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Presentation Transcript
Understanding Human Behavior – Part 3
January 15, 2009

This presentation is titled *Understanding Human Behavior, Part 3*.

Good afternoon to everybody. Packed house here today. We're working our way through a series on why we act the way we act and why we do what we do. So far in this series we've covered three principles on brain function and looked at what each one of them means in real world terms.

The first one, if you'll recall, is *the brain is organized in heirarchial fashion* with information entering the lowest parts and the smallest parts of the brain, then moving up into the more complex, larger parts. Why is it good to know this? Well, the smaller parts of the brain are the less complex and no thinking is done in those parts. So early experiences – because those parts of the brain are first developed when we're little – are stored, but they're not stored as thoughts. They're just stored as experiences and we can't access them by thinking about them.

The second one that we covered was *brain cells change in a use-dependent fashion*. So what's the thing with that? Well, even though we have early associations that are pre-thought that are stored in networks in the brain, if those associations aren't activated all the time, they will eventually degrade and be replaced by other experiences. So that's a good thing to know if you're dealing with somebody that was not treated properly as a small child.

The third principle we covered is *the brain develops in sequential fashion*. So what's good to know about that? Well, if we want to help our children grow, or if we want to work with a child therapeutically, like I do – to help them overcome their past – then we have to provide services and experiences that are appropriate for the developmental level – because, if you're too far past their development, it doesn't do them any good. And, if you're too far under their developmental level, then you're covering old ground. So you need to be out on the edge of what they're learning to do at that time.

So today we're going to continue on with these principles. We'll begin with number four. And I think we're going to be able to get through all six of them today.

The fourth principle is *the brain develops more rapidly early in life*. By age four a child's brain is ninety percent of its adult size, even though the brain continues to develop to late adolescence. Females brains are usually complete somewhere around twenty-one to twenty-three. And male brains tend to take longer – like twenty-four, twenty-five. That's why girls are much more verbal at a younger age than guys are. That's the last thing to develop, it seems like, in guys.

So the young brain is very adaptable to the environment. A young brain is like a gigantic sponge. It just soaks up experiences. And those early experiences form those networks that become the basis for comparison for all future incoming input. And like I said, those early experiences are stored in the brain as experience, but there's no thought connected with it, because you don't think with your brain stem and your diencephalon. Yet those are the parts that are developing when we're very young.

Of all the experiences of a lifetime that are stored in the brain, the earliest form the most enduring and the most powerful. So three years of neglect can cause a lifetime dysfunction. It seems like it's not fair, but that's how it works. It's also true that it's much easier for a brain to organize when young than to reorganize itself when it's older, because it's much more *plastic* when it's young. It's kind of like the human body, too, isn't it? It's much more flexible when we're young than when we get older.

So let's talk about the implications of this principle – that the brain develops more rapidly early in life. Think about what we think about kids. This understanding of how the brain works kind of turns on its head a major prevailing idea that very young children are not as affected by events around them as older children are affected. That's not really true at all. Younger children are affected the *most* by the experiences that happen to them. The brain has a predilection for earliest memory. So the earlier a child has repeated negative experiences, the more likely that is to affect them all the rest of their lives in a negative manner.

It's also true that the sooner a neglected or abused child can be removed from that bad environment, the less will be the damage. And the longer a child is in that type of environment, the more pervasive the negative affects on the child. So all that points to early intervention, doesn't it? So the sooner things can be fixed for the child, the better it's going to be – the less damage that's done. And that also means that proactive interventions reduce the need for reactive interventions later.

What's a reactive intervention? Well, a reactive intervention is what I do all day long. I get the kid *after* the damage has been done and I'm reacting to the negative symptom. Whereas *proactive* interventions *prevent* the negative occurring in the first place – or at least minimize them. Unfortunately, it's really difficult to be proactive here. Families function in the privacy of their own homes. And infants can't tell their story. And they're not seen by teachers or really anybody outside the family most of the time. So there are a lot of things that go on in some families that are very detrimental to children and nobody finds out about it until the child starts school and teachers start encountering them and seeing that something isn't right. So it's much harder to change what has been put in place early, but it can be done to a degree.

