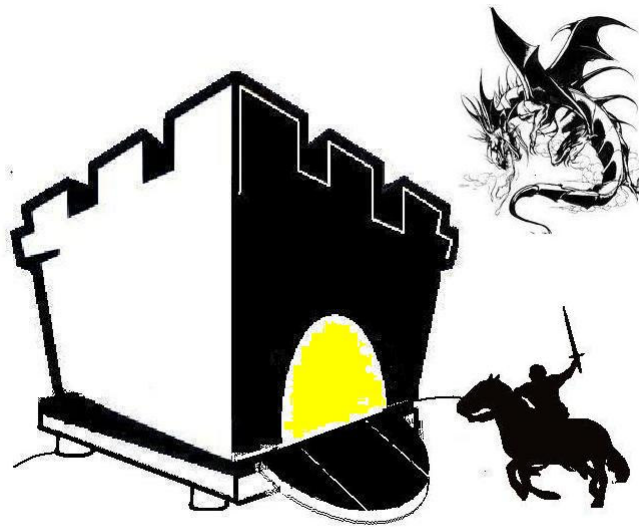


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# Fortress Living



Three Solutions for Your Greatest Problems in Life

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## Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

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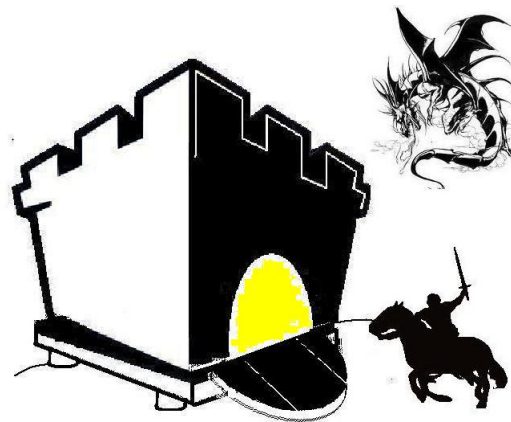
### Lesson Fifteen

### *The Fortress Solution to the Greatest Problem of Danger*

#### God-Centered Relationships: Reliable Access

I've repeatedly said that it's in relationships we find access to the normative and situational solutions of life. In other words, relationships with people, places and things are where we live out our moral and ethical choices. As in all the natural solutions to the greatest problems in life, normative, situational and relational solutions can provide some hope. But it's always short-lived and limited. We saw that over the last 2500 years of history. And where the collapse of those systems was ultimately felt was in the relationships of life: marriages, families and communities. When those solutions break down the destruction is grave.

Let's imagine the castle again. The surest foundation and the sturdiest structure is of little use when the fire breathing dragons of trouble circle overhead if there is no way inside. That's what the bridge is for. But even if there is a bridge, that doesn't mean we can rely on it. Reliable access requires that the bridge have enough *capacity* to sustain whatever load will cross it. In terms of the problems of life, this means our systems of morality, as lived out in our relationships, must be capable of enduring even the *worst* of dangers, the most *severe* pain, and the most *miserable* failure. If they are not, they will eventually crack and collapse under the increased load. Reliable access is all about load capacity. We've seen how limited the load capacity was of the natural solutions to the greatest problems in life. How do God's relational solutions differ?



#### Capacity Building Through Abductive and Intraori Reasoning

Previously I introduced three types of formal logic and reasoning: deductive, inductive and abductive. In God's design, normative solutions require deductive logic and apriori reasoning because they are derived from trusted, authoritative information prior to experience. Our study of situational solutions highlighted the value of inductive, aposteriori reasoning. Inductive logic orders and arranges the particular data of experience in meaningful patterns. When we account for and arrange correctly these data, it's like finishing a jigsaw puzzle on the dining room table. It not only makes sense, there is a sense of satisfaction and completion. The test of these solutions is whether the "picture" is balanced and complete.

