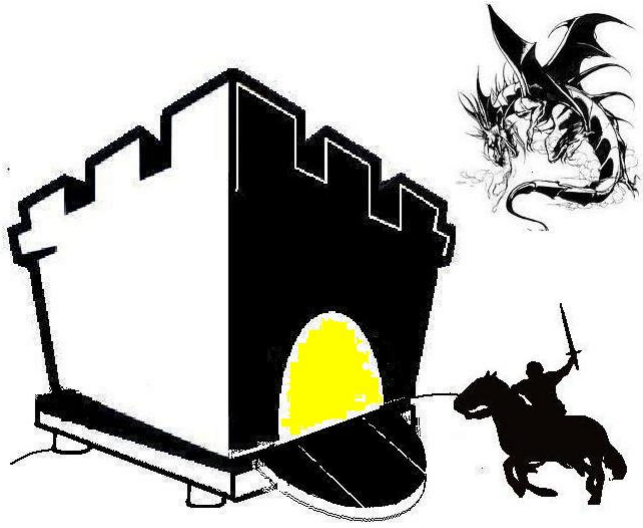
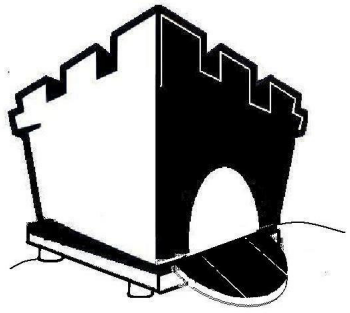
Fortress Living



Three Solutions for Your Greatest Problems in Life

Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

Lesson Five *Where do Relational Solutions Come From?*



Though I started our discussion of the greatest problems in life addressing the problem of failure and how we naturally attempt solutions rooted in the need for self-validation, this is not the *first* problem of life we attempt to solve. When we are newly born and taking our first baby steps, we aren't thinking that much about success and failure. What we are thinking about is the great problem of danger and our need for self-protection. Even the tiniest baby is aware of this problem. That first journey down the birth canal and into the new world is extremely frightening for the newborn. It is all so strange and different. The baby has no frame of reference by which to reassure itself that "it will all work out okay." So, it is terrified by all the new events unfolding every moment of the journey.

This is why I say that from a developmental standpoint, the first problems we address in life are not the worst ones. Here's how the greatest problems in life unfold from a developmental point of view. The ages I've mentioned are approximations only. Each person develops at his own pace:

Birth to Puberty (0 to 12)

From birth to approximately puberty , children are attempting to solve the problem of danger. As we will see in this lesson, they do that by development patterns of self-protection designed to deal with the many frightening, dangerous experiences they are encountering on a daily basis.

Puberty to Young Adulthood (12 – 21)

As they enter adolescence and teen years, the problem of pain and how to find self-gratification becomes increasingly important. I don't mean to imply that little children are immune to the problem of pain! Not at all. But they are not well-equipped to try and solve the problem so they don't spend a lot of time developing solutions.

Adulthood to Death (21 +)

It is generally in young adulthood and beyond that we finally wrestle with the great problem of failure and our need for self-validation. In adulthood we develop patterns of thinking about ourselves, our circumstances and our relationships ultimately intended to feel better about ourselves.

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Though it's something even little ones struggle with, the problem of danger is very real in all our lives. Because most people do not develop adequate solutions in childhood, the problem of danger continues long into adulthood. So it is time we think carefully about it.

From the earliest days of childhood, we attempt to find solutions to this problem in our relationships with the people, places and things around us.

Relationships with People

I'm sure you realize how a newborn tries to find safety: in his mother's arms. Often his mother is the only one who can comfort him. As he gets older, he will venture outside of her embrace for solutions. If his mother is not able or refuses to provide the safety and protection he needs, the child is even more likely to struggle in other human relationships—even as an adult. Many scientific studies have been conducted over the last fifty years that demonstrate how the relational patterns established between a mother and her baby establish habits we take with us through the rest of life.

Relationships with Places

Though relationships with people are the most important sources of safety for children, often a child looks to relationships with places for that safety and comfort—particularly if the human relationships prove disappointing or unsatisfying. Think about the familiarity of your own house or neighborhood. Especially when feeling threatened by various situations in life, often just being in those familiar surroundings can be a significant source of comfort.

