

## **SIM – Learning Cafes**

### **Week 1- Two Ways of Knowing:**

**Hello! I'm sincerely grateful for each of you joining me!**

**Start with “grounding/appreciation” tips. Recall something that has you smile, feel gratitude, feel ‘calm’ or ‘happy’..... If the information gets intense, then please take a break.**

**We are going to be talking about the importance of living in safe and secure environments, where we are aware of being seen, appreciated, enjoyed, understood and cared for, valued, supported and encouraged to live life fully! This is the original heart desire of God.**

**Research was being done on the levels and portions/aspects of the brain, starting around 1990's. Including how the brain developed and what happens in the brain if trauma occurs at different developmental stages. Studies progressed to the Poly Vagal system in the 2000's. Research is continuing, along with how what is being discovered can be used to help people heal from trauma.**

**To the limited ability I have in our short time other, I want to create this kind of environment for all of us.**

**What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing**  
by [Oprah Winfrey](#) (Author), [Bruce D. Perry](#) (Author)

**Connect with each “group”. There are widely different groups present.**

**\* There are adult missionary kids – some of who have been significantly harmed in childhood. Some who are not aware of being harmed, but very appreciative of childhood experiences.**

**\* There are some of you who have tender hearts towards those who have been hurt and want to come along side in meaningful, caring ways.**

**\*There are parents who more recently discovered that their children were hurt while at boarding school and under the care of other missionaries.**

\* There are those who more recently joined the mission and find the 'topic' interesting and want to learn to navigate life well on the mission field and help their children adjust well in life. You may not be aware of the historical abuse that has happened and some of what you hear could be disconcerting.

\* There are mission leaders who want to more fully understand how 'kids' in our mission were hurt so- as to gain insights into how to proceed in helping them on their healing journey. And also to proceed in safe guarding future generations.

All of us have blind spots. Regarding ourselves and regarding others.

Hopefully these classes will help each of us grow in our understanding (not absolving what occurred and is possible still occurring to different degrees!)... And may we all grow towards being less condemning of ourselves and others through being curious, more discerning and less judgemental. And keep moving towards wholeness.

1. Bruce Perry has a book- What Happened To You? Rather than interacting with others from an angry or disdainful stance of "What is your problem? How could you do what you did?", wouldn't it be wonderful if we all approached each other with curiosity and compassion !!

There are historically personal reasons behind the decisions made to send children away from their parents. Both at the leadership level and within the parents. Within the older missionary era. And even reasons the perpetrators acted as they did!

And much the 'newer' missionaries can learn from it all.

There are historical and personal reasons behind all the woundedness, the rejections of God, the angry reactivity and significant denial and shut downs, lack of skills in navigating relational life, etc. among the adult missionary kid population.

None of us know all the puzzle pieces of anyone else's lives, (or even our own lives) so it is best if we keep a stance of curiosity towards each other, withholding judgment. Hopefully these classes will help us do this more fully.

Sequence for all 3 classes:

Very brief summaries. Overly simplistic. User friendly... My desire is to offer understanding on how we are designed and what motivates us to live as we do.

### **Two Ways of Knowing whether or not we are safe in**

**relationships:** we live and make choices based on what we 'know'.

TODAY's class

**Attachments:** all of us have relational patterns that are literally 'hard wired' into our nervous systems.

**Living the Heart of Jesus without Weaponizing the Truth:** this is going to be the most challenging for all of us. I am going to bring up some scriptural principles, that I very much value, and try to broaden our way of thinking of them from the perspective of how we are designed by God... bringing in the content from the first 2 classes.

- Using the above concepts, look at the overlay of growing up in a "religious" environment

**Caveat:** not covering the dynamics that come with brain trauma or different forms of special needs.

Due to time restraint, I am going to skim the surface...I have taught these topics in 10 hour classes, so this is certainly a 'condensed version' but hopefully give enough information that is practically insightful.

**Practical tips for each section.**



### GETTING TO KNOW MARIBETH POOLE

**Short Life summary:** This is not the experience of other MK's, but also very similar to many. Please use my life as a case study to understand the concepts of the 3 classes. Pay attention to the threads reflecting the quality of bonds I had, relationships and the lack thereof, and the absence of a sense of security and safety I experienced...

I was born in Jos, Nigeria in 1958. I went to Kent Academy from 1953-1970 (9<sup>th</sup> grade), except for one year when in the US on furlough. Then I came to finish up high school while attending Toccoa Falls Academy, a boarding school that had a similar mindset and guidelines to KA and our mission.

