

Chapter Two

The Big “H”

I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.
— *Philippians 4:11-12, MSG*

Shipwrecked three times, flogged five times, three times beaten with rods, stoned once, imprisoned twice. Such was the experience of Paul, the author of the words that began this chapter. This devoted servant of God had the presence of mind to say he had found the secret to contentment in all things and in all circumstances. Paul had discovered the difference between Happiness (Big H) and happiness (little h). Since ancient times, people have understood that humans can experience two different kinds of happiness.¹

As children we learned to understand happiness as events that made us feel good or excited. Tasty treats, thrilling rides at amusement parks, vigorous play activities with our friends. These are all examples of happiness with a small “h.” You can identify little “h” because it includes such experiences as pleasure, excitement, and fun. “Little h” is easy to get. Short term gratification is all around us. Great food is in abundant supply. We have an unlimited variety of recreation available to us. Television, radio, DVDs, movies, the Internet and other media are always available. These sources of “little h” happiness are not bad things intrinsically. It’s how we use or misuse them that is important.

As we mature, we begin to recognize a different kind of happiness. We will identify this as the Big “H,” which also goes by other names such as tranquility, contentment, serenity, composure, and inner peace. Paul describes true Happiness when he writes about the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal. 5:22-23, NLT). Notice the last attribute on the list. It is only when we achieve “self-control,” as St. Paul advocated, that we can experience this “Big H” kind of happiness throughout our lives. Research on control continues to find that it is often one of the key elements for experiencing Happiness. By self-control we do not mean that we are inflexible and “wound too tightly.” Rather, it is the ability to make good choices in response to what happens around us. We also know it is a skill because the more we practice, the easier it becomes.

Big “H” does not just come to us because we are Christians or because we plead with God to give it to us. We need to (in the words of Scripture) “work out our salvation.” We need to practice spiritual discipline, the self-control that helps us “keep at it,” applying the principles we’ll be discussing throughout this book. What sets the Big “H” and the little “h” apart from each other is how pain and discomfort are experienced. Happiness, in the Big “H” sense, is not the absence of pain or discomfort but the ability to cope with it. In contrast, little “h” withers and disappears in the presence of pain, discomfort or inconvenience, because it is dependent on events outside of us.