Relationships with Things

Thirdly, many children (and adults too) look to things for comfort. For a child, this may be a favorite toy or blanket. Teens sometimes use things like electronic gadgets or sports equipment in this way. We all do it to some extent. Many adults find great security in their investments and possessions and spend enormous energies trying to accumulate more, imagining that if one thing makes them feel safe; ten things will make them feel even safer!

The point is that these relationships are actually "solutions" to address the greatest problem of protection. They answer the question how can I be protected?

In Lesson Three we saw that our normative solutions relate to how we process the *past* Particularly this means that the information we require to develop norms and rules for life ultimately comes from the past—it is passed to us from parents, teachers and other authorities who have gone before us. Logical reasoning is deductive in the sense that we begin with premises or untested beliefs and our solutions flow from them by the laws of logic.

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In Lesson Four we talked about how situational solutions are developed. They come from attempts to process the *future*—particularly our *expectations* of what is likely to happen next in our lives. Whereas normative solutions rely on *apriori* knowledge—knowledge held before we've really had the experience—situational solutions rely on *aposteriori* knowledge. As we saw, *aposteriori* is knowledge gained after the experience and the type of reasoning used is *inductive.* It moves from the parts to the whole. The "parts" are the individual bits of experience. The "whole" is how we organize and arrange them into a particular meaning and perception. And when we find a solution that feels "normal" we assume we've got what we need.

If *normative* solutions are how we process the *past* and *situational* solutions are how we process the *future*, what about *relational* solutions? Relational solutions result from how we process our experiences in the *present*. And, unlike apriori and aposteriori forms of knowledge, relational solutions rely on a form of reasoning I will term "intraori"—knowledge from *within* the experience. They use a form of logic called "abductive."

Greatest Problem	Solution	Experience Processing	Source of Solutions	Reasoning	Type of Logic
Danger Self-protection	Relationships	The Present	Practicality	Intraori	Abductive
Pain Self-gratification	Situations	The Future	Normalcy	Aposteriori	Inductive
Failure Self-validation	Norms	The Past	Authority	Apriori	Deductive

Relational Solutions and Intraori Reasoning

I've made up this term intraori so don't bother looking it up in a dictionary! The word is a contrivance, based on two Latin roots:

Intra = "within" or "inside"

+ *Ori* = something that develops or comes into existence

_____

Intraori = "knowledge that is gained from within an experience"

Intraori knowledge may be a made up term, but it describes a very real experience. It's something we've all had. A simply way to describe it is "gut feelings" or "instinct." It's when someone says, "I just know this is what I'm supposed to do right now." If you ask them why they can't explain it. It's just a feeling. But it's more than that.

Intraori reasoning is primarily focused on reacting to the present moment. It is not based on prior decisions or information about the moment (that would be apriori) or even based on gathering facts and evidence and anticipating what it all means (aposteriori). It is simply a reaction to what we are experiencing right now. And it is primarily related to our relationships in the moment with the people, places and things to which we look for solving our greatest problem of danger.

Why would we need intraori reasoning? If you think about it, intraori reasoning sounds very unpredictable and even unreliable. And if you've ever tried to explain an intraori "gut feeling" to someone you know how difficult it can be to do so. Is there any value in intraori knowledge? Why would God make us this way? It's not too hard to figure out.

Think about that little baby, crying its lungs out. It is so young and inexperienced it doesn't have the ability to process the past or future. Babies aren't able yet to figure out why they are crying. Really young ones aren't even make a conscious connection between a wet diaper or rumbles in the tummy and the feeling of pain and danger growing within them. All that baby can do is react in the present. Therefore, intraori reasoning is the most basic and fundamental form of thought.

If you're interested, the primary brain organ for this kind of reasoning is a gland called the Thalamus. It's located lower in the brain, and generally sits atop the spinal cord. Researchers have found that the Thalamus is one of the most important parts of the brain when it comes to our sense of safety. When a baby is raised in a warm, stable home, with parents who care for him well, his Thalamus develops correctly. Even in adulthood, this healthy Thalamaic development will equip him to have more stable, predictable and satisfying relationships with others. Tragically, inadequate or traumatic events in the first two or three years of life can hinder this development, however. And many of the social and relational challenges that show up later in life can actually be traced to unhealthy development in this part of the brain.