Mom and dad, from all I have learned about them, were committed to our God, to the mission priority of wanting to help the Nigerians get to know God. They were friendly, generous, loyal to God and the mission to the best of their ability.

Mom and dad's first child was stillborn. Mom was alone at the hospital in Jos, and it was not possible for dad to be with her or with his first born son. I cannot imagine how gut wrenching this would have been for them, but have no doubt that the impact was profound. From my limited understanding- they never shared their story with me- due to their strong loyalty to God and the mission, along with the enormity of pain in losing their child, it only makes sense to me that they needed to put up some kind of internal "guard" to not bond too deeply with any other children that came along! They knew that they, to be under the leadership of the mission and it's policy, would have to send any other children away, again feeling devastating loss if they allowed themselves to feel normal parental emotions.

We lived in a station with virtually no other children and thus there were not many playmates for me. At age 3, my brother, who is two years older than I am, went on to KA, following the mission policy. Thus, here is a major event that had me experience great relational loss. At age 5, I also went to KA- leaving my main caregivers, my parents. Another gut wrenching loss!

KA was set up so that interactions with siblings (and the opposite gender and those of different age groups or virtually any other child) were not conducive to building cohesive and close relationships. I did not get to know my brother or become friends with him till much later in life. Personally, I experienced KA as a "reform school" with an agenda of "management". Having few staff and lots of kids, this makes sense to me to some degree. But management over love was the environment that I experienced and did nothing to help me know I was loved and valuable and safe.

I vaguely recall the memory of my first plane ride to KA. My mom had given my brother and I gifts to open once we got in the air. Mom was standing in front of my dad smiling and waving, seemingly happy to see me go. My dad was standing calmly behind her with a smile on his face. Unfortunately, this little 5-year-old interpreted it that her parents were glad to have her gone. It was like it was a party or celebration for me to be leaving. And there was no one involved in my life to help me correct my wrong interpretation.

I felt lost and adrift... and have struggled with these sensations throughout my life.

Children are in need of a "safe base" to run to when hard things happen. There were many reasons, I am certain, but while I was there, it was not safe to go to the boarding school staff for help or for comfort. My first harsh scolding was on the first night there. I was in a strange place, knowing no one, feeling understandable loss. My memory is fuzzy, but I and my roommates were whimpering and the dorm parent burst into the room to hush us up. The message was something like this, "Jesus said Rejoice in the Lord. Again I say rejoice! He really means it because he said it two times!" I needed to be glad that my parents were able to tell the Nigerians about Jesus! My emotions were seen to be very incongruent with the situation and how I was to experience it according to the staff. We were also told that our crying was bothering the other children on the hall who needed quiet in order to get to sleep. We were being selfish when we cried. The message I got was that I do not matter. Jesus, who supposedly loved me, was going to be upset with me if I was not happy. And I was selfish in wanting comfort. Obedience to rules was much more important than me. God's words were used as a hammer to shut me down. Rules and structure were more important than relationship!

I also experienced that rules were a "1 size fits all". There was no concept given me that responsibility needed to be age appropriate.

It was not an option to reach out to my parents for comfort, not only due to their not being present, but also our letters- which we had to write weekly - were read and approved of before they were sent. If we had written anything negative, we would be

called out in front of the entire dining room. I felt so much shame and embarrassment with the spotlight on me when I had to march out and rewrite my letter so that I did not say anything that could upset my parents and make it harder for them to share the gospel with the Nigerians. I was to create a false narrative and not be authentic. Thus, more isolation from any hope of help and consolation.

I never figured out what a "dad" or "mom" was supposed to be like. I did not develop a close relationship with my parents, regardless of how wonderful they may have been. They had abdicated their parental role - under the leadership/ direction of the mission and what was believed to be God's will. This setup was a normalized one. I was conditioned to believe that they did not want me close. Did not want to know how I was or wasn't cared for. And that my being a "good girl who was always cheerful" is what mattered to them as well as the boarding school staff.

I had no concept within me to let them into my heart and life. I lived the concept that I was to be self-sufficient and overly dependent by the age of five! Being appropriately interdependent was a foreign concept. To have needs and express them would be to prove that I was somehow "bad" and "selfish" and worthy of being shamed and punished. It was not safe to be authentic or transparent. In order to be as safe as possible, I had to crush my personhood. Do not be authentic! Instead, live a pretense. This went along with the verses we were taught on "dying to self" if I was to please God and be seemingly safe with Him.