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In the relational solutions of life, yet another form of reasoning is used: abductive logic with intraori reasoning. I fabricated the term “intraori” to emphasize where these relational solutions come from: not *before* the experience (that would be apriori) or even *after* (aposteriori) but in the *middle* of it. In other words, relational solutions must grow out of relationships. If the best relational solutions are those that provide enough load bearing capacity for the greatest problems (loads) in life, how can abductive, intraori reasoning strengthen them?



The inventor of abductive reasoning was Charles Sanders Pierce, a philosopher and mathematician who lived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The theories he devised were instrumental in the computer revolution that began 50 years later. Pierce called abductive reasoning the “logic of discovery.” Whereas deductive reasoning involves testing the *correspondence* between a premise and the conclusions; and inductive reasoning tests the *coherence* of conclusions with each other; abductive reasoning simply tests whether or not something works right now. If this sounds similar to the pragmatic philosophy of William James discussed previously, you’re right! In fact, many scholars credit Pierce with the theoretical foundations for William James’ more popular work on pragmatic philosophy and ethics.

In creating relational solutions to the great problems in our lives abductive logic relies on a pragmatic, “whatever works” test. For the Christian, abductive “guesses” will always be in the larger context of the general normative and situational solutions God has provided. Abductive reasoning is not an excuse for going our own way. However, it does acknowledge the latitude and flexibility God has given in working out practical solutions in the complexities of relationships.

So, how does abductive reasoning build load capacity in relationships? As the “logic of discovery” it encourages experimentation and testing. It says, “let’s try this and see how it works.” If it does, we’ll continue using it. If not, we will try something else. Intraori logic—conclusions derived from within the experience itself—means the job of relationship building is never done. Every new relationship and every new day brings new challenges. Even so, it’s not like starting every new day from scratch. Christian abduction means we can build on the successes of yesterday and learn from the failures for today. This is how load capacity in our relationships improves: by trial and error.

A practical example of how abduction can improve capacity is warranted.

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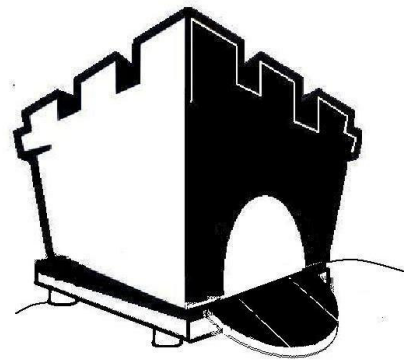


Let's say that our rider has, over the years, come to trust his horse, especially in combat situations. In the past, his horse has alerted him to dangers even before he saw them coming. Today, as the fire rains down upon him, he's making a mad dash for the bridge and the safety of his castle.

However, just as he spurs the horse to gallop across the bridge, it rears up on its hind legs and refuses to go forward. The rider could insist, overruling the horse and demanding they keep going. However, in that moment, the rider uses abductive, intraori reasoning, the logic of discovery. He considers the possibility, based on his trust in their relationship, that the horse sees something he does not. Then, looking carefully at the bridge, he notices what alarmed the horse: dragon fire so singed the planking that if they tried to ride across they would break through. His relational solution to the problem of danger worked—this time. And, even next time they are in a tight spot together, it's likely to have an impact.

This is how relational solutions to the greatest problems in life are derived. If it sounds a bit unpredictable that's because they are. There are larger, normative and situational realities. But the relational ones provide the immediate experience in which those answers are acted out.

Abductive reasoning and intraori logic enable us to experiment in the application of normative and situational solutions. That's why logicians and philosophers call abduction the logic of "guessing." However, when viewed in the larger context of God-centered solutions, abductive logic takes on a unique cast. As pragmatists, philosophers like Pierce and James imagined that the "guesswork" of abduction meant there was no end to the possible alternatives. Truth was not fixed or absolute. It changed, based on the need and perception of the moment. That's because pragmatism was their dominant normative solution as well.



