

Overcoming Obstacles of Loving Neighbor as Self

Session Six

Online 2020-21



 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world

Overcoming Obstacles of Loving Neighbor as Self

Session Six Participant Outcomes:

1. Reflect on a situation in which you escalated to “noble certitudes.”
2. Develop a plan to deal with “rubs” in a challenging relationship.
3. Examine “armored” responses in a difficult leadership situation.

Preparation for this Session:

- Read this section of the manual and have it with you during the Zoom meeting.
- Finish reading *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown.

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Becoming Aware of the Ways We Get Hooked

All human beings have “hot buttons,” tender places in need of protection. These sensitive areas are often the results of emotional wounds not yet completely healed. In families, workplaces, and even faith communities, people knowingly and unknowingly touch our tender spots and we get hooked. Becoming aware of our own unhealed places helps us reduce the chances we will react in fight/flight/freeze mode. Becoming self-aware gives our brains time to engage a more thoughtful response to hurt and frustration. In our current political and cultural climate, we can easily jump on soap boxes and quickly react to rhetoric and drama without taking time to listen to each other’s perspective. Spending time thinking about how and when we get hooked increases the health of the whole community.

“God loves you by becoming you, taking your side in the internal dialogue of self-accusation and defense. God loves you by turning your mistakes into grace, by constantly giving you back to yourself in a larger shape. God stands with you, and not against you, when you are tempted to shame or self-hatred.”

Richard Rohr, The Universal Christ (p. 79)

Brené Brown, in her book *Daring Greatly*, lists common ways we tend to get hooked:

- What people think of us, our image.
- Being perfect, not showing weakness or imperfection.
- Not being good enough, smart enough, thin enough, etc.
- Knowing for certain before deciding or making a move.
- Constantly comparing ourselves with others.
- Constantly producing, achieving, or being busy.
- Plagued by self-doubt.
- Always in control.

It takes courage to face the fact that we have been emotionally hooked and get curious about it. In order to get unhooked, we need to reflect on our own internal dialogue. What is the story we are telling ourselves? What armor do we wear around our feelings of inadequacies or our need to be in control? How might self-compassion and empathy give us potential for restarting a conversation or rebooting a relationship?

It also helps to realize some common strategies we use to off-load our emotions onto others. Brown offers these strategies in her book *Dare to Lead* (pp. 252-255):

- **Chandeliering**—This is emotionally exploding or hitting the roof when something buried within is triggered.
- **Bouncing Hurt**—This involves blaming, finding fault, making excuse, inflicting payback, and lashing out. These are tactics of anger, blame, and avoidance to push away the real hurt.

- **Numbing**—Offloading on numbing behaviors.
- **Stockpiling Hurt**—Packing down the pain until our bodies tell us enough is enough.
- **The Umbridge** (from Harry Potter)—Saccharine cheerfulness to cover the pain and pass it on to someone else.
- **Fear of High-Centering**—Getting caught up in the flood of emotion if we acknowledge it.

Besides awareness, getting calm in the face of emotional reactivity is very important. Brown defines calm as “creating perspective and mindfulness while managing emotional reactivity.” Ways we can create this perspective may include intentional breathing, counting to ten, or asking to circle back and meet at another time in order to process what is going on.