I worked with two little boys once – two brothers. The parents brought them because they both had been stealing things at school – from other kids, from the classroom. They were six and eight. They lived in a middle class neighborhood and went to one of the better elementary schools in town. So I started doing sand tray therapy with them. I saw one, and then he walked out of the room, and the other walked in. They had no time to talk to each other in between. And they did the *exact* same identical thing in the sand tray – exactly the same thing. They went right to the most expensive, unique figures I had and they piled them into the tray until there wasn't room for another single thing to be put in there. They both did the same thing. I would say that they picked ninety percent of the same figures. It was really amazing! And of course, I'm sitting there wondering, "What in the world is going on here? Do we have clones going or what?" I mean they are two years apart in age. They didn't have a chance to talk to each other. So I was just trying to figure out what that meant.

Well, as I got to know the parents and these boys, a picture started to take shape. Father's job was to deliver pizzas. That was what he did. The mother worked at, I think, a call center for a time, but she was laid off when I met them. She was looking for work. And I noticed, too – it sort of escaped me in the beginning – that they were on Medicaid – the kids were. So you have to have a certain income to be on Medicaid. So how could they live where they lived – in that neighborhood – and still be on Medicaid? Things weren't adding up.

Well, a couple of times, while these kids were in therapy, the parents didn't have gas money to bring them. So I started talking to the father about the situation. I learned that he'd been in the military, but once he got out, he was unable to earn very much – because he had no education and no skills. What they would do is they rent a house in a nice neighborhood so that their children could go to a good school. And in a few months they would not be able to make the rent payments, so they would be evicted. And they would go rent another house in the same school district. And this process was being endlessly repeated. The reason they were doing this was because they *loved* their kids and they wanted them to go to a good school. But they really didn't have the money to afford to do that.

Both of these boys were really, really nice little guys. You could tell that they knew that they were loved, that they had been well cared for and they felt secure. But what I think was going on there was they picking up on their family's poverty and the fear that comes along with that. "What can we do next to keep on living?" I'm sure that's what was going on with the parents. And I think that's why they were stealing. I think the theft was kind of a way of trying to deal with that feeling of not having enough.

Do you know how I knew that they were inherently secure kids? Well, there were several tipoffs, but every week each one of them would place a box somewhere in the tray that was filled with what a child would perceive as the most valuable things – the gold, the jewels, the money – that kind of thing. They'd pack a box full of that and it would be somewhere in the tray. I've seen that so many times it cannot be an accident. That always represents the kid and their value. So these boys thought of themselves as valuable children. They picked that up from how their parents felt about them.

So let's think about that for a minute from the perspective of what we've learned. This "we're poor" thing that they seemed to be suffering from – is that early or late experience? That's later experience, isn't it? That's a thinking thing, right? Now the security that they felt – what's that? That's early. That's a feeling thing, isn't it? The "we're poor" – that has some feelings that go with it, but it's derived from thinking about what's going on and realizing something. "We don't have as much as other people." So the box of jewels – is that early or late? Well, that's early. That's bedrock, fundamental experience that they had with their parents. There's no thinking about that. It's just knowing who they are.

So these kids really did have a good foundation for life, in spite of all the problems that were going on around them. I mean, you really have to hand it to their parents – to pass that kind of thing along to their children when they were always one step away from financial disaster – one step away from needing a brake job on the car – not being able to get to work or not being able to put gas in it. So even though the parents were probably under terrific stress, they somehow managed to convey to their children in the first years of their lives that they were loved and precious.

It's really interesting, too, that one of these kids – I think it was the older one – stole something from my office – one of the toys – one of the little figures. His father – when he found out about it – made him give it back to me and apologize. The way he did it was he told him what he had to do and then he sent him into the office to fend for himself. He didn't stand over him and make him do it. And this little guy – I could tell that he was really embarrassed about what he had done and really sorry. And yet there was no defensiveness there. He didn't make any excuses. He just told me what he did and told me he was sorry and shed a few tears. That came from that undergirding of security that his parents had given him. It's really interesting, too, that that theft – which happened, I think, in week two or three – formed the basis for our therapeutic relationship. He told me that, and I said, "It's so hard to see all these nice things and not have any of them at home." So he knew that I understood what he was going through and that I wasn't putting him down for it. I think, maybe, I saw them for maybe three months. After week six all the stealing had stopped at school. That all just kind of went away.

So we can have all kinds of problems in our life as we get older, but if there is a foundation underneath that of love and care and nurturing and respect that it stays with us – and it's not something we even have to think about, because it was just put there – then we can override all these things that come our way. We're resilient people. But, if we've been neglected and sent the message that we're not valuable, when these things happen to us, it's devastating.

