful transmission of gentle protector skills are quite strict. Television, computers, movies, books or video games cannot spread relational skills. Media has gone from being the message to being the method for much of our training and education. Joy skills do not propagate through media, internet, webcams or even telecommunications. We cannot raise babies into human beings by internet or television any more than we can make babies that way.

But the problem is not simply that babies and children are in front of screens for hours, so are the older people. Even if children want to engage, the grandparents are watching television in their retirement homes. Even if media could transmit relational skills, they are not what is generally displayed in programming. Predators are abundant and media is a useful source for developing predator strategies.

Because of the reasons given, joy skills are not being propagated at home because the weak and strong from different generations no longer provide constant care and practice. Gentle protector skills are not generally taught in school. Schools rarely even do much to strengthen these skills. Relational skills are rarely taught in most churches, because for many Christians, the weak and strong are rarely together in a way that promotes relationships and transformation. Most people in church are staying in their comfort zone and promoting their pseudo-self to stay safe. We should also notice that most people who consider themselves Christian rarely see church as a resource for their skills or relationships.

Mobility: The invention of the internal combustion engine has allowed people to escape places of low-joy. Millions have left the farm, the country, and the neighborhood to find work elsewhere. Travel means leaving behind the weak, old and very young. The strongest move to cities, new countries and jobs where they have a better life. However, in moving away to find a better future they must leave behind the constant interactions between old and young, weak and strong that occupies so much of the day for the weak. Tender moments become an occasional event each year or whenever workers return home.

Work environments are often low-joy and not weakness-friendly. Employers prefer strong workers. Many jobs take the worker's strength in exchange for pay and then discard the workers when their strength is gone or, worse yet, destroyed by the work itself. Even ministries whose goal is the care of the weak may be harsh with the lives of their staff members. Christians and their organizations frequently demand that their workers and leaders be mobile and free of weaknesses.

Cultural mobility has allowed people to leave problems and liabilities behind. Having children became a weakness one could avoid along with being married. Both children and marriage create a long-term "liability" that could result in needing to take care of someone's weaknesses. In fact, any long-term commitment to people will leave us dealing with weakness at some point.

Professionalized care: Those who do stay as families in Western society find that in order to work, the young must be placed in schools and the old placed in homes. The weak are often placed in institutions and their care has been professionalized. Not too far into the industrial revolution, babies began to be nursed by wet-nurses, the sick by health care providers, the old by nursing homes, the dying were in hospitals and the dead put in funeral homes. Even the housing and feeding of people with chronic weakness became the burden of government rather than families, churches and neighborhoods. While these factors constantly shift, what does not change is that there is less and less ongoing interaction between weak and strong. Chances for relational skills to propagate are lost.

Professional care-givers often possess specialized skills but not for propagating joy. Government workers and programs are not set up to develop tenderness toward the weak, they are motivated to reduce costs to the government and keep their budgets. Schools were not designed to produce gentle protectors but rather strong workers who would be free of weakness and stay productive to society.

Fast food: We all know that cooking real food takes a long time. What we do not notice is that during these long periods of food preparation, the

generations interacted with each other, children bonded with people instead of food, participants appreciated the effort and waiting for the meal taught craving control over appetites. Cooking causes injuries so people practiced quieting distress, problem solving and returning to joy. With fast food at home or out these interaction times are gone. Whether it is due to less time cooking, central heating, lights in every room, entertainment, mobility or loss of resources, the effect of all these factors is the same, a dramatic reduction in the opportunities to see, learn or practice relational skills. Skills that once propagated on their own are more endangered than the polar bear.

Our lack of awareness: More importantly, what we are discussing here is virtually unknown to the last two generations of humans in the Western world. People who are now three generations removed from the relational world so common for children prior to WWII think that what they are doing is the same as what has always happened. After all, don't they come home from work, take the children to soccer practice and dance lessons? Don't they watch television together? Don't they text each other regularly? What could possibly be different? Sure, they have heard the stories their grandparents tell about how life used to be, but the old days do not sound appealing.

Old folks also do not know what was accomplished during all those hours that were "wasted" dealing with weakness. They worked hard to avoid weakness and make a better life for their children. No weakness or suffering would be passed on to their children who would all be healthy and strong. The elderly cannot put into words how relational skills were learned, but they can see something disappearing in the "young people today." Some even guess it is related to the way life required more from them as children. But these war and depression era survivors want to be strong so who would ever guess that it was the constant exposure to weakness that allowed character to form, emotional control to be learned and gentle protector skills to develop. Old people sense they are weak now but see there is no value in their weakness anymore. They only see an eventual move to the nursing home where they will watch television if they are not lucky enough to go out with a decent heart attack.

Care for the weak is the pivot point for relational skills

Located above our eyes, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex has the very important job of figuring out the least harmful solution to every situation. This damage-control system in our brain needs to be trained with the full range of joy skills. Part of damage control is our ability to return to joy. Return to joy is how we go about saving our relationships when others are not glad to be with us. When a classmate says, "your hair looks stupid," we feel our joy leave the

room. Now, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex will have to look at what we have learned from our role models at home, school or church and then decide what to do. We could answer rudely, we could withdraw, we could tell the teacher or our mother. Our brain's identity center considers the examples we have seen and tries to figure out the least painful solution. The control section is non-verbal so it does not consider what our parents told us or what they said in church; it considers examples it has known and observed. Our brain might never have learned that the best solutions bring us back to joy. So we might shoot back, "You are too stupid to know," and our friends might laugh.