However, for Christians, normative solutions are found within the *Word* of God. Discovering them requires faith. Similarly, situational solutions are found when we practice the *Worship* of God and learn to experience the living hope discussed earlier. But relational solutions function within that larger context. They result from our effort to live out the normative solutions within the context of our daily relationships. Another way of saying this is that relational solutions come in the *Work* of God. And when we look for normative solutions by faith, and situational solutions through hope, our relational solutions become directed toward one purpose: love.

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Putting it together, this is what Fortress Living is all about:

Greatest Problem in Life	Natural Solution	God's Solution	Experience Processing	Logic and Reasoning	Test of Solutions
Danger Self-protection and Fear	Relational Solutions	The <i>Works</i> of God -- Love	The Present	Intraori abductive within the experience	Is it practical?
Pain Self-gratification and Lust	Situational Solutions	The <i>Worship</i> of God -- Hope	The Future	Aposteriori inductive after the experience	Is it normal?
Failure Self-validation and Pride	Normative Solutions	The <i>Word</i> of God -- Faith	The Past	Apriori deductive before the experience	Is it authoritative?

### Fortress Living, Love and Reconciliation

There is no single word so commonly used but so commonly misunderstood as the word “love.” For most people it describes an emotional response or feeling of affection. It refers to someone or something we need or can’t do without. We “love” a dog or a favorite pair of shoes. Yet, within the Christian message, love means something dramatically different. It is not as much a feeling or attitude toward someone as a way of relating to them. Older translations of the Bible, like the King James Version (from 1611) were more inclined to translate the Greek word “AGAPE” as “charity.” I wish we could return to this usage because it much more accurately describes what God means by love. It’s not as much a way of thinking or feeling about someone as the way we act toward them.

This gives us a hint as to how love solves one of the greatest problems in our lives. We have spent much time considering the problem of danger and how we spend so much of our lives paralyzed by fear and the need for self-protection. Relational solutions are the way we answer those problems. But how can love address the paralysis of fear and the desire for self-protection? The answer comes when we understand what the Bible really means by love.

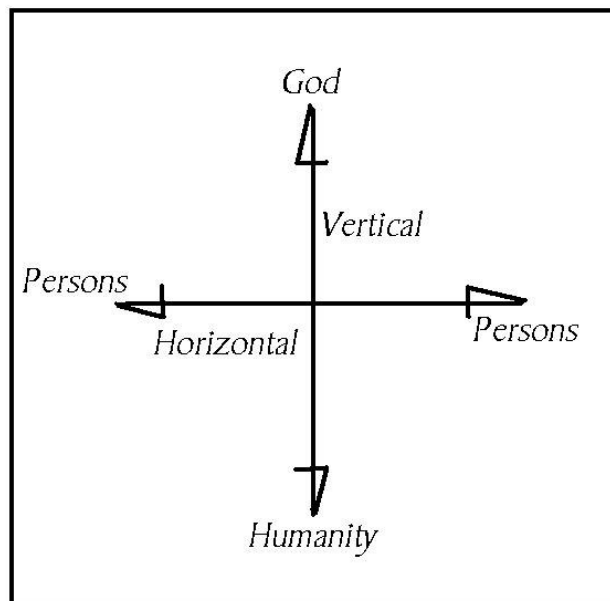
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Though “love” (Greek AGAPE) is a rich term, with many dimensions, I am going to focus on one aspect here that distinguishes God’s perspective from man’s. I’m going to consider love as the process of building bridges to others, utilizing abductive and intraori reasoning, with the goal of making those relationships authentic and life giving. The Bible uses a term for this process of relationship building. It’s the word “reconciliation.” Notice how the term is defined by the Apostle Paul in this familiar passage:

*<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5)*

The “ministry of reconciliation” in which Paul was an “ambassador,” involved two dimensions of life. These two dimensions apply to us as well:



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Reconciliation is a useful term to describe the process of love—even as repentance and confession are fitting terms to describe the processes of faith and hope. Reconciliation reminds us that love is an action more than a feeling and that it involves the active work of building bridges of trust to others.