Relational Solutions and Abductive Logic – Take Your Best Shot Logic

As we've seen in past lessons, each form of reasoning also has a unique form of logical processing. We may not know the technical terms for it, but we use these processes all the time. The way we process information from the past is called deductive logic; the way we process information about the future is inductive. Likewise, the way we process information and experiences we are confronting in the present moment is called "abductive."

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The word "abductive" was not recognized by mathematicians and philosophers in Aristotle's day or in the Middle Ages. In fact, it wasn't until the last hundred years. It was coined by a philosopher named Charles Sanders Pierce to explain what we would commonly call "guesses." Why would we guess at explanations for things? For example, Pierce proposed a scenario in which you awaken to find the grass outside your front window wet. Why is the grass wet? Abduction permits you to guess at an answer and arrive at a temporary solution that can satisfy the need of the moment until it is disproven or until a better one comes along.

Problem:	*Why is the grass wet outside my window?*
Abduction:	*It probably rained*

Compare this to how one would solve the mystery using our other forms of reason:

Problem:	*Why is the grass wet outside my window?*
Deduction:	*Father told me yesterday it would rain*
Induction:	*I got up in the night and looked out the window and saw it raining*

Abductive reasoning is a necessary form of problem solving. It allows us to take short-cuts. When it comes to deciding why the grass is wet, the consequences or answer to the question probably makes little difference in our lives. Whether it was a rain storm, a gentle drizzle, snow, or even someone leaving the garden sprinkler on all night, matters little. It may mean the difference between taking an umbrella to school or not, but that's about it.

However, when it comes to some situations, the consequences can make the difference between life and death. So, how do we evaluate our abductive reasoning? How do we know it's working?

Relationships and Practical Solutions

In earlier lessons we saw that normative solutions are best evaluated by examining the experts and authorities who gave them to us. Norms are derived apriori through logical deduction and that means the way we process the past. So, we need to make sure we can trust those authorities and sources to accurately reflect what is really there.

Likewise, situational solutions must be evaluated. Whether a situational solution is deemed right or wrong depends mainly on how well it keeps us balanced. The term for this is "homeostasis." Aposteriori reasoning means that we take the various data and information available to us and try and arrange it in some meaningful way. If the arrangement accomplishes that balance, within the framework of our normative solutions, it's good.

How about relational solutions, derived from abductive logic and intraori reasoning? If a relational solution is oriented toward addressing our great problem of danger, awarding us safety and protection, how do we know it is a good solution? Simply, if it works! If it does what it's supposed to do. In other words, relational solutions are evaluated based on *practicality*.

This may sound obvious but it's true. When the baby is crying, and his mother picks him up to comfort him, the acid test of this relational solution is if he stops crying. If she picks him up and he doesn't stop crying, perhaps it's because he needs more than just a comforting embrace. And if mother is alert, she will begin looking for other answers within the moment—feeling his diaper or trying to give him a bottle, perhaps even checking his temperature with a thermometer if there's a possibility he is ill. All these "guesses" are ways of testing her abductive reasoning to see if it's practical.

The Limits of Practicality

There's a problem with this strategy, however. Just because something "works" doesn't mean it's good or right. Many of our relational solutions seem to have short term benefits but bring long term damage. Think about the child who has a poor relationship with his parents and so begins looking to friends to answer the great problem of danger. The problem is, all his friends are involved in destructive lifestyles--drugs, alcohol and pornography. While being with those friends may feel to the child like the answer, it isn't a good answer. That's because relational solutions are not enough. They must be the right relationships.

These natural relational solutions to which we turn in answering the great problem of danger come from the outworking of actions and internal motivations that are tainted with a condition I call "behavioral distress." There's an entire medical specialty dealing with distressed behavior and we aren't able to go into great detail here. Suffice to say that behavioral distress means that our natural capacity to handle the changes around us is limited. We can handle quite a bit of change. But only so much. And when our capacity is exceeded our body and brain experience a panicked condition called "behavioral distress."