But, did we act like our true selves and reach shalom by shouting back? Did we open the door to return to joy with the classmate who insulted us? Did we learn to be a gentle protector? If we did not learn to think about our identity in those terms, our ventromedial prefrontal cortex damage-control computer did not consider them as options. However, this clever computer can be taught to look for options it does not yet have. Even when we do not have the entire set of gentle protector skills, we can position ourselves to find new protector ways with an identity that says, "I respond tenderly toward weakness." When we are people who are tender toward weakness, then every encounter with weakness makes us want to learn better responses, provided our relational circuits are running.

Even without proper return to joy skills we can think to ourselves, "There must be a kind and tender way to respond." If God is always here with us, an Immanuel experience will help us acquire a new response. We can acquire these skills from God because Jesus will redemptively bypass the gaps left by our families, schools and churches to teach us the way back to joy so that we can then practice this skill with others. Sometimes we will find answers by asking our "tribe" to show us possibilities, examining scripture, reading the biographies of gentle protectors or even taking some Life Model training.

Suppose that we totally forget to check with Immanuel or our relational circuits go off as soon as our classmate says our hair looks stupid. We can return to the event when the lack of shalom shows up later in the day and the comments keep running through our mind. Perhaps when we get home, we can ask our family how they would have answered or sit down with God for a quiet time of review to learn a better way. We can learn skills before, during or after an event when our identity wants to be a gentle protector and we do not yet know how.

Perhaps we are still wondering how the hair comment represents weakness. The comment itself was aggressive and hostile. The hair bully was trying to be powerful. How then can this be weakness? However puffed up the hair bully

sounded, true strength comes from joy. Certainly the hair bully has a weak level of joy! Joy is what fuels our brain and our spirit. Whenever we hit a low level of joy, or people suck the joy out of life, we have landed on one of the largest weaknesses a person can have. Tenderness would urge us to start joy here.

What can we expect as relational skills disappear?

As relational skills decrease we can expect a long series of shifts in how people relate. These shifts will remain fairly invisible to the generation where the shift happens. For them, “this is just how people are.” Without relational skills, power will become more attractive and the phrase “that was powerful” will justify almost anything. Increased interest in power will result in lower joy levels while people will fight for their rights. Revenge crimes will increase because without relational skills, people become problems rather than the people we care about, and revenge represents power to a predator. Lower relational skills will always mean increased violence and predatory behavior.

Emotional intensity will increase in whatever people do together, from how they dress to how they speak. People will “display” their emotional intensity and aggression without shame. Self control will decrease along with common sense. Of course, joy levels will drop as the ability to quiet oneself is lost. The wealthy will begin to find “quiet” retreats to demonstrate their wealth as quiet becomes increasingly rare. At the same time, powerful people will rise above the “common laws” and become increasingly exclusive.

Autistic-like behavior and reactions will increase and maturity levels will drop. Attachments to food and other BEEPS will increase along with weight and health issues from BEEPS. Family meals will disappear. Medications and other non-relational solutions will increasingly be needed to control emotions and focus attention. People will have little to no idea what satisfies them or how to sustain joy, so joy levels will drop.

The logic of relationship will be replaced by functionality. For example, instead of “she is my wife” indicating a bond, anyone who can perform the functions of a wife will be of equal value as “wife.” Professionalism will replace tenderness or kindness as the standard of care between people. This will increase the view of people as disposable when they cannot render value. All of this will carry us to lower joy levels. Let us consider some specific issues.

Rise of pseudo-return to joy

One of the more detrimental effects of disappearing relational skills is pseudo-return to joy. As Shelia and Ella discovered, they had to act like nothing had happened. Shelia pretended that she was fine when her mother re-

turned after vanishing for three months. This looks like joy but something is wrong beneath the surface. Walking on eggshells is another way Shelia described pretending that emotions and problems did not exist. Unhappy emotions do not build relationships when genuine return to joy skills are missing. Interactions no longer end in joyful, peaceful, glad to be together moments. Joy levels drop.

Managing problems instead of restoring joy

Mass management of people and their problems becomes the focus of public life when relational skills are scarce. Solving problems take priority over restoring joy. Who will have control becomes more important than uniting the country. People use their energy and resources rigidly to avoid as many problems as they can. More laws and rules are seen as the way to solve social issues. One social issue we will consider in detail involves schools.

Schools manage problems rather than raise human children: Schools will spend most of their time trying to manage violence and predatory behavior by children, parents and staff, while denying there is a problem. Inside the classroom everyone will compete for attention. Without relational skills, power goes to the one who gets the most attention. Schools will take over most of the feeding of children, thus making sure that children bond with food instead of people and increasing the epidemic of obesity and related health issues.