Even as we observed three “faces” or dimensions of repentance and three of confession, I’m going to suggest there are three faces of reconciliation. If we would activate God’s relational solutions in the greatest problems of life, it will mean we too are active participants in the ministry of reconciliation, both on a vertical and a horizontal plane.

### **The Three Faces of Reconciliation**

We have seen that God’s solutions to the problems of danger, pain and failure involve the transformation of natural processes in our thinking, feeling and actions. God does not do this transforming work independently of his biological design. For example, we saw how in the activation of faith and repentance, God transforms the Pre-Frontal Cortex, Temporal Lobes and Corpus Callosum to change our judgment, modify our language and transform our identity. Similarly, in the activation of hope and confession, God’s transforms natural processes in our Amygdala, Nucleus Accumbens, Hypothalamus and Hippocampus. How does God activate love and reconciliation in our lives?

- **Transforming our Alarm System Through Gratitude**

Sitting atop the brain stem and at the base of the skull is complex mass of neural fibers called the Reticular Formation (RF). I call it the Alarm System of the brain because it reacts to changes around us, waking up the sleeping or passive brain and making us attentive and alert. Though most of the time, the RF works properly, setting in motion other natural processes in the brain that equip us to respond to the circumstances of life, when those changes are extreme and unrelenting, they can cause distress. We considered this in the last lesson in understanding the ordering and arranging of experience in defining situational solutions.

I want to revisit the issue of distress however and see how it contributes to the greatest problem of danger in our lives. The Reticular Formation is not just alerting us when there is change. It’s especially focused on change that may be dangerous. That’s why the RF is so instrumental in our natural occupation for self-protection. Indeed, as one of the earliest brain activities to develop, the concern for self-protection and the fear of dangerous changes is something we are born with. But notice something: the more focused we are on self-protection, the more relationships with people, places and even things pose a potential threat. That’s why fear is such a dominant struggle in our lives. It also explains why the ministry and process of reconciliation is both necessary and difficult. Indeed, reconciliation is the necessary means by which we can overcome our natural suspicion and fear of others and what they might do to us.

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Though the natural Reticular Formation sounds an alarm on the basis of danger, and then silences when the need for self-protection has passed, this is counterproductive in terms of relationships. For, in practice, it means we are likely to be aware of others when they are a potential threat but ignore them when there is little evidence of danger.

There's an old adage, "familiarity breeds contempt." It means when we become too familiar or used to a person, place or thing we ignore and eventually dislike them. That's one of the great problems in the natural Alarm System: we are continuously ignoring or even disregarding others, especially those to whom we are closest or those who are trying to build relationships with us. Married couples and family members experience this often. Over time, they begin to take one another for granted. They don't notice the kindnesses or sacrifices. In fact, they focus more on petty annoyances and irritations and less on building bridges of trust and communication. Part of the reason for this relates to what we've been learning about the Reticular Formation and how it operates. Unaided and undisciplined, it ignores the good and focuses on the bad—defined as potentially threatening. Another old adage says, "the squeaking wheel gets the grease."

In order to transform the natural function of our Reticular Formation, we must train it to alert us for different reasons. It will always alert us to danger and potential threats. But we must learn to sound the alarm when others need our love. A practical way we can do this is through the practice of gratitude.

Gratitude is nearly as misunderstood as love. It's often relegated to saying "please and thank you" and sending a Thank You note after opening birthday presents. Though these are important expressions of gratitude, they are only the tip of the iceberg! We can't develop the concept fully here, but I will say that the heart of the word "gratitude" is the Latin word "gratis" which is also translated "grace." This is a reminder that the deepest meaning of "gratitude" relates to "grace" which always implies an "unmerited favor." In terms of reconciliation and love, gratitude means we train the Reticular Formation to notice the actions of others that demonstrate their need for reconciliation both to God and others. It means we then take appropriate action to build a bridge of gratitude toward them, through words we speak, expressions on our faces and even gestures of appreciation. Gratitude is an important way of demonstrating love to others and building relational solutions to the greatest problems in life.