If those boys had been neglected and shamed or abused, there wouldn't be any security to weather the storms of poverty, but they were going to make it. They were going to be okay, I think. And it's easy, when you look at kids like that, to see how they could have become hardened and bitter, if they didn't have that kind of support. And that hardness and that bitterness that comes trying to face trials when you don't really believe you're up to it, that's the stuff that sociopaths are made of. People that become hardened and bitter

have no conscience and no feeling for others and think that they deserve everything that they should want.

Okay. So let's move on to the fifth principle. And that is *the brain systems can be changed, but some are easier to change than others*. I used a word a while back – *plastic* – to talk about the flexibility of the brain – the ability to change. That's what we're talking about here – plasticity.

When a baby is young, and while the whole brain is organizing, all parts of the brain are plastic and easily organized. But once organized, those smaller parts of the brain that are lower down toward the spinal column – the simpler parts – become the hardest to change. In one way that's really good, because those things control our heartbeat, and our breathing, and all the things that we need to stay alive. So, if those parts of the brain could be changed by experience, we'd probably – some of us – quit breathing – stop living as a result. So it's really good that those things are really stable and can't be changed very easily. We wouldn't want that.

Now the larger, higher up parts, like the cortex – the more complex parts – they're relatively plastic all through life. The cortex can change even in people of old age. An older person, for example, can learn a phone number that they didn't know. Or they can even change their opinion about something, even though they've held it for a long time – or a belief. So those parts remain plastic.

So the problems that we have that are caused by how we think can be easily changed, even in old age, compared to the things that happened to us when we were very young and in our formative state, because those parts of the brain are no longer plastic like they were when we were born. By the time we're three, that stuff is pretty much set there. Now, like I said, sometimes those things can be changed, but it's harder. An event experienced in the brain stem of an infant is going to be a lot harder to change than an event experienced in the cortex of a six-year-old, for example.

Most of us can remember stuff that happened to us that we didn't like when we were six, can't we? And you know, as long as you can think about it, you can do something about it yourself – that mean teacher that looked like a bull dog, or the one that accused us of cheating and we were pretty much helpless to defend ourselves. We can think about that and do something about it. But when we were startled when we were an infant, or neglected and left in a walker or a playpen, and didn't have a chance to talk or move around and interact with other people, I mean, there isn't anything you can do about that, as an adult, too much.

The boys I spoke of – their earlier experiences, as infants, was of love and attuning and care. That's in there. And it's going to take a lot of negative experience to convince them that they're not worthwhile. Probably never. The thing about the stealing – I mean, they had a chance to think about that and experience all the things that went with that and it just kind of took care of itself. So those things are relatively easy to change.

So what are the implications of this plasticity issue? Well, when trauma occurs early, it takes more positive experience to degrade those firmly entrenched experiences that occurred as the brain there becomes less plastic. It's easier to change beliefs than it is to change feelings. So working with the feelings that are developed when we're young is where the work needs to be done. That's why EMDR, and sand tray therapy, and play therapy, and therapeutic relationship – all that stuff – goes right to the part of the brain that needs the help. There's so much more of it that needs to be done than a therapist can do in forty-five minutes a week. It has to be a whole team of people working on that.

I was thinking about the little girl I was telling you about the last two weeks. She stands with her back to me a lot. She'll be in the sand tray and she won't look at me. She'll be playing...her head's cocked. She's listening to what I'm saying to her, but she won't look at me. She's afraid of the relationship. And you see this a lot with kids that have that approach-avoidance fear of relationships. They want the relationship, but they turn their back. Sometimes they'll even come up and want to be hugged from behind, instead of face to face. This little girl is *not* secure like those two little boys were. But she's still communicating with me.

When it was time to go a few weeks ago, she came over to my chair, and turned her back and leaned against an arm of the chair. She got very close, but she had that arm of the chair in between me and her. So I put my hand – just the flat of my hand – up on her shoulder and her back while I was talking to her, saying, “Goodbye.” While I was talking to her I felt her lean back into my hand. It was almost imperceptible, but it was there. So she's telling me what she wants – what she needs – what's going to help her. So there's a relationship starting to form there. She's just starting to learn to trust me. That's what this work, really, for her is all about. It's learning to trust – and in my case – an older adult male. She doesn't have a father, so she's not used to being around men really – at least of my age or the age of mother. So this therapy is about her feelings and how she is going to change how she feels. That's where the work is. And that's a lower brain activity. That's where the problem is with her. It's hard to change that. It's going to be hard for her to develop that trust. If she learns to trust me, then there will be trust issues with other people, too, and she's going to have to...there needs to be more than one person willing to engage her so that she has a broad base of experience, so that will *undo* the early impressions that were built there – of distrust. So the teachers and the caring adults in her life are going to...we all have to work together to try to help her. That's an example of reactive therapy, isn't it? Where we're reacting to a problem that was put there early on and now we're just reacting to that and trying to fix something that if she'd had the right experiences early on, there wouldn't even be a problem to worry about. Too late to be proactive there, as far as that part of it goes, but there are other things that are proactive that we can do.