Predators at school: Children who have not learned to return to joy work hard to increase their power. They put other people down. Some use guns or knives, but most children rely on words, shame and attachment pain as the bullets. Frequently children will fantasize about revenge when they cannot return to joy and focus their predatory impulses on a pet, a younger sibling or by bullying other children.

In a school setting we see a variety of responses when individuals have not learned return to joy skills. People stuff emotions and rely on name-calling, teasing, and of course, bullying. Possums bury what they really feel so others cannot see the depth of their pain. Weaknesses stay hidden.

Bullying dramatically drops the joy level in schools. For the victim of bullying, hallways turn into tunnels for cruel jokes and torment. Cafeterias become the dreadful period for being mocked. Locker rooms become a nightmare. The bathroom may become a hideout, or the place where we are cornered. Lisa remembers being confronted in the bathroom by a pack of predator girls. She still cringes remembering the dread. Cyberbullying, a growing trend that spreads far beyond the walls of a school, sometimes includes parents as predators.

In schools, the power of belonging and growing a group identity motivates people to fit in, sometimes at extreme costs. One must look good, sound right and act a certain way to be part of the “in” crowd. To be excluded feels like death. To be left out is to live in a world of agony. Attachment pain colors reality and creates fear. Julie still feels the sting from her friends in high school who liked to call her Miss Prudence. All of Julie’s friends knew this term was an insult.

People who lack return to joy skills frequently rely on BEEPS in the form of food and sugar. Obesity is a growing problem but telling children the importance of healthy eating does little to train the brain’s relational control center. Children find comfort with artificial joy.

People exclude the weak for their own gain because they long to feel special. Feeling special ironically describes what people feel in genuine, joy-based relationships. Joy is ultimately what everyone wants and needs. Mike was not the predator-type but his fear of rejection drove him to join others in poking fun of Trina. Trina lived in an impoverished home and her clothes were neither clean nor stylish. Deep down Mike still remembers the expression of pain on Trina’s face when his group tormented her at recess.

At school Tim would frequently tease Nathan about his weight. It seemed Tim creatively used every opportunity to remind Nathan and other classmates how big Nathan was. What people did not know was that Tim endured similar taunts and abuse at home from his stepfather. Tim’s teasing left Nathan feeling powerless at school, and at home Nathan started emotionally abusing his younger sister.

Mark still remembers how frightening it was for him in high school to see his peers, many who were involved in gangs, bring guns to school in shoe boxes. Fear and tension ruled out any hopes of joy and peace. Now that Mark is grown up and his children attend school, he feels relief knowing metal detectors are in place to prevent guns from entering schools. One problem remains, however, metal detectors do not change character. Even without guns, students behave in threatening ways to prove they are powerful.

Gangs

Where weakness is no longer permitted and relational brain skills disappear, we start to see the kinds of monsters we can grow. Gang life is what happens when relational brain skills are missing and the need for belonging goes unsatisfied. We see individuals join gangs about the same age they would be forming a group identity. Twelve and thirteen year-olds often join gangs out of pressure and to fill the deep longing for power, joy, acceptance, respect, belonging, love, protection and connection. When our joy is low or non-ex-

istent, it feels good to have peers who are glad to be with us, even if we are breaking the law and deadly in the process. Gang members frequently refer to themselves as family which adds strength to the bond and bolsters loyalty.

Sadly, these basic needs could be met if gentle protector skills were learned at home, school and church through men and women protectors. If return to joy skills are missing or underdeveloped by the time children reach grade school, we have a new opportunity to learn gentle protector skills from our teachers, peers, coaches and other parents. Schools become fertile ground to cultivate and learn gentle protector skills or a hostile playing field where the strong use their power to rule the weak. Unless people of joy begin to propagate joy in our schools and churches, joy will continue to drop and hostility will grow.

Self-justified behavior

Predators offer seemingly justifiable reasons for their cruel behavior such as, “He deserved it!” “He’s a know-it-all.” “It was her fault we lost the game so I need to teach her a lesson.” “He is stupid.” “She looks ugly.” The more efficient predators always seem to have their own valid-sounding reasons to justify attacking others. In the first Life Model book, *Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You*, we pointed out that this self-justification is called the *sarx* in Greek and is always contrary to God’s ways. Living by self-justification always brings death rather than joy.

Pseudo-identity

Our true identity is always relational. When our identity becomes attached to ideology, religion, problems or success and power, we develop a pseudo-identity that we will perceive as our real self. We function in this pseudo-identity to look happy, feel important and belong. Sadly, this facade is a house of cards that eventually collapses under pressure. With the loss of relational skills people will spend increasing money and effort to create their image and keep it looking good.

Church without relational skills

Churches implode in one of three ways when return to joy skills drop out. First, divisions arise due to malfunctions and immaturity. The inability to return to joy means leaders in particular lack the gentle protector skills to manage what they feel, stay relational and recover from upset. Emotions quickly become amplified and problems spiral out of control.

Second, without relational skills people set up rules while others feel controlled by these rules and rigidity. Personalities who lack return to joy skills

fail to flex, adapt and recover from upset. Instead of exploring useful, relational, joyful solutions to solve problems, rigid leaders rely on control that drains joy, restricts movement and robs creativity. During times of crisis and transition, those who make and follow the rules best will win but at the expense of having large numbers of people leave the church.