At age 14, it was decided that I needed to be sent off to another boarding school over here in the US. This became a tipping point for me -again feeling a loss of what was familiar, peers who had walked the journey with me and understood me better than anyone else- even if we were not close. Leaving for a foreign country. Was more than I could emotionally handle. I became suicidal and struggled strongly with the urges to kill myself for about 7 years.

I recall a day that I was especially despondent. I went into the Chapel on campus and sat in a pew in the dark room. Without thinking I pulled the hymn book from the pew in front of me into my lap and opened it. The hymn that showed up was "Trust and obey. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." Without thinking, I grabbed the little pencil in the shelf in front of me and put a big X through the page. I wrote "Not True! I've obeyed my whole life and I'm not happy!" My "Truster" was completely broken when it came to God!

I went on to Bible college, still struggling with suicidal urges. I find it ironic that God used even my fear and insecurities to keep me alive. Good little Christian girls don't kill themselves or God would be angry. I couldn't set myself up for that! But I only stayed alive out of fear of God. I had no sense that He was a loving God who cared about me and what I was going through.

Eventually I went to seminary in pursuit of becoming a Christian counselor. The main reason was to keep presenting a picture that I was a great Christian and have people happy that I was going to into Christian ministry. Also, I desperately needed to figure out what was happening within me, without anyone knowing I was really a mess. Well, I wasn't able to pull off that cover story!

While in this program, I was, for the first time, given the permission to doubt. Ultimately, it wonderfully changed the trajectory of my life to bring me to where I am today. But initially, it pulled out from under me the entire foundation my life had been built on. It was excruciating and terrifying!

It's too long of a story, but at the start of my being a counselor almost all my clients were survivors of satanic ritual abuse and other types of severe abuse. It was through this population that I began to know a God that did not match the god I had been introduced to at boarding school! Through the years I have been on the journey to get to know the true nature of God, work on addressing my insecure bond of fear and developing an ability to bond to Him and others in a healthy way.

Please use my experience as a case study to open up curiosity about your own life and others.

**First go over some basic background information...**

### **Two Ways of Knowing**

Have you ever noticed conflicts in what you profess to believe and doubts that gurgle up? Personal example. I know God loves me intellectually.... I'm not sure of the quality of His love. I am filled with doubt at the level of my nervous system...

Perception: What I consciously think to be true. Logic. Rational thinking. Bible verses.

Neuroception: What my nervous system knows to be true.

Example of bananas. Boarding school. Daily mixed fruit made the day before with bananas going mushy and growing slime! I have the gag reflex! Staff sitting at my table, enforcing I swallow all of the concoction before I could escape the dining room! To this day, I may logically recognize a banana to be a good one, but my nervous system will not believe it. And this 'neuroception' is much stronger than my perception!



“Neurons that fire together, wire together.”

**Trauma plays a powerful part in this incongruity!**

**Type A and Type B trauma**

Type A Trauma- The Absence of Needs being met.

“Silent Face” experiment. More detrimental... No safe base. No Competent and Strong Protector or Advocate. Lack of personal self developed...

Type B Trauma- The Presence of Bad things happening.

These seep deep into our world views regarding ourselves and others.

**Two Basic Needs that are often in conflict.**

Need for secure bond. Vs. Need for authenticity. Which is going to win?

Example- need to sign the ‘I accept’ line if going to be able to get the use some needed internet app. ....

Or- In order to be ‘safe’ in the church, I must present that I am doing fine and trusting God rather than be authentic with my struggles.

(We often do not recognize something is wrong in a situation due to it being ‘normalized’.)

Let’s also touch on an additional dynamic.

Betrayal Trauma: violation of a person's trust or confidence



Trauma perpetrated by someone with whom the victim is close to and reliant upon for support and survival. Occurs in situations when people or institutions on which a person relies for protection, resources, and survival violate the trust or well-being of that person.

All of us live to different degrees of Betrayal Blindness- Too much is at stake if I acknowledge that 'my people' are not as trustworthy as I need them to be. Not knowing what we know. We 'reframe' a situation in order to give ourselves a sense of stability/ security. We will minimize, dismiss things that are 'unsafe'. Or we may live out a form of 'Stockholm syndrom'- thinking like and becoming like the ones who hurt us/ to whom we belong, in hopes of them liking us and hurting us less.