We can kind of get with her developmental level and we can start doing those things that we saw last week that you do at the different developmental levels. She has a lot of energy and she likes music and she likes to dance. So that's one of the places we can go with that – and also the performing arts.

Why performing arts for kids that have these kinds of brain stem problems? Why art at all? Art is all about feelings. It's how you feel. And so anything that we can do to engage these kinds of kids in their feelings and make them aware of the things that they're feeling, that's all good stuff.

I said earlier that the medical model uses medication to deal with brain stem problems. We're just going to regulate their emotions by drugging them up. We said that kind of treatment helps the people around them more than it helps the kids themselves, because it doesn't really go to the source of the problem. It just masks symptoms. And all that's true. It controls the outbursts of feelings, but it doesn't change the feelings. But there's something else we need to think about here. I'm not really intending to imply that there is no use for medication in cases like this.

I had a kid refuse to come into my office some time ago. He arrived with his mother upset already. And when I invited him in, he stormed out of the building, slamming doors as he went. He was already upset. Well, right now he has a really good psychiatrist working with him on his medication, so he can be in school without disrupting everybody else. Even though it helps everybody else be around him, it's also helping *him* to be around other people. So that's a good thing. After being on an anti-psychotic for three weeks, his behavior is really starting to get a lot better. And that's good for him. The causal problem is still there, so he needs to do therapy, but now he can come to my office and we can have a relational session. Whereas, before he wouldn't even come through the door. So the medication is actually supporting his therapy.

Do you know what he wanted to do for his session – when he finally got himself back together enough to come in? He wanted to take a walk. Isn't that a great thing for a kid to want to do when he has trouble sitting still? I mean, he instinctively knew what would work best for him. So we took this walk. He lost his father two years ago and so to have a walk around the block and look at bugs and spiders with another guy that was roughly – probably a little older – than his dad – but in the ballpark.... I mean, kids that age don't understand the difference between forty and sixty, so it's okay. So he was in a non-threatening environment doing his energy-burning thing while we talked and walked and got to know each other. Kids, if you give them a chance, they'll tell you what they need.

So that's the fifth principle that Bruce Perry brought out about the brain. The insights that come about from this brain research – about what we can do – are just profoundly helpful, I think.

Listen to what his sixth principle was. *The human brain was not designed for the twenty-first century.* He learned that from brain research. After twenty-five years of studying the human brain, that's what he has come up with.

One of the main points he has is that we live in a relationally impoverished world. Things go so fast. There are so many choices, so many distractions, so much to do we don't really have time to relate to each other. We have Face Book instead of spending time with each other.

Think about the time of the patriarchs – when Abraham moved from his home to the holy land. It took him – what? – six months to get there? Maybe longer. So they had all that time to sit on a camel and time passed – this four mile an hour world. I think that was the only move he made in his whole life. I mean, how many times have you moved? He took his whole family with him – not just wife and his immediate kids, but the whole *clan* went. So they spent a lot of time with the same people, even when they were moving. Working together back then meant tugging on the same rope, not sitting in another cubicle somewhere communicating by email. They didn't get to watch any TV at night. What did they do? Well, they *talked*, didn't they? That's what they did. They had large families back then. So children were always surrounded by more developmentally mature people to teach them, and model for them and care for them. There were older siblings. There were aunts, uncles, cousins and their parents. So they had lots of older people to learn from, watch out for them, and also to spy on them and not let them get away with anything.

Now, you think about that and then you think about what we think is good for kids today. We think that before they go to school, putting one adult with six or eight of them together is good for them. And when they go to school, put thirty of them in a room with one adult and that's good. Now that we know what the brain needs, how crazy is that? Well, it's amazing! The brain needs a relationally rich environment where many of the others we associate with are at different developmental levels than we are.

Another thing about our life in this world is that everything is rapid, chaotic, bright, noisy and artificial – artificial light, artificial entertainment, artificial relationships. The brain is not designed for that – not designed for rapidly changing, chaotic visual images. It's not designed for anonymous relationships. All this rapid change is stressful to the brain. It's something the brain has to defend itself against.