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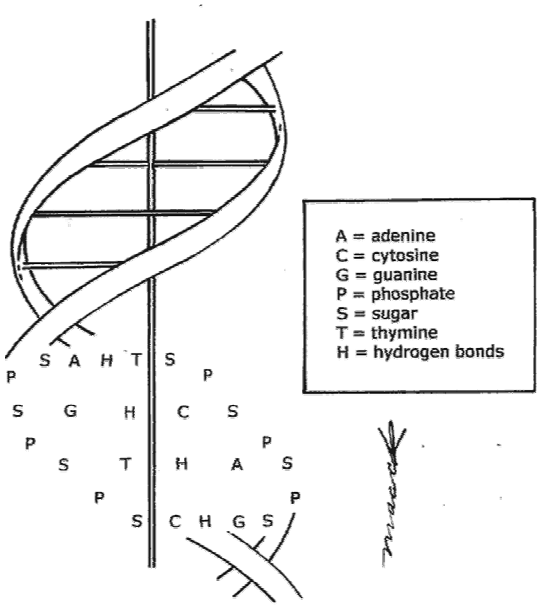
In an ironic twist of events, the relationships we look to for protection and security in our lives are often the greatest source of behavioral distress we will deal with. So, for example, the crying baby screams to be held and cared for by her mother. If her mother properly cares for the baby, she will eventually overcome her natural fears and insecurities in the face of change and adversity and grow into a healthy, thriving adult.

But if mother has her own behavioral distresses—say she is seriously ill, a drug addict or severely depressed—and she fails to render the stable comfort and care the baby needs, the very relationship intended to overcome the baby's distress will add to it and the baby may grow up despising her mother, looking for ways to hurt her back.

It would be nice to assume that this only happens rarely in our world: that mothers are able to meet the needs of their babies and always figure out what to do for them. It would be encouraging to imagine they can further sort out the difference between a baby's need for comfort and a baby's selfish demands—like the child that has all his needs met but just cries because he's naughty. But if we hope that parents are able to do this consistently all the time we will be sadly disappointed. No wonder so many struggle with fears, insecurities, anxieties and worries. No wonder we have conflicts in our relationships when the very people we thought were there to help us seem to be the source of our greatest pain.

Evil Genes

It gets even worse. On a microbiological level, there is something about all creatures that makes our condition even more desperate.



You probably know that living cells are made up of a substance called DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid. DNA is like the building blocks in the castle wall I described earlier. DNA is so small we cannot see it without a microscope, but, like the atom, it is in every living cell on the planet. In the last few years, scientists have begun mapping DNA functions. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about the research. But I will say this. Most experts today agree that every strand and combination of DNA—whether in a flower or a human being--is oriented toward one goal only: its own survival.

DNA is not conscious of itself, as you and I think about ourselves, but if it were, it would have only one thing on its tiny mind: "self-protection."

This should sound familiar by now! That's because I started the lesson talking about *self-protection* solutions as the necessary answer to our greatest problem of danger. Now you can understand why. It's in our very DNA; in every microfiber of our being we are trying to survive and anything that threatens or seems to threaten that survival is believed to be a danger—even when it isn't really.

Because of this overwhelming disposition toward self-protection, some researchers have come to call our genes "selfish." Several books have been written in the last twenty years with titles like, *"Evil Genes"* (Barbara Oakley), *"The Selfish Gene"* (Richard Dawkins) and "*The Lucifer Principle"* (Howard Bloom). None of these is from a Christian point of view. As far as I know, none of the authors believes in God. When they use terms like "evil" or "selfish" it's simply to describe how driven we are to putting ourselves and our survival first. So, even modern science recognizes this phenomenon. Putting ourselves first is what we do.

While Christians with a traditional understanding of the Bible would disagree with many things these authors say, it is impossible to dispute their over all conclusion: humans are constantly putting ourselves and our survival first; the driving, dominant motivation in virtually everything we do is to survive. No wonder we experience so much behavioral distress in our relationships with others. Relationships disintegrate quickly when they are characterized by selfishness. When we put our own interests ahead of others we are sure to experience conflict because they are doing the same thing to us.