Betrayal blindness can take many forms, but it creates a view of the world how we want it to be rather than what actually is. It helps protect us from a reality that feels too big and too difficult to handle. It is a form of denial that is a defense mechanism used to keep a sense of being stable and able to remain functioning in our daily lives.

As children we are dependent on our caregivers, and so we must do what we can to preserve the best stability we can within the relationship. Even if we do not receive the attention and nurture we need. This most often results in the child assuming that the neglect or abuse is a result of something bad or wrong with themselves. This allows them to maintain the needed attachment by placing the blame within themselves. "Maybe if I can be/do different, I will be treated better and be liked, etc.." A futile attempt to increase an illusion of hope- but actually increases shame and despair. "I am deficient or defective in some way and that is why I am unworthy of care and can't get my needs met." The more threatened we feel, the more we take steps to try to preserve our attachment and survival. One way to preserve a remnant of a 'safe connection' is to not know what we know and not see what we see. (reframing the situation into an explanation that is more tolerable, shutting down the awareness, dissociating.... We don't have eyes to see or ears to hear and do not want to realize the full extent of the danger.

To recognize the full extent is like bringing in a tsunami that destroys everything when you discover that your relationship has been built on a lie! The ground below us shifts, and everything feels unstable. It is like the world turns into a 'fun house' with the foundation shifting under our feet, every step we take. We feel unbalanced.

Need a foundation beneath us, a support person/ group to help when it feels like world caving in. Otherwise, not safe to the polyvagal system to 'know'

I.e.-1. Mk's needing to be safe at KA and with parents.

2. Parents sensing something was wrong with boarding school, but not safe to push back against mission policies. Wanting to be 'secure' with God (who it is perceived is asking for such a sacrifice) and with the mission! Thus, push away from internal parental longings etc.

3. Leaders believed strongly in the 'call' to forsake all in order to follow God. Top priority was for evangelism.... They wanted to be pleasing to God and safe with Him.

This class is all about what is needed for a person to be safe in relationships. This is the primary role of the Poly Vagal system.

Now let's look at the

**Poly vagal System- Three Branches.** This is the basis of our Neuroception. [Talk about being interictally designed and created!!].

Did you know we have 2 systems for figuring out if we are physiologically safe and secure in relationships? Our nervous systems are designed to help us know if we are safe with the people in our lives.

{Have audience pick person who is safe/ unsafe. Use these relationship to help you make sense of what I will be talking about.}

Let's look at this subconscious, more fundamental and actually more powerful/ influential belief system. Within a millisecond, a perception (neuroception) can be formed. This system is developed before birth, or the part of brain that 'thinks' is formed. In utero. All about SAFETY. We are marinating in a 'soup' / in the womb- getting a sense if our world is going to be a safe one. If there is anxiety, anger in the home- all the chemicals etc. are flowing within the mother- and thus the infant. If there is yelling or mother sick, or not enough food/ nutrition.... The infant is perceiving that the world is not safe.

Lack of relational safety: Silence, lack of connection and communication  
'Family secrets'. The dangers are not known and will not be looked out for.  
Spiritual 'bypassing'. Or other kinds of by-passing through deflection and..... (minimization and denial of realities that are hard!  
Gas lighting/ confusion as to what is accurate

What is safety? The relational world. Delighted in! Seen. Understood. Joined. Needs met in timely manner. Constant and consistent. Competent and Gentle Protector. Then there is a confidence that the world is safe to live in. Child (an all thru life span) can engage in the world with confidence rather than always on edge and scanning for that ‘bad’ is around the corner.

What is ‘safe and secure’? Think of how this coincides with the person you brought to mind earlier.

With this as a backdrop of what is needed for safety and a secure relationship:

**3 Branches: Respond to real or perceived threat.**

**Many long term and broad scope of implications!**

\*\*\*. Develops pre-birth.

- Longest nerve in the body..... goes thru major organs/ health issues
- Autonomic Nervous System. Like a highly sophisticated submarine. Top level technology in detecting danger, lack of safety in relationships!

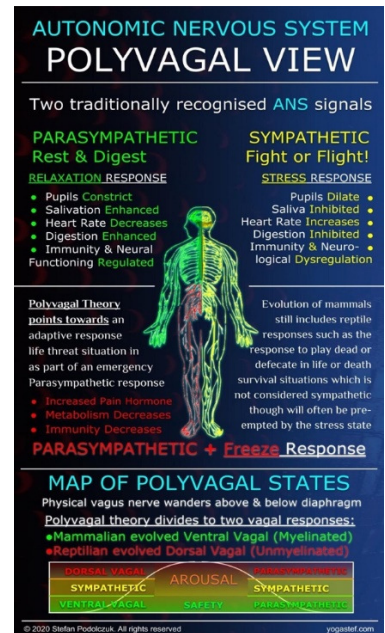
\*\*\* This ‘determination’ results in a behavioral stance which happens within a millisecond!

\*\*\* Brings understanding to when a person has strong emotion, seems to be – over the -top emotional, or overly shut down.... Possible a trauma response!

**Ventral Vagus-** Safe! I can stay engaged in social connections  
Physically found in the thalamus, deep limbic/ attachment center and on up into the upper regions of the brain.

[Quickly tie in the PV with the 5 levels of the brain

(attachment/ deep limbic, Amygdala, Cingulate, Rt. PFC, Lft PFC)



**Sympathetic-** Danger! High Energy. Mobilize to take action! Fight or Flight

I am going to fight the monster or move to get away. This is a fight for one's personhood. For justice.

Anxiety

Physical symptoms: pupils dilate, dry mouth, heart rate increases, digestion inhibited, immunity and neurological dysregulation

**Dorsal-** Life threat! Shuts down energy. Immobilize and attempt to be invisible, play dead, overly compliant

Freeze, Shut down, Collapse, Surrender

This is a best approach 'fight' to be safe in the group I belong to.

Depression

Physical symptoms: heart rate decreases, Breath affected (slow) immunity decreases, increase pain hormones, metabolism decreases, digestive issues

\*\*\*. If these branches are highly activated, then it will show up in the Ventral Vagal Branch. I.e.... Voice box, can't get words out, loses the words, jaws tight, facial structure tight, hearing impaired, eyes/ vision constricts....

**Befriend each branch:** Eeyore, Tigger, Christopher Robin



Be curious. Compassionately ask within what isn't safe? (real or perceived.) What or who is the danger? What is needed to get safe? Fight or run away? If you could disappear or become invisible, what danger would you hopefully be safe from?

Be appreciative of the ways that your Polyvagus system tried/ tries to increase safety. Shift away from shame towards appreciation of our adaptive styles. Then add in exploration if this protective style is currently working and if there are other approaches that might work and could be learned?

**To reset the Poly vagal:** Need to start with activating the Dorsal with gentle movement to get blood circulating better. Use breathing and the 5 senses.

Then move on to the Sympathetic, using breathing and the 5 senses to bring yourself to calm.

Like initial exercise- appreciation and expression

**Ideal, when feeling safe: To the degree that we feel safe, we will live in a peaceful ebb and flow of energy and calm and be able to engage in healthy relationships.**

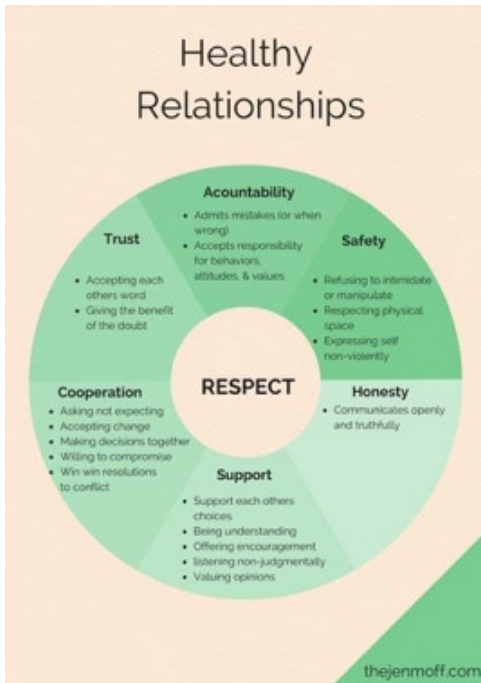
The Dorsal branch will experience being dreamy, tranquil, blissful, meditative.... Rather than lonely, depressed, unhappy, hopeless

The Sympathetic branch will experience being energetic, active, playful, motivated.... Rather than stressed, anxious, fearful, highly energized in pushing ones agenda, in a fight/ flight mode

The Ventral Vagal Branch will experience being relaxed, creative, curious, hopeful

Enjoy activities such as... dance, activity, sports, performance

... quiet moments, intimacy



(attachment/ deep limbic, Amygdala, Cingulate, Rt. PFC, Lft PFC)