Have you ever watched one of these movies or these commercials where they chop everything up, and you have this and that going on, and you never get to finish the sentence before the next one is on you? It's irritating. You have to get used to that. What's actually going on there is you're brain is building a defense system to fight that stuff off. It's not that we get used to it. It's that we learn how to defend ourselves against it.

So another thing that Dr. Perry mentioned is that brain structure and function point to our inter-relational nature. Isn't that one of the most amazing things? Talk about the theological implications of research! What does that say to us? We start out dependent. And we *never* become *independent*. We become *interdependent*. We *need* each other. Our survival depends on our ability to *relate* to each other.

I was watching the Olympics a few weeks ago and Bob Costas interviewed President Bush. He asked President Bush...he said, "I saw you talking with Putin" – the Russian president. He said, "Yeah, I was talking to him." He said, "Were you talking about Georgia?" And he said, "Yes, I was." And he said, "You know, we need to stay connected with the Russians and the Chinese, even if we don't approve of some of the things that they do. We need to maintain a dialogue so that we can encourage them to act

well.” When he asked him if he talked to him about Georgia, he said, “Every chance I get.” That’s the way it works. If President Putin and President Bush *know* each other, they have a chance to have influence on one another. But if they just shout stuff at each other through the headlines of the newspapers, everybody is just going to blow that off.

We need to remember: It’s all about *relationships*! Even the way our brains are put together shows that to us. The greatest rewards in life and the greatest pains in life come from relational experiences. Isn’t that true? Attention and approval from a loved, respected person activates the reward system in the brain. And disapproval, or loss of attention, activates the pain-relieving system. Rejection, humiliation and loss actually hurt. Brain systems that control stress response, reproduction, social affiliation and communication are all inter-related and often share the same response networks, and are housed together in the same regions in the brain. All that relational stuff is connected.

I was working with a little guy who was running away from school. I mean, the administration of the school – at the elementary school he was going to – he was a first grader – love it when he runs out into the highway in traffic when they’re responsible for him. Of course, they’re calling me. They want me to fix the kid. And the mother’s calling me. She wants me to fix the kid. And I want to fix the kid, because I don’t want to see him get smashed out in the highway. I don’t want him to become the most unpopular child in school with everybody there. So she wants a quick fix. And we’re all feeling the need for that. I’m not immune myself. So we started trying to do EMDR with him and he wouldn’t respond to it. He wouldn’t participate in it. Do you know why? Because there’s no relationship there yet. He doesn’t trust me enough to do that with me yet. But do you know what he does like? He likes to play UNO. So that’s what we’re doing. But at some point, he’ll be ready to do what’s going to help him. Of course, it drives his mother crazy. “You’re just playing with him!” Only after we’re friends is he going to be able to tolerate therapy, because *it’s all about the relationship*. That’s what life is about.

The human brain is not designed for the twenty-first century. Childcare – six to eight kids to an adult. School – one to thirty. Six hours of TV a day. Fragmented nuclear families. These and other factors have produced several generations of American children now who are relationally impoverished. Now how do you expect a relationally impoverished adult to bring up a relationally nurtured child? It’s not going to happen.

Most kids today – ten years old – have the same number of relationships children had at five years old seventy-five years ago. They have half as much. So this is going to lead to social and emotional immaturity. And we see this in so many kids today. They don’t know how to relate to others. They have no emotional regulation. They lack empathy and humanity. These kids are ten when you look at them. They are chronologically ten years old – biologically ten years old. But emotionally they are five years old. And they live in a world where they’re expected to act like they’re ten. But they can’t, because they haven’t had enough experience to be a ten-year-old yet. So these kids fall behind. They frustrate teachers and puzzle their friends. They begin to feel useless and stupid. And when all that starts to kick in, they can start to feel really self-absorbed, and at the same time, have a lot of self-loathing and disrespect. And you take a child like this, and you

expose them to domestic violence, or violent media, and they are at risk for aggressive and violent behavior as they get older. That's what happens.

One of the things that you hear at school from teachers a lot about these kind of kids is that "he does really well with one-on-one, but I can't take the time for that, because I have thirty children." So why is he doing well with one-on-one? Doesn't that mean that he can really concentrate if he wanted to? That's the conclusion we come up with. In one way it kind of sounds logical, but what's going on there is the kid is showing us what they need. They *missed* relationship early on and they instinctively know that relationship is going to help them now. So they *crave* one-on-one attention. It's interesting to them. It helps them to focus. So when we look at a child like that, we're looking at a kid who has finally figured out what he needs to grow, and he's sending that message out to us. But we would rather label them with illnesses than spend the time with them that they need to catch up.