Christianity has a term for this condition. Phrases like "behavioral distress" and "self-protection" do not appear much in Christian literature. But the terms "selfishness" "flesh" and "sin" do. And, ultimately, that's what we're talking about. "Sin" and the "flesh" means I put my own interests and needs above everything and everyone else. Yes, sin is violating God's norms. Yes, sin is reacting incorrectly to the situations he sends my way. But at its very core, sin means that my life and my survival matters more to me than anyone or anything else.

Why is that a problem? It's not wrong to live or want to survive. But in the outworking of self-protection strategies and relational solutions of life, selfishness, sin and the flesh mean more than just trying to protect myself. They mean that anyone trying to do that to me is a threat. Relationships are the "bridge" by which we attempt to access the various solutions of life. But when we have a relationship with someone, and both the other person and we are driven to survival and self-protection at any cost, you can see how even the people closest to us are a threat. You may have a hard time accepting this, especially when it's someone you love, but those very relationships represent the biggest threat to our self-interest.

It sounds insane. Actually, it is. Our natural inclination in relationships would rather destroy a relationship with someone—even a parent or best friend--than be destroyed by it. My point is, our disposition toward self-protection is one of the strongest forces you can imagine.

Relational Solutions and Power

Let's look more closely at why a relationship could be perceived as a threat. Why would we think it is dangerous? In general, any time someone or something might overwhelm us because of its greater power it is a threat. Technically, this is called a "power differential." Even the smallest animal is wired to fear creatures bigger than it. Is it any wonder a baby or toddler feels so frightened in this world? It lives in a world of giants. Even those who render comfort are more powerful. Even adults struggle with power differentials. This is why stories of victimization and exploitation in the media and in popular culture are so compelling. There is always a suspicion of authority. You see, relational threats are not simply bad guys that would kidnap or rob us. To the weak, anyone with more strength is a danger. It is a mere coincidence that authorities—parents, teachers, religious leaders, governments, employers—also represent a threat?

Nor is it coincidental that all these authorities are involved in rule making and norm setting in our lives. They are always telling us what we can and cannot do. This too explains why authority represents such a great threat to creatures determined to protect themselves at all cost and why the greater the power the greater the threat.

Among humans this explains why Absolute Authority—like that claimed by the Creator, God—represents the greatest threat of all. Maybe you never thought of God in this way. But to limited creatures like us—bent on our own self-protection, self-gratification and self-validation—a Being like God who has all power and is unlimited in every way can be perceived as the *reason* for all our danger, all our pain and all our failure. In other words, in the natural mind, our greatest problem in life is not just danger, pain and failure. It's the One who has power over them. God is our greatest problem of all! No wonder creatures naturally run from God.

In the lessons to follow we will examine how various philosophers, theologians, artists and craftsman have attempted to solve the three greatest problems in life. Though many solutions have been offered, they've always included normative, situational and relational solutions. But they also have another thing in common: all the natural, man-made solutions to the greatest problems in life have included a rejection of God Himself. Driven as we are to self-protection, self-gratification and self-validation, God represents not the answer to the greatest problems in life but the reason for them.

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Quiz 5 Questions:

1. From a developmental standpoint, which of the greatest problems in life is a toddler most likely to confront?

a. The Problem of Failure
b. The Problem of Pain
c. The Problem of Danger

2. In what way do relationships with people attempt to answer the great problem of danger?

a. We expect them to reward us
b. We expect them to protect us
c. We expect them to stay out of our way

3.Which type of logic and reasoning is used in developing relational solutions to danger?

a. Abductive logic and intraori reasoning
b. Inductive logic and aposteriori reasoning
c. Deductive logic and apriori reasoning

4.Why are relational solutions, with their guiding principle of practicality, so limited?

a. Just because a solution is practical doesn't mean it works?
b. Just because a solution is practical doesn't mean it's right
c. Just because a solution is practical doesn't mean it's effective?

5. The phrase "evil genes" refers to…

a. Our genetic disposition toward self-protection
b. Our suspicion of scientific theories on genetics
c. The ability of our genes to overcome all evil