



## **Dad/God Isn't All-knowing or All-powerful: A Case Study and Discussion**

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This case study begins with one of those particularly miserable moments in life. I had been working on the essay about unresolved issues in the facilitator on and off for more than a year, and had already invested somewhere between 50 and 100 hours. When my laptop locked up and I had to reboot the system, I was upset, but thought I had only lost the work from the last hour or so since I had last saved the document (the automatic backup function on my wordprocessor was not working properly). I immediately pulled up the original document, intending to figure out what had been lost and hoping to recapture much of the lost material while it was still relatively fresh in my memory. At first I was baffled, and then I was horrified. Not only had my computer failed to make an automatic backup of the material I had just been working on, it had also somehow replaced the original file with a blank document (we still have no idea how this happened). Blank. Nothing. Just the file name.

Writing is usually a slow and painful process for me, and the essay about unresolved issues in the facilitator was one of my slowest and most difficult writing projects. People who write quickly and easily may not understand this, but losing this whole document felt like coming home from a trip and finding that my house had burned down, or like being told that something was wrong with the material the dentist had used for my fillings, and that I needed to have *all* of them redone. This was a truth-based loss that would be upsetting by any standards, but I was also triggered. I was really triggered. I was really, *really* triggered. Even as I recognized the initial waves of intense triggering, I realized that this was a *wonderful*<sup>1</sup> opportunity for me to get healing. But I was having difficulty “considering it pure joy....”<sup>2</sup> (I think I sat there for about 15 minutes, holding my head in my hands and swearing with intensity).

This experience especially stirred up lies around the overall theme “I don’t feel safe in the Lord’s care.” Some of the lies I recognized immediately as thematic lies that I had been working on for some time, but one component of the triggering was quite new. In addition to the familiar thoughts and feelings from memories I had identified in previous emotional healing work, I felt a strange and intense confusion or disorientation – like I had been stunned – like I was in shock. I remember saying to myself, “I feel like someone just hit me on the head with a sledge hammer,” and I couldn’t think clearly enough even to start trying to reconstruct the document. Even a day later, when I sat down and opened my laptop to try and recreate the document, the disoriented “stunned” feeling would come back so intensely that I would just sit there and stare at the screen (I could sit there for more than 30 minutes without writing a single word).

The file disappeared on a Friday, and I spent the weekend alternating between working with

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<sup>1</sup> Feel free to imagine “*wonderful*” spoken with a variety of interesting voice tones and inflections.

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

special recovery software to salvage fragments of the essay<sup>3</sup> and working with Charlotte to do emotional healing work for all my triggers. By the end of the weekend lots of good stuff had happened – I had found and resolved a number of minor traumatic memories that contributed to several of my longstanding thematic lies. But the overall sense that I wasn't safe in the Lord's care still felt somewhat true, and we hadn't found any memories that included the confusion and disorientation. As I focused especially on this shocked, stunned confusion and disorientation, an interesting childhood memory suddenly came into my mind – a memory that I had always been aware of, but that had never seemed important.

I was standing in the alley, behind our garage, watching my father as he was talking with a friend and doing something to our car. I was especially fascinated by the car trunk, which my father had left standing open. I had never seen inside a car trunk before, and somehow, to my three year old mind, it seemed like some kind of mysterious cavern that must certainly contain amazing and wonderful things. Unfortunately, I walked up to the back of the car at the same time my father reached up to close the trunk lid. He had his face turned towards his friend so that he didn't see me, and at the moment I peeped over the edge of the trunk he slammed the lid. I can still remember the dull “thunk” the edge of the trunk lid made as it hit the top of my head. The blow wasn't especially painful (compared to other childhood injuries I had survived), but it surprised and frightened me so that I started screaming and crying immediately. Dad was horrified when he realized what had happened, and Mom came running when she heard me screaming. I think everybody was especially upset because there was a lot of blood (scalp wounds bleed a lot), but fortunately my hard head was equal to the task of protecting my brain.

I had always remembered these details, and had often told the story to friends and cousins – proudly letting them feel the lump across the top of my head that I carried as a souvenir. My conscious memory had always been that the whole incident wasn't that big of a deal once Mom and Dad cleaned up the mess and put an ice pack on my head. It always seemed like a moderately physically traumatic, but emotionally unimportant, childhood adventure.

However, when this memory came forward during the emotional healing prayer time I became aware of several details that had never been present in previous memory reviews of the incident. (I was obviously *inside* the childhood memory experience in a whole new way.) I remembered images from my peripheral vision at the moment I was peeking over the bottom edge of the car trunk – I remembered seeing Dad reach up to close the trunk lid, and also seeing that his face was turned away because he was talking to his friend. I remembered being aware of the fact that he was about to close the car trunk, but then I also clearly remembered thinking “I don't need to worry, because Dad can see me even though he's looking the other way. He knows where I am and will make sure I'm okay.” Even as the trunk lid was starting to come down, I remember thinking, “It's okay. He knows everything, he can do anything, and he will make sure that I don't get hurt. He will stop it in mid-air and wait until I am out of the way.”