Third, fear propagates under the guise of spiritual guidance, service and ministry. Leaders who are motivated by fear tend to react and make decisions that restrict people and options. An inability to return to joy shows up as a lack of consistency and may even appear as a lack of integrity. In the end, the church will neutralize itself trying to keep everyone happy and comfortable. This church will stay in their comfort zone until they die.

The result of all three scenarios is a lack of transformation in people's lives. Without relational skills the weak and strong do not share life, and the faithful are left wondering if there should be something more to their faith. Ultimately, young people lose faith in the church as a real resource.

Rise of narcissism

Declining social skills practically mandate an increase in narcissism. Not only is the inability to return to joy from shame and to learn from our mistakes increasingly common but, without the relational skills needed to work together for joy, we are each left to look out for ourselves. Some people with tender hearts toward weakness will choose to look out for others and ignore themselves, but this only trades one disaster for another. Narcissists hide their own weakness and exploit the weaknesses they find in others while bathing their operation with self-justification.

Increasing number of unresolved conflicts

Churched or unchurched, educated or uneducated, city or country folk will all find the best intentions and strongest convictions are no match for strain and distress when it comes to missing gentle protector skills. As of 2012, newlyweds in the US can toss a coin and match the odds of their marriage lasting eight years. Divorce, church splits and unresolved ruptures between families and groups expose the toll missing skills have on our lives and relationships.

Bitterness, resentment, stubbornness, custody battles, church splits, alienated friends and endless lawsuits follow a trail of unresolved conflicts. Almost all unresolved conflicts represent a lack of the relational skills needed to return to joy. The weak always suffer the most in these situations. Blame, shame, entitlement, and quarreling demonstrate a lack of maturity and the

painful absence of return to joy skills. The outcome is tragic. In families especially, children grow up fatherless and motherless as the family unit ruptures from strain. Low-joy sets couples up for marital disaster. Children learn at a young age that they must be bigger than they really are which fosters pseudo maturity. Low-joy cycles continue for generations, but the pain does not end there. Child abuse and domestic violence propagate as the powerful lash out at the weak people closest to them, creating more predators and possums.

Unresolved conflicts are also spreading on a global scale. For the first time in history wealthy predator cultures can purchase weapons of mass destruction that they could not create on their own because their social fabric lacks enough social cohesion and hopefulness to develop sophisticated weapon systems. This has made terrorism and counterterrorism a road to power for many predators. One culture's benevolent predator is another culture's pirate, terrorist and revolutionary. Predator culture with its characteristically low-joy will propagate unless we put protector skills back into children and cultures. Protectors arise from relational skills and tenderness toward weakness.

Increasing BEEPS

Divorce, death, an affair, an unavailable parent, and abandonment create a dull ache that leaves us feeling alone, unwanted, hurt and overwhelmed. Attachment pain originates at the subcortical level of brain functioning, deep inside the emotional control center, the limbic region of our bonding circuits. This area creates and synchronizes our reality so when we hurt from attachment pain, our entire world and reality is filled with pain. Attachment pain is felt intensely and consumes our entire life and relationships. Attachment pain leaves us wanting to go away, disconnect, numb, veg-out, even die. "I cannot live without you!" one could say to describe the feeling. Does this sound like a song or two that plays on the radio?

Attachment pain appears indirectly with strong cravings and powerful urges. We are strongly motivated to avoid painful feelings we have not learned to manage. Painful feelings tell us we are about to "lose it," or even cease to exist, unless we find quick relief. It does not take long for children to discover that candy bars, chocolate, donuts, soda, pornography and sexually acting out provide temporary relief to pain which opens the door for using BEEPS as a way of life. Attachment pain is the dominant force behind food and sexual addictions. We gravitate toward pseudo-joy as a rush to make us feel better as we try to avoid the lonely feelings that seem as though they will swallow us alive. When seeking relief, we are not so much concerned with finding true joy as we are with finding a shut-off valve to stop the pain. True, meaningful, relational

joy is ultimately what we need for lasting relief. Along the way we learn a great many unhelpful lessons from attachment pain such as, “Love hurts.” “If I get too close I will get burned.” and “I’m safe as long as I do not become too attached.” These lies lead us to non-relational sources of pleasure and comfort.

Homes, schools and churches as targets for those who lack relational skills

There is a steady stream of attacks in schools and churches, making them the target of numerous mass murders. Home is the most likely location for violence. The level of domestic violence, abuse and murder reveals predatory behavior inside and outside of homes. The actual violence is often triggered by attachment pain. Think of murders and school shootings that started with resentment, bitterness, disconnection, affairs, loss, jealousy and other evidence of attachment pain. Very often the perpetrator felt wronged and weak.

Schools and churches are not usually the cause of violence but they have become the targets, perhaps because they are supposed to be places of hope but actually have little to offer angry, young people who lack social skills. School shootings demonstrate the opposite of gentle protector skills. The number of school shootings, knifings and killings suggest that schools deserve some attention. There is a long history of school shootings around the world with eleven in Canada, twenty in Europe and more elsewhere in the world. School shootings have been going on for over 100 years with many of the tragedies in recent years.