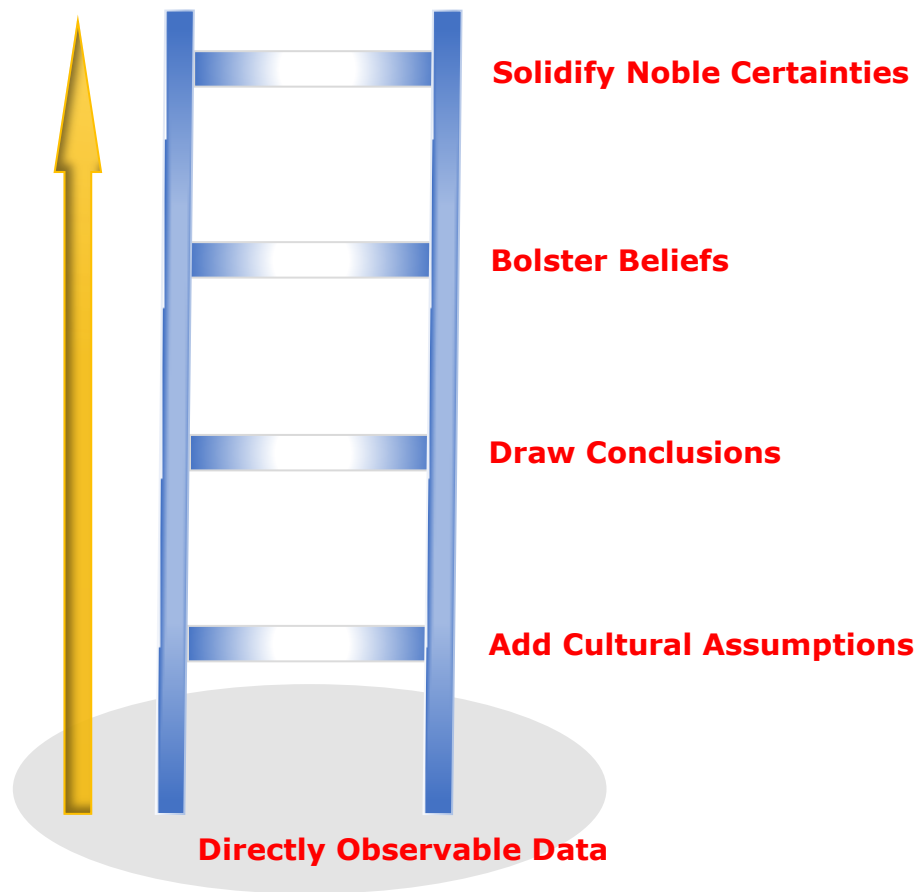
Groups also have “hot buttons”—places that threaten values, sense of identity, or community. Edwin Freidman, in his book *Failure of Nerve*, offers some ways groups can get hooked by this kind of anxiety:

- **Blaming**—Projecting the problem on others or blaming an individual or another group instead of looking at the situation as an opportunity for growth.
- **Herding**—Circling the wagons with likeminded people, entrenching in beliefs and values, or triangulating instead of trying to find common ground with people who disagree.
- **Quick Fix**—Relieving the anxiety with a quick fix instead of thinking about the complexities of the challenge.
- **Treadmill**—Trying harder and working harder doing what has been done in the past rather than addressing what is really going on and what has changed.
- **Diagnosing**—Focusing on the pathology and what is wrong instead of focusing on strengths that would address the challenge.

The Ladder of Inference

Are you ever amazed at how quickly you or someone in your community escalates a situation? Understanding how this happens can help us analyze and even de-escalate individually and as a group.

The **Ladder of Inference** diagram below shows how this happens. It begins with *directly observable data* in a given situation. *Cultural assumptions* are added, and *conclusions* drawn from those assumptions. Adding to those assumptions and conclusions are *core beliefs and values* which add a sense of self-righteousness to the position. These are then solidified into *noble certitudes* (and perhaps ideologies) which can become intractable to our cause, even to the point of vilifying the person across the table. To de-escalate, one must descend The Ladder – back to the *observable data*.



Practice—In a difficult meeting or a stressful conversation, when you find your buttons have been pushed and you are hooked, it might be helpful to reflect on what was observable data (what was actually going on) and noting your internal dialogue. Take a sheet of paper and fold it in half length-wise. In the left column write the **observable facts**—what is being said, what actions are being taken. In the right column write your **internal dialogue**—what assumptions are you making, what conclusions are you coming to, what beliefs are bolstering those conclusions. Reflect on how you might climb back down from the ladder of inference.

“The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns. Faith also means reaching deeply within, for the sense one was born with, the sense, for example, to go for a walk.”