But that's what we've been talking about this whole time. When you have a relational problem formed early in life, the *only* solution for that that we know of is to start building those relationships, and erode those early experiences, and replace them with emotionally rich experiences as soon as we possibly can.

I used to work at a kids' prison here in town when I was doing a practicum. And a lot of the seventeen-year-olds that I met...they had the intellect of a seventeen-year-old – some of them – but most of them had the emotions of a three-year-old. They could tantrum. They didn't think about how what they did affected other people. They were at the three-year-old level. So if we're going to help kids like that, we have to start thinking about the kind of interactions that we need to have with them, instead of thinking of them as a seventeen-year-old.

That little girl that I was telling you about – the one that leaned into my hand – she likes me to pick her up and hold her like a baby. She's very small, so I can do that. I only do that when her mother is around. That really says something about where she is emotionally. Most nine-year-olds would rather drop dead than have somebody hold them like that. "I'm a big kid. I can do what I want." Not this one.

So if we talk about assessing a kid's maturity level, a lot of people want to go to a standardized survey, have them color in the bubbles and that kind of thing. But we can look at children, and we can talk to them, and we can kind of assess what's going on and what they need. Kids will let us know in different ways what they need. It might not be in words, but they will let us know. So I don't talk about adjudicated kids, because everybody here is going to meet them all the time, but it helps to understand that when we look at people, we need to think about how they're acting and what age they're acting at. What's going on?

I heard an Albuquerque policeman talk about one of the most notorious gangsters in town – who is now in state prison up in Santa Fe. He said that one of his interactions with this guy, just before he went to the state pen, was out in front of a house that the cops had surrounded with a SWAT team, and this guy drove up. And he said, "He reminded me of

a fifteen-year-old kid.” And he was forty! He still had all that macho stuff that a lot of fifteen-year-old boys have. This guy never got past any of that.

Okay. So we’ve managed to get through all six principles. That means that we’re done with that part of it. What should we do next? Let’s go to Malachi 2, and verse 13. I want to read this passage to you and then we’ll talk about what it means in light of what we’ve been studying for the last three weeks. God says:

Mal. 2:13 – *Another thing you do – that doesn’t start out good, does it? Another thing you do: you flood the LORD’s altar with your tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings, or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” – Why are you not paying attention to us, God, and answering our prayers? It is because the LORD is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth – because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner – the wife of your marriage covenant. Has He not made them one in flesh and in spirit? They are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself and your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife – or the husband – of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel. “And I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself and your spirit and do not break faith.*

What’s the point here? Why did God promise to bring severe consequences on these people? Well, because they were breaking their covenants of marriage. And what was so bad about that? Because it was hurting the spiritual development of their children. That’s exactly what that says, isn’t it? And the thing that God had in His mind – the byproduct of marriage – was spiritually healthy kids. That’s what’s important to Him.

So there is one thing that we can know from this scripture. Anything that hinders the spiritual development of our children is equally deserving of punishment. Remember what Jesus said about a millstone for those who offend our children? It’s not just one place in the Bible. It’s several places.

Now, in the Church of God we have made a tradition of *listening*. We have equated spirituality with listening, instead of *doing*. We sit and listen, and we think that that makes us good people. Our consciences are clear. We went to church. We listened. The only problem with that is, nothing really *happens* after we listen. We stay the same. We are self-satisfied because we listened. And we tolerate all kinds of structures that are archaic and don’t produce change or growth.

So I want to continue this series with one more presentation next time. And what I want to do is take what we’ve learned in these first three presentations about what the brain needs, and next week we’re going to construct a congregation built from the ground up to nurture children into a relationship with God.

Now I’m not fooling myself. I know that most who hear this will listen to it and then do what they’ve always done, which is nothing. And a week after we’ve heard it, most of us won’t even remember what it was about. But I’m hoping that some people will be willing

to move from listening to doing – from isolation to connection, from silence to talking to other people about change, from inactivity to inter-related action, from spiritual isolation to spiritual connection and relationship. If we work together, things can get better. Things can get better for the kids in the Church of God. We don't have to remain the church that loses most of its kids. We can change. We can make a difference for them. And to do that, we have to remember that *it's all about relationships!*