- **Transforming our Attachment System Through Forgiveness**

A second system in this part of the biological brain is the Attachment System. After the Reticular Formation is aroused by changes it sends a message to the Thalamus which is the center of what I call the Attachment System. The Thalamus evaluates the change message from the Alarm System in terms of two things: should we approach or avoid it? Should we flee or fight?



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Though the Thalamus reacts to all such messages, it is especially important to see its role in our human relationships. For a generation now, researchers have studied the unique function in the Thalamus in establishing relational patterns with significant people in our lives. This process begins in the earliest days after birth so that “attachment patterns” established then are likely to stay with us for the rest of our lives.

For example, the bond between a mother and her baby is one of the most significant relational interactions in the universe, secondly only to the bond between God and his creatures. When this attachment bond between mother and child is secure and stable—when the baby consistently feels protected and comforted by the mother during times of stress and change—the baby develops attachment patterns of *approach*. On the other hand, when the attachment bond between them is insecure or unstable, patterns of avoidance or ambivalence are likely. Why would their relationship be unstable or insecure to begin with? There are any number of reasons—perhaps the mother herself is emotionally unstable and unable to consistently meet the baby’s need for comfort. It may also be that the mother has other children or responsibilities that make it impossible for her to always meet the demands of her child. In extreme cases, she is absent because of sickness or even death.

The point is, the way all of this attachment activity impacts the Thalamus creates patterns in relationships that continue into adulthood.

So, what does God do to transform the natural Attachment System—especially given that so many of our human relationships are plagued by imperfection, insecurity and instability? God’s relational solution is to train us to forgive those people who harm or disappoint us, especially in the relationships that have the greatest potential of doing us harm—our families, friends and colleagues.

Like gratitude, forgiveness is a sadly neglected and misunderstood concept today. And like “love” it is most often relegated to a feeling or attitude. If you ask a dozen people what forgiveness means most will respond that it has something to do with forgetting the bad things that happened between ourselves and others so we can move forward in our lives.

Yet this is scarcely what forgiveness is all about. Forgiveness is one of the processes of reconciliation, not where we forget about past offences but where we learn to overcome them. Forgiveness is not a feeling. It’s an action. So in this sense it is very similar to love. Indeed, there can be no love in relationships without active forgiveness.

I believe God wants to transform our Thalamus by establishing new attachment patterns in our significant relationships. In fact, when our natural inclination is to avoid, he wants us to approach. And where our natural inclination is to fight, he want us to flee—and vice versa.

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- **Transforming our Habit System Through Peace**

Finally, God transforms what I call the Habit System. Activity in this system regulates most of the automatic, preconscious habits and routines in our bodies—everything from breathing to riding a bike. The Habit System centers around activity in the hind brain or Cerebellum, located in the back of our heads. After a change message arouses the Reticular Formation and is sent to the Thalamus for instant analysis, appropriate patterns of response are directed by the Cerebellum. Thus, if the change suggest danger, and if we've established a pattern of avoiding dangerous situations like this in the past, avoidance patterns are likely to be implemented now also. As a preconscious member of the nervous system, the Cerebellum doesn't weight alternative scenarios or deliberate over optional responses. It reacts more or less spontaneously, based on what has worked in the past.

This is why I call it the Habit System. So much of what it does relates to those patterns of behavior over which we have very little control. Do you lie awake at night when you are worried about things you have to do tomorrow? Does your heart begin to race and your palms sweat when you're nervous? Have you developed hypertension (high blood pressure) because your anxieties have become so deeply engrained in you that your body is perpetually in a state of shock? These are all evidences of distress in the Habit System. And they are also clues about how God desires to transform it.

An anxious, frightened Habit System is not good at building relationships! It's like the proverbial bull in a china shop. Perhaps you know people that are very critical, negative or defensive even with their friends. Underlying much of this activity is a distressed Habit System. So, if we are going to love others and become seriously engaged in the ministry of reconciliation it will mean overcoming these habits of distress.