Anne Lemont



The Relationship Cycle

Healthy relationships are key to proclaiming and embodying the Gospel of God’s love. Keeping relationships healthy involves an awareness of formal and informal agreements in the formation of relationships and the ability to negotiate the inevitable “rubs” or conflict that happens when two are three are gathered. The **Relationship Cycle Model** below is a tool which can help a group visualize what is going on in community relationships. Specifically, it can be used to:

- Assess conflict causes and dynamics.
- Understand how relationships adapt to new external forces, visions, and ideas.
- Create a common set of concepts, skills, and norms to negotiate life together.

Relationships go through five stages of development

1. **Create and Negotiate the Relationship:** At this stage, information is shared about what is hoped for and expected in the relationship and continues until a mutual acceptance is reached and the initial relationship is established. Certainly not all information is shared, but enough is shared to begin and the parties involved are satisfied.
2. **Agreement:** At this stage, formal and informal agreements on how the relationship will work are established. This may include things like communication, ways of working together, common goals and vision, etc.
3. **Stability:** Once an agreement has been established, a “honeymoon” period ensues. People give one another the benefit of the doubt when there are misunderstandings or missed communication. As the relationship matures, however, slight irritations emerge and tend to accumulate.
4. **The Rub:** Eventually, all relationships experience forces that unsettle their equilibrium. These forces can be internal (misunderstandings between people) or external (pressures on the relationship from beyond). Failure to come to terms with these forces causes festering and escalates conflict.
5. **Process of Planned Change and Negotiation:** This stage works when the relationship assumes rubs are inevitable and that there is commitment to hear and engage the rubs in a constructive way to improve and strengthen the relationship.

In a community, healthy relationships can be established

When a community, board, or council is first formed, take the time to establish structures and processes that enable good communication habits. Be explicit about how the group plans to handle the small irritations that easily accumulate. By establishing processes for speaking and listening, the group will



form norms for dealing with the inevitable rubs. Practice testing issues to find the extent and impact these concerns have on the community. Learn from the experience of the group. Offer training and coaching on self and community awareness in order to create brave and safe places of appropriate vulnerability. Build trust through inclusion, acceptance, open communication, and shared vision.

Conflict and the Other Possible Cycle

Conflict is likely to take place when rubs are not addressed. When rubs are not addressed, drama may continue to build until there is a **“Blow Out”** which may take several different forms:

- It may take the form of a public intense battle.
- It might express itself in a series of smaller irruptions.
- It might be internalized and show up as inappropriate behavior or a health problem in the leader.

Leaders need to assess the situation by considering some of the following questions:

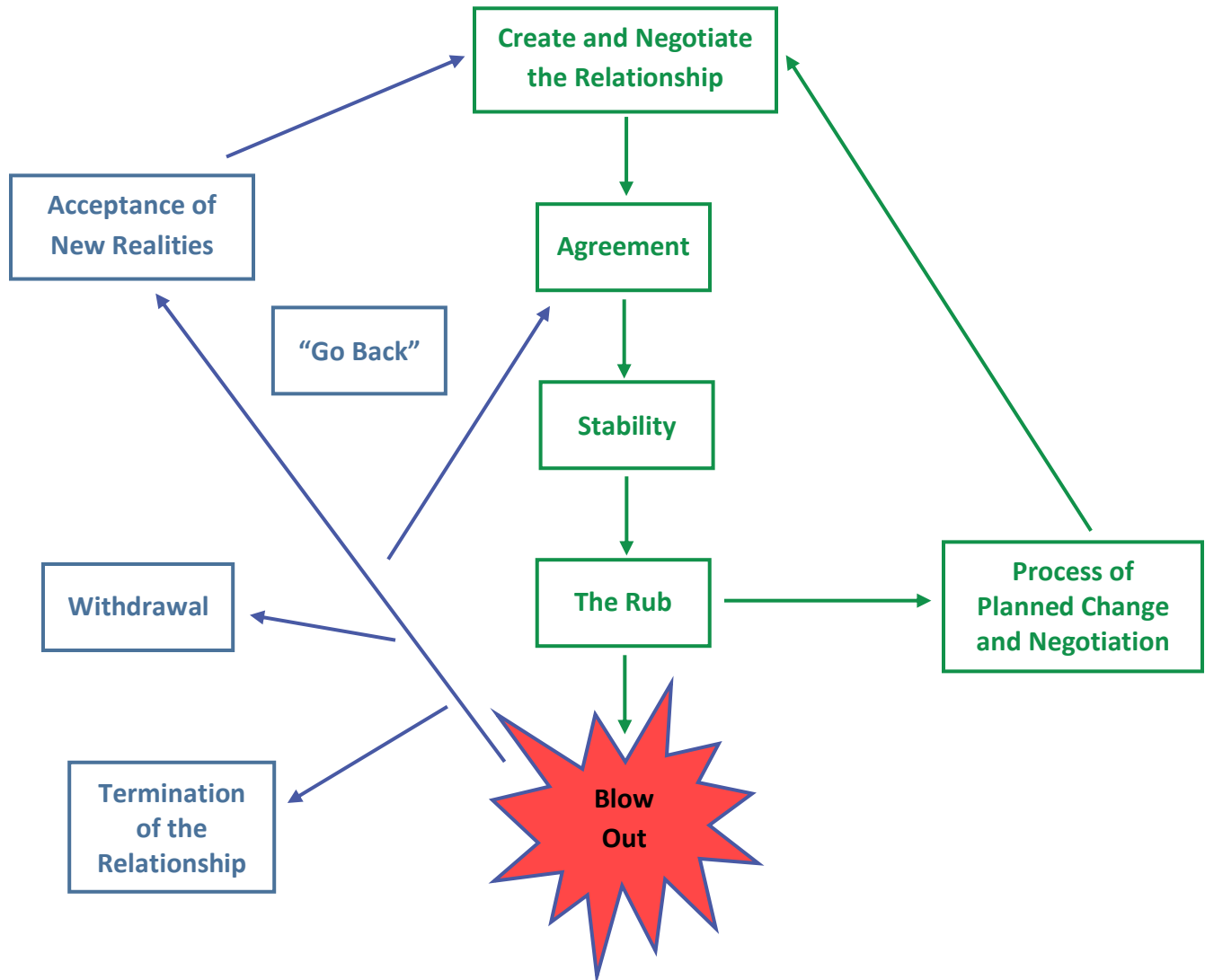
1. How widespread is the “blow out” in the system? Does it involve everyone, a subgroup, or a few influential people?
2. What issues affect the community vision, values, and mission?
3. Is there sabotage involved?
4. Is this an expression of cynic, victim, or bystander behavior coming from people with a pattern of such behavior?

Once the conflict cycle is underway there are four options:

1. **Termination of the Relationship:** The person or people quit or leave the community.
2. **Withdrawal:** Those involved reduce their participation, cut financial contribution, or become passive.
3. **“Go Back”:** People sometimes fantasize about the way it used to be or want to pretend that the “blow up” never happened. Healthy relationships, however, need to get through the difficult situations and not ignore the damaged done. We are people of the Resurrection. We believe that there is life after painful things.
4. **Acceptance of New Realities:** When people return to the creating and negotiating stage and renegotiate the relationship with new learning from the blow out there is great potential for new life and living into an even healthier relationship.



Relationship Cycle and the Process of Reconciliation



Differentiated, Daring Leadership

In the 16th chapter of John's gospel, Jesus tells the disciples to be grounded in God's amazing love for them and that this world does not have the last word. Jesus shows them the way through the cross to the resurrection and gives his Spirit to them as an assurance of this promise. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, these timid disciples who are locked in an upper room on Easter, find themselves on the street boldly proclaiming God's love on Pentecost. Jesus tells his disciples to have courage for he has conquered the world.¹ Relying on the Holy Spirit, we too will discover that God does infuse us with the courage to be vulnerable, differentiated, daring leaders.

¹ John 16:33

Practicing Differentiation helps us be courageous and even loving leaders. Self-differentiation is a ninja-like practice. It allows us to focus, not on the situation, but on how we respond to the situation. It allows us to let go of our fear and thoughtfully choose our response. Practicing self-differentiation allows us to practice remaining less anxious in stressful situations. We all know the feeling of becoming overwhelmed when we simply react to one stressful situation after another. Through prayer, meditation, and honest conversation with trusted companions, we can ground ourselves in knowing who we are, where we begin and end, what we are capable of, and what isn't our work to do.