The United States has had well over 150 school shootings not to count knifings, hostage situations and other forms of violence. Unresolved attachment pain and failure to return to joy are behind many of these incidents where the attacker targets a specific person to kill. The cases that involve mass killings generally reveal an attacker who was trying to be powerful, was self-justified and who carefully prepared and even studied predator strategies to make the attack more powerful and effective.

Matthew J. Murray was a gunman in Colorado who targeted both a school and a church in 2007. This 24-year-old is described as someone with poor relational skills. It is hard to find any shooters with good relational skills. Murray’s computer was reported to contain considerable amounts of pornography indicating that he was subsisting on pseudo-joy from BEEPS. He attended a Youth With a Mission (YWAM) training school where he was asked to leave. He returned to that same school to start his shooting rampage. Murray was home-schooled by Christian parents and his situation tragically reflects how it is possible to have home, school and church experiences without developing the character of a gentle protector.

We want to be very careful to say that it is our determination to be tender toward weakness and not the lack of relational skill training that determines if we will become a predator or protector. While a few schools like Amble-side International are working to build gentle protector skill training directly into every aspect of the school day, most homes, home schools, schools and churches are not prepared to train children in the relational skills needed to be protectors. People with no religion are increasingly bringing their children to Christian schools hoping they will learn character. Increasingly young people without emotional maturity and social skills are seeking programs like YWAM, religious orders, Christian schools and missions to learn how to be human, have joyful relationships and add structure to their lives. While most of these groups are prepared to teach how to selflessly serve and give away what we have to others, it is a whole different issue to fill the relational maturity void in applicants. The epidemic of youth without relational skills is just beginning as relational skills continue to fade into extinction.

Allowing weakness to restore our return to joy skills

Respect for weakness lets us form relationships with people who need skills not just with the ones who already have them. Recognizing weakness helps us determine what protector skills are in short supply where we live. When people are unable or reluctant to act protectively with anger, sadness, fear, shame, disgust or despair, we now see a weakness in their identities. The same goes when people get stuck on problems and forget relationships or when they amplify the upset over the problems they encounter. We are particularly aware of weakness when people attack, criticize, shame or exploit the weaknesses of others. Here are the storm clouds that bring low-joy. When we see low-joy as the weakness it really is, we can become joy starters and look for others who will join us.

Weakness also becomes our strong point. When we recognize that we are all rather small, weak and vulnerable people who need tender treatment for joy to thrive, we avoid the kinds of excesses that chronically drain joy from our society. Trying to be strong and “do it on our own” drains joy and starts us on the road to being predators. Recognizing our weakness calls for constant contact with Immanuel to restore us to our real selves and stay tender toward each other.

Respect for weakness lets us train others at the rate they can learn. People learn joy and relational skills according to their capacity and ability. When we work people too hard or fast, they stop learning and start avoiding. Those who seek to restore joy must first let others rest and then return to rest each time people become tired.

It is encouraging that we can propagate return to joy skills through sharing our weaknesses. With practice we learn to share our weaknesses and express vulnerabilities to those we trust. What emerges is a secure bond built on trust and transparency. Weaknesses no longer remain hidden or masked. We cherish the weak among us as God's gifts. We rejoice when people return to relationship instead of isolating or pulling away. We start noticing Immanuel's presence in our life and story. We respond to vulnerabilities with care. Observers now find the courage to let down their guard. A community of faith and hope grows into a community of love as people share their pains, sorrows and sufferings.

Joy is central to a Christian life and identity. Joy is the growth hormone for the development of relational skills. As one third of the world's population, if we Christians were to start joy where we live, we would make a difference in our homes, schools and churches. Could we invite the other two thirds of the world to join in joy?

Correcting narcissism and anger

We cannot overemphasize the deadly nature of narcissism. It is even more important to invite narcissists and their communities to a new kind of life. Narcissism is a way of looking strong and justifying ourselves instead of learning from healthy shame. Narcissism is the biggest contributor to low-joy and the loss of community. Gentle protectors must protect the community against narcissism by demonstrating what true maturity and glad-to-be together life looks and feels like. We not only talk about joy, we create belonging for the weak. Protectors see people as more than their malfunctions. Gentle protector skills such as heartsight convey, "We are more than the sum of our mistakes." Joyful character creates belonging and is developed by strong, joyful people who cultivate and spread joy among the weak. This means narcissists and predators will be shown that their attacks on the weak are not to be justified. Narcissism is not valued in the redemptive community of love. We help one another grow into the life God has called each one of us to live.

As narcissists, we must learn return to joy skills, and people who have an identity anchored in anger must learn how to return to joy. While angry people are accustomed to using intimidation to get their way, protectors remember there is more going on beneath the surface. Protectors guide the angry ones to acknowledge they are weak and extend the invitation to stop pretending they are strong. There is freedom in a humble acknowledgement of weakness.

Returning to joy at home

Parents are in the best possible position to grow gentle protector skills with their children. Parents with relational skills can proactively “download” gentle protector skills, ensuring their children learn and use all nineteen skills. Similar to practicing a musical instrument, relational skills take time to develop. Parents who use their skills show children and guests “this is how we do it” during moments of distress, fatigue, excitement and conflict. Children learn best by mom and dad’s example.