As all these pieces came forward I suddenly realized that my three year old mind had spontaneously connected Dad and God, assuming that whatever was true about Dad must also be true about God. I realized that at the beginning of this memory, *both* Dad and God seemed

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<sup>3</sup> Just in case anyone is wondering how we could recover fragments of a file that had been “lost” and replaced by a blank file: even when a file has been “erased” or “lost,” there are still fragments of previous versions scattered about the hard drive. Special software can find and recover these “invisible” fragments as long as the computer hasn't overwritten them with some new file.

omniscient and omnipotent, and I trusted them to make sure that nothing really bad would happen to me. By the end of the memory this no longer felt true. At the end of the memory, it felt like *neither* Dad nor God were omniscient or omnipotent, and I no longer trusted that they would make sure that I was okay. It wasn't that I came to understand that God would sometimes *choose to allow* bad things to happen to me (which is part of the painful truth in this fallen world), but rather that I came to believe that neither Dad nor God were all-knowing or all-powerful – that neither Dad nor God were *able* to protect me from harm in all situations. This was a truth-based realization about the human limitations of my father, but obviously also included a lie as my three-year-old mind concluded that the same was true about God.

As soon as I realized that my three-year-old mind had made the assumption that whatever was true about Dad must also be true about God, I also realized, *experientially*, that this assumption wasn't true. Instead of "Neither Dad nor God are able to protect me" feeling true, it felt true that Dad is human and limited, but that God *is able* to protect me – that God sometimes *chooses to allow* bad things to happen, but that He *is* all knowing and all powerful, and that He *is* able to protect me in any and all situations if He chooses to do so.

### Discussion/comments

Additional healing months later: It is interesting to note that I received some additional healing nine months after the initial trigger of losing the computer file. While I was thinking about the original memory and about the emotional healing process in order to write this essay, I realized that something wasn't completely peaceful and calm. When I focused on this, I identified another lie, and then received another piece of healing as another truth clicked into place (I have found this to be a common occurrence, and have often received additional healing in the process of writing about my healing experiences):

Throughout my life, whenever I had told this story or thought about this memory, I had always felt vaguely puzzled that I hadn't been injured more seriously. But it had never occurred to me that the Lord may have been protecting me. As I was working on this essay, I realized that I *still* didn't really feel safe in the Lord's care because even though He *is able* to protect me, He *chooses* to let bad things happen. As I focused on this thought, it suddenly occurred to me: "Maybe the Lord did protect me – maybe the minimal damage feels like it doesn't quite make sense because it *doesn't* make sense (at least not without acknowledging supernatural protection)."

I have a degree in physics and a degree in medicine, and when I thought about this part of the memory carefully and logically I realized that my injury *should* have been much more serious. This was back in the early 60's, and our car was one of those big old cars where you could lay several men side-by-side in the trunk. The trunk lid was probably 4-5 feet from the hinges to the closing edge, and swung through a large closing arc. This was also back in the days when cars were made of heavier steel, so the trunk lid was not only big, but also heavy. The bottom edge of the trunk lid was a narrow metal ridge. My dad was 6'2" and over 200 pounds, and he would stretch up, and then come down with both arms and his weight when slamming those old car trunks. I was only three years old, with the thinner skull and small, skinny neck of a small child. From a medicine and physics perspective, I should have suffered some

combination of a skull fracture, a concussion, intracranial bleeding, and a broken neck.<sup>4</sup> As I look at it now, what *feels* true is that the Lord did allow a painful, scary event to occur, but that He also protected me from much more serious injury in this particular situation.

This doesn't completely address the complex question of why God sometimes allows bad things to happen, even though He could protect us, but part of the truth regarding whether or not I can trust the Lord to take care of me is that He often *has* protected me, even when I haven't been aware of it.

Physical memory of being confused, disoriented, stunned, and in shock: I didn't feel any physical pain with the triggering from losing the computer file, but it certainly seemed like the shocked, stunned, confused, and disoriented part of the intense triggering was a physical memory component of being hit on the head. I think the physical pain remained connected, and was processed at the time of the original event, but that the physical memory of being shocked, stunned, confused, and disoriented was disconnected and buried along with the overwhelming emotional shock, confusion, and disorientation of "discovering" that those in charge of the world (God and my father) were not omniscient or omnipotent.

Truth carried in non-traumatic memory files versus distorted beliefs carried in traumatic memories: This point has been made in many other places, but it is such an important principle that I am going to make it again. Getting the correct cognitive information into my head was not the problem. I have read the Bible from cover to cover several times, and I have read hundreds of other books – from theology to true story accounts of God's supernatural intervention – telling me that God is all knowing and all powerful. I had the correct *cognitive* information about God's omniscience and omnipotence, and I would have argued with you if you had told me that God was not all-knowing enough or all-powerful enough to protect His children. But these truths about the Lord did not *feel* true in any situation where my trauma-associated distorted interpretations were triggered. Buried in the files for unresolved trauma was this three-year-old memory of Dad slamming the car trunk on my head, and when this memory would get triggered these distorted interpretations would *feel* true – it would *feel* true that God did *not* always see me, and that He was *not* always able to protect me.

Memory present, but pieces missing and/or no insight: This case study is a good example of something we have often seen. It is possible to have the memory of an event in conscious awareness, but to not perceive the importance of the memory and/or to have *portions* of the memory repressed and/or dissociated.

No anger: Another interesting observation is that I didn't feel any anger towards Dad in this memory. In fact, the only part of working through this memory that made me cry was seeing how frightened Dad was and how bad he felt when he realized what had happened. It was completely clear that he cared about me and didn't want to hurt me, but that he simply hadn't known I was there.

I don't remember anything about what the inside of that car trunk looked like.

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<sup>4</sup>I recently spoke with my father, to check if my memory was accurate or whether I might have exaggerated the physics of the situation. He responded with "I shake every time I hear you tell that story," and he totally agreed that (logically) I should have been much more seriously injured.