Friedman² says self-differentiation is:

- Having the capacity to take a stand or “go it alone.”
- Saying “I” when others are demanding “we;” when the group-think is not healthy and moving toward mob mentality.
- Managing our own reactivity and tendency toward polarization.
- Offering a less anxious presence in the midst of other people’s anxiety.
- Knowing our boundaries—where we begin and end in relationships.
- Being clear about our values and goals.
- Being responsible for our self; managing self-care and stress.
- Managing emotional triangles.
- Taking responsibility for ourselves, inviting others to take responsibility for themselves, and refraining from blaming.
- Having endurance and resiliency in a crisis.

Daring Leadership also means looking deeply at our own leadership style and the ways we get caught in our own defenses and shame shields. Brené Brown, in her book *Dare to Lead*, compares “armored leadership” to daring leadership. (pp. 76-77)

Armored Leadership	Daring Leadership
Perfectionism, fear of failure	Healthy striving, empathy, compassion
Working from scarcity	Practicing gratitude, celebrating success
Numbing	Setting boundaries
False dichotomy of victim or Viking	Integration – strong back, soft front, wild heart
Cynicism	Clarity and kindness and hope
Being expert and being right	Being a learner

² *Failure of Nerve*, p. 183.

Criticism as self-protection	Making contributions and taking risks
Using power over	Power with, power to, power within
Weaponizing fear and uncertainty	Normalizing fear and uncertainty
Rewarding exhaustion and productivity	Modeling support, rest, play
Leading from compliance and control	Cultivating commitment and shared purpose
Hustling our worth	Knowing our value
Tolerating discrimination	Culture of belonging, inclusivity, diversity
Collecting gold stars	Giving gold stars
Avoiding	Straight talk and action
Leading from hurt	Leading from heart

Courageous Leadership also means knowing your group and what motivates them while staying true to yourself and your mission. Ron Heifetz, in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, encourages leaders to:

- **Identify your loyalties**—Heifetz encourages self-reflection on your personal loyalties as a leader as well as noting three areas of relationship management: colleagues (immediate professional relationships), community (current family members and groups), and ancestors (people of profound impact from the past). He suggests naming people in each category, prioritizing them and naming their hold on you as a leader. Loyalties which are getting in the way are often attached to our vulnerability shields and need to be addressed if we are to be effective, adaptive leaders.
- **Know your values and purpose**—We all need to work toward something bigger than ourselves. Clarifying your own values and purpose can keep you focused on that bigger vision. What is it that drives and motivates you to lead this community and thrive into the future? How does the work connect to your core values and sense of purpose as a person in the world and as a beloved child of God?
- **Know your triggers**—Know where you get hooked. Realize that once you are hooked, others may get triggered as well. Anger and anxiety can be contagious. Heifetz names areas where we often get hooked: the need for power/control, affirmation/importance, and intimacy/pleasure. If you find yourself out of control, in need of affirmation or intimacy, others can use these needs to manipulate you and you lose your capacity to stay differentiated. Burnout is another way we get hooked. Heifetz calls it carrying other people’s water—their hopes, fears, needs, expectations, and trying to do it for them. Knowing your triggers helps you maintain boundaries and stay differentiated.

- **Broaden your bandwidth**—One way to increase your capacity to tolerate stress and tension is by practicing prayer and meditation. Another way is to expand your knowledge and skill around relationships. Reflect on where your blind spots are. How might you increase your arena, that area of authentic relationship? Know your tolerances—how much chaos, confusion, and conflict you can take.

References in this Section

- Brown, Brené, *Dare to Lead*, Random House, 2018.
- Brown, Brené, *Daring Greatly*, Penguin Random House, 2012.
- Friedman, Edwin, *Failure of Nerve*, Seabury, 2007.
- Heifetz, Ronald, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Harvard Business Press, 2009.