Parents who discover missing skills can learn new skills from other parents then practice their new skills at home. Gentle protector training spreads to the local community as parents invite friends and families over in order to interact, exchange joy and recover when things go wrong. Home becomes a transformation zone through a healthy blend of the strong who already have the skills with the weak who lack the skills. As the two groups interact, protector skills are trained “live” under a variety of conditions.

Growing and practicing protector skills can be as simple as an evening meal and time of fellowship. There is good reason for eating and interacting together being one of the most mentioned activities in all of Scripture. Food should lead to bonding. Jesus frequently used stories when enjoying a meal with others. Every Friday evening John and his wife Amy host a pizza night where John’s children invite two or three friends over for interaction, pizza and games. This is a high-energy time filled with fun, laughter and joy. John and Amy started this family tradition that now extends into their community. They purposefully share stories about the workweek and school. The group practices relational skills and takes some time to pray for one another. The joy levels stay high as stories include emotions that give listeners practice at returning to joy. Most of the time the interaction is so much fun that the group forgets they are learning new gentle protector skills and strengthening existing skills. John and Amy are creating a legacy of joy for their children and community.

Returning to joy at school

Shelia’s desire to propagate joy and grow protectors led her to design a senior project where her older students identify the roles of possums, predators, and protectors as they relate to bullying in school. Shelia taught the seniors how to grow their protector skills while recognizing their own predator and possum-like responses. The 36 students in each of Shelia’s classes divided into six teams of six students. The goal of the project was for the seniors to activate their protector identities and teach the ninth and tenth grade classes about

the harmful effects of school bullying, while also teaching them about ways to behave tenderly toward the weak. Each team took their presentation “on the road” to ninth and tenth grade classrooms for a three-day bullying education seminar. This meant that each team of six seniors conducted the seminar in three different classrooms on three separate days for a total outreach to nine classrooms. Shelia teaches three senior classes, and her goal was for students to reach out to 54 classrooms of underclassmen to spread the message about bullying and its effects.

This project afforded the seniors the opportunity to “start something that matters” on campus before they graduated in May. The seniors were excited about how they could use their stories about bullying to teach the underclassmen to make their school a more joyful place. The project was more than a campaign against bullying because it included teaching about predators, possums, and protectors and ways to return to joy and stay relational. Since Shelia had just added these components to the curriculum, students were learning key concepts about relational functioning that they had not encountered before. Each team was also required to engage the students they taught in at least one meaningful appreciation exercise. The hope was that the outcome would propagate joy while informing students of practical ways they could begin to regulate their own emotions, whether it was anger, sadness, or hopeless despair.

This ten-week instructional process was a huge undertaking that required courage on the part of Shelia and her seniors. It required students to read multiple research articles, view multiple informational videos, identify predator, possum, and protector behaviors, and practice ways to stay relationally connected through returning to joy. Each team created 1) a visual presentation to inform their younger classmates, 2) a video to engage and challenge them to see relationships as bigger than problems, and 3) a minimum of one appreciation exercise to help students begin to practice the relational brain skills needed to combat the epidemic of bullying on the school campus. Having seniors actively teach the underclassmen how to return to joy by staying relational and expressing tenderness toward the weak began the process of propagating joy throughout the school. And, if it were up to Shelia, this would become the new norm!

Returning to joy at church

Churches have many means of bringing the weak and strong together. In the deserts of northern Mexico, an orphanage brings abused children together with dedicated caregivers. Both young adults and older couples live together with the orphans in long-term, stable homes. This community deliberately

keeps the weak and strong together whether within the orphanage, church or community. In every context they show tenderness toward the weak. Training is an ongoing part of the community with deliberate joy, shalom and gentle protector brain skill practice. While many of the staff have discovered weaknesses and traumas in their own lives during this process, tenderness is not reserved for the orphans alone so everyone is helped to heal and transform. This community transforms together. The orphanage includes a school where learning shalom and seeking the Immanuel presence of God when things do not go smoothly is a frequent practice.

A church in Canada created a restaurant to provide work, housing, community and training for young women who found themselves pregnant. The weak and the strong share life with compassion for weakness and transformed lives for both.

In Southern California, a Los Angeles area church has cautiously introduced the *Connexus*[™] exercises into their church life. A few members of the church had their lives changed by using the Life Model. As a result of their changes, they used the *Forming* module to interact with God more clearly. *Restarting* taught them joy and how God can heal our wounds. They used *Belonging* to create appreciation and joy. However, for the first few years they did not make any deliberate effort to bring the weak and strong together. While people generally liked their experience, the transformation levels were low and changes were generally personal and private.

However, something quite different happened for this church group when the idea of making their class into a transformation zone for joy began to take root. “The response was amazing! People lingered after class chatting around the tables about what they learned and their lives until we left at ten. It was the most excited response I have ever experienced,” the leader said. “The best part was seeing people grasp their need for the transformation zone,” she concluded. Schoolteachers in the group immediately applied the concepts to their classes and began figuring out together how to help low-joy children. One veteran teacher, who was ready to quit teaching due to behavior problems in the classroom, was so changed that in a few weeks he reported liking his job. Group members shared that they no longer pounced on the weakness of their children, spouses and family members. “Many were dealing with an awakening of strength and weakness in their lives. It’s upside down of what we have all learned,” the leader reported. This is life in the transformation zone. The weak and strong interact with tenderness toward weakness and guidance from Immanuel. Transformation will continue and joy will spread while they stay in the “t-zone.”