Though there are many important ways God transforms our Cerebellum, establishing new routines and habits in our relationships with others, one of the most important relates to what I will just call "peace." As I use the term I'm referring not just to a feeling we have about someone or some situation. When the Bible uses the term it almost always describes relationships.

For example, the Apostle Paul said that God's purpose in history has been to bring about "peace" in the relationship between God and man. He calls it "peace with God."

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we<sup>[c]</sup> also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5)*

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God has reconciled us to himself, bringing peace where there was conflict. This peace with God is granted us “by faith” and, Paul says, produces in us “hope of the glory of God.” It permits us to persevere even in the midst of suffering and trials. How is all of this done? “because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts.”

There are many dimensions to this kind of peace and they all relate to the great themes we’ve been discussing in our lessons. But there is another kind of peace discussed in the Bible. It’s not the peace with God but the peace of God.

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4)*

Here peace includes both the relationship with God and the very internal harmony of our own hearts and minds. The “peace of God” means we are no longer at war with ourselves. Patterns of cognitive distortion, affective disorder and behavioral distress have been transformed. New patterns related to God’s Word, God’s Worship and God’s Work have replaced them.

And when we experience this kind of peace, it changes our relationships with others. Someone once said, we cannot handle the trouble with our brother until we’ve handled the trouble within ourselves. That’s what the peace of God enables us to do. Though God does not promise that it will eliminate all your behavioral distress, it will redirect you in the right direction. And, when combined with new patterns of gratitude and forgiveness will make you a more effective ambassador in the ministry and practice of reconciliation.

### **Transformation of our Evil Genes**

In an earlier lesson I suggested that one of the reasons the disposition for self-protection is so strong is that it is in our very genetic structure. Every cell in our bodies is wired for it. This is why researchers often describe our genes as “evil” or “selfish.” When God begins transforming the Reticular Formation, Thalamus and Cerebellum, does he eliminate those evil genes?

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No, he does not. We might wish he did—it would certainly make life in this world much easier. In many passages of Scripture we are reminded that, as long as we live in these mortal bodies, sin—evil genes--will be a constant battle.

Even so, God promises that one day the battle will be over. He promises a new, “glorified” body, one not subject to the natural dispositions we’ve discussed.

Our new body will not struggle with the three greatest problems in life. Danger, pain and failure will be only a distant memory. And when we receive this new body, it will begin a wonderful new chapter in the purpose of our lives. Beginning with our new relationship to God, and extending to our new relationships with others, in that age we will experience relationships on a totally new level—the way God intended us to experience them.

In all our interactions with others, our thinking will be motivated not by the validation of ourselves but the validation of God and others. Likewise, our feelings. We spend our lives here trying to gratify ourselves. But in that world our greatest pleasure will not be in the gratification of ourselves but in the gratification of others. Finally, the frantic need for self-protection in the face of the greatest problems in life will be over. If there is any protection to be done, it won’t be directed toward ourselves but toward those we love. For in that day, we will live in the fullest understanding and experience of the greatest solutions ever conceived. And what’s more, it will just keep getting better and better.

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### **Quiz 15 Questions**

1. The relational solutions to the greatest problems in life always involve
  - a. Rebuilding our feelings
  - b. Rebuilding our relationships
  - c. Rebuilding our thoughts
  
2. The man who invented the term “abductive logic” was named:
  - a. Aristotle
  - b. Kant
  - c. Pierce
  
3. An effective relational solution to the greatest problems in life will result primarily in
  - a. Solutions that are practical
  - b. Solutions that are authoritative
  - c. Solutions that are normal
  
4. The “three faces of reconciliation” are:
  - a. Gratitude, Forgiveness and Peace
  - b. Faith, Hope and Love
  - c. Thoughts, Words and Deeds
  
5. God has given what practice to his people to give meaning and purpose to the relational problems in their lives?
  - a. Restoration
  - b. Emancipation
  - c. Reconciliation