Church schools provide another option for adding the nineteen gentle protector skills and helping children learn love, joy and the Immanuel lifestyle. What if every student learned return to joy skills for the big six emotions before they finished third grade? Sunday School offers an ideal window for groups to learn and practice gentle protector skills. Summer Bible camps, women's studies, young mothers clubs and many church activities could become places for transformation.

How are we doing?

- What changes have we observed in the last one hundred years in our family, school, church and culture?
- Where do we think these changes are taking us?

What signs do we have in our family, school and church that gentle protector skills have moved toward extinction? What is our part in recovery?

Correcting what we might have heard about salvation

The general tendency for Christians is to think of salvation in terms of the after-life. In the after-life, salvation becomes admission to heaven. For others the focus falls on being saved from hell and the punishment that all sinners deserve. Many extend this thinking to try and follow God's rules on earth so we are not punished later. What we would like to discuss briefly is not the means of salvation through Christ or the method of salvation but the purpose of salvation. Salvation is about eternal life. Eternal life does not mean life after we die. Eternal life means "life all our life." Salvation is for all our life, both now and later. Salvation is about leaving our pseudo-self immediately in favor of our true self. Salvation means discovering how to be alive and stay a source of joy to God and all those who love being alive, beginning immediately. While we are beset with weaknesses now, it is not our weakness that prevents us from experiencing our salvation, it is our attempts to be strong that keep us from new life. Salvation is our ongoing acceptance of God's tender response to our weakness made possible by God's great strength and gentle protection. On our part, we do not hide or deny our deformities, short falls and non-relational moments with God, but in admitting them, seek to return to joy and learn from the God who is with us about how to live the same way with those who are non-relational or weaker than we are. Salvation is joy that starts now and here. The good news we spread is that this life of joy is open to all who would be like Jesus, whose life was called "great joy to all people."

Restoring our Christian capacity to change lives

Historically, Christians have helped the weak in many ways by advocating for children and starting many of the world's schools and hospitals. We now need schools and hospitals for the soul. The main point of this chapter is to highlight the recent and rapid loss of ability to relate as human beings. The media we watch, the way we can travel and the loss of multi-generational community and dramatic reduction of engaged interaction is bringing gentle relational skills near extinction by greatly reducing the direct interactions between the young and old in daily life. Where Christians once helped people learn to read and heal, we now must train the world in joyful relationship skills. If we fail to do so, we face a steep rise in predator levels across the world, in all homes, schools and churches. We are watching this happen.

We cannot afford to build our comfort zones. We try to hide our lack of character by staying with people we like and asking God to help make us stronger. For our lives and character to change, it is necessary, but not enough, to have the strong and weak together. Spiritual and emotional maturity only develop when there are frequent and extended joyful interactions. Being glad to be together during weakness happens when we see each other through the "eyes of heaven."

The unchanged character in most Christians starts from a lack of joy to be with God or joy to be with people. Let us be first to enter the transformation zone.

- Let us express our joy.
- Let us stay in joyful contact with the weak. Joy strengthens weakness.
- Let us find Immanuel every time our joy or shalom gets lost and return to joy.
- Let us sustain joy at home, school and church.

While our best network for spreading gentle protector skills is definitely through churches, the most strategic target is schools. Christian teachers, parents and students are everywhere, and the best way to take joy where it is needed is to bring joy to all classrooms. There are secular attempts to change the culture of schools by training relational and emotional maturity skills. These programs are showing tremendous impact, but these programs will continue to be the exception in schools. The impact will be greater if teachers, parents and students bring joy with them and work to spread the joy in every class they attend. Joy is always personal so let us give joy to every student, parent, teacher or administrator we meet. Learn something about joy so we can

help others catch the dream. After all, joy is the most powerful of all human motivations and everyone needs some.

Let us find some low-joy place and get involved bringing joy. We will check with Immanuel every time we lose our joy or shalom. We will invite people with relational skills to join us. Our character will change as we bring our weakness to Immanuel instead of trying to be strong. Trying to be strong will kill our joy. Avoiding our weakness will kill our joy. God put us right where we are because that is the best place God could imagine for us to start some joy. Joy starts here.

Joy Actions

Home: Think of the people in your life who are in the transformation zone who would be inspired to start joy. Share this book with them and start some joy.

School: Find a teacher, administrator, parent or student and share the vision of this book. Start some joy.

Church: Give this book to the children's pastor or youth leader who would be inspired to start some joy in your church. Start some joy.

Home, School and Church Assessment

You might be wondering where to start. Because home, school and church are the three most common places for our identities to be formed and transformed, we have created way to compare their readiness for transformation. To use this tool you must consider what home, school and church you will evaluate. We designed this tool to evaluate the home where you now live, the school you, your children or grandchildren attend (or you work) and your current church. The comparison of scores may help you decide where to seek transformation first.

We are aware that many people live alone, are not involved with any schools and have no active church life. You can therefore pick a category like “school” and substitute “work” answers. “Friends” can replace “home” and any social network can fill in for “church.” Simply answer all the questions using the same target group.

A second way to use the home, school and church assessment is to evaluate how your life developed. In this historical use, you can rate your childhood home, school and early church experiences. Once you decide your three target groups, complete the questions on the following page.

Home, School and Church Assessment

1. We often speak about how this place has changed our lives for the better. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *constantly*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. It is easy to find things to appreciate here each day. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *consistent appreciation*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. I expect people will say kind things about my weaknesses here. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *everyone is always kind*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. We regularly become more joyful when we come here. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *everyone every time*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. When things are going wrong here I still feel peaceful. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *consistent peace*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6. When I see people who are hurting I want to bring them here. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *very strongly*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7. Here I can interact with people who have more life experience than I have. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *easily*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8. What I am expected to do here has value. (0 = *my energy gets wasted* to 10 = *what I do is really worthwhile*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
9. What we do here has a positive effect on the people around us. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *daily*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10. I feel understood here. (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *by everyone*)
 Home 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Church 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Home total _____ School total _____ Church total _____

Home	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
School	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Church	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

Disruption of Protector Skill Propagation Assessment

1. The way I have been treated makes it hard to trust people.
I am very trusting 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I trust no one*
2. People with lots of problems stay to themselves in my church.
They mix well 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *They stay isolated*
3. How many people taught me better ways to get along with others?
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+ *People*
4. Most days I spend ___ hours watching shows and movies.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+ *Hours*
5. Asking others for help is a sign of weakness.
Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Strongly agree*
6. People ridicule or reject me if I ask for help.
Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Most of the time*
7. In the last day I have spent time in person with ___ people outside of work.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+ *People*
8. Someone at home spends ___ hours a day on computer-based devices.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+ *Hours*
9. How much has alcoholism, addiction, mental illness and disease disrupted the last 3 generations of my family?
Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Severely*
10. War, crime and abuse has disrupted the last 3 generations of my family.
Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Severely*

Total your scores here. _____

Mark the matching spot on the scale.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Saving Joy From Extinction Bible Study

Think back on something you appreciate and spend two minutes enjoying appreciation. Next, ask God to make this study interesting for you. Now read the following passage from the epistles.

Scripture Ephesians 4:11-5:1 Read then review the passage for each question.

Chapter Ten Question: What changes in identity and character will God's joy-bonded children (verse 5:1) learn and introduce into their human relationships?

Weakness, Joy and Shalom Questions:

1. Who are weak or strong in this passage?
2. What kind of interaction does God desire between weak and strong?
3. What do we learn about joy and shalom (everything works together) from this passage?

Immanuel Questions:

1. What effects does perceiving "God is with us" have in this passage?
2. Group study activity: God is always present and eager to help us see more clearly. In what ways do we perceive or guess that God is helping us understand this passage right now in the group discussion?

Note: Thinking about God's active presence may seem strange at first because people generally discuss the past more than they observe the present. Keep your answers short. Feel free to guess.

Personal Story Question: Where in this passage did you sense low-joy in your life and want God to visit your weakness?

Whole Bible Question: Across the Bible, what stories tell of someone who learned a better way to treat others from God or God's people?

Wrap-Up Minute: What do you now know that you didn't know before this week's study?

Our Life Model Joy Skills Exercises

Individual: Return to Joy from Shame

1. What thoughts and behaviors do you notice in yourself when you feel criticized or judged? How does this feel in your body? (For example, “My chest tightens or my stomach aches.”)
2. Who has permission to correct you? Who does not? Why?
3. What fears or resistance do you notice when others try to give you feedback and correction?
4. What aspects of your presence, personality and character do not bring other people joy? What is the best evidence to support your conclusions from family, school and church?
5. What reasons are given when other people are not glad to be with you? How well can you place yourself in the shoes of other people when they are upset with you? In other words, can you see their perspective (mindsight skill) when they are upset with you? Why or why not?
6. How long do you stay stuck when you encounter shame messages?
7. Even if the criticism does not sound accurate, what do you need when you feel ashamed? What do you need from people and from God?
8. Take a moment to remember an appreciation (or Immanuel) moment that brings you joy. Once you feel shalom pray and ask how Immanuel sees you. Notice what thoughts come to mind.
9. Find three people in your life who appear to handle shame in a way you appreciate. Ask them to tell you a time they felt like someone was not glad to be with them and how they responded.

Group: The Predator, Possum and Protector in Me

1. As each person shares their answers to the questions below, practice seeing them through Immanuel’s eyes. Do not offer feedback.
 - A. What predatory traits do you see in yourself that you would like to change? What role does fear play?
 - B. What possum traits do you see in yourself that you would like to change? What role does fear play?
 - C. In what ways are you a protector to your family, church, school and community? Give examples. What role does joy play? How can you strengthen your protector skills?
2. After each person finishes his or her answers to the questions above pray for the person and the specific needs that were expressed. Once the group completes the above steps, discuss how the group can grow joy to be better protectors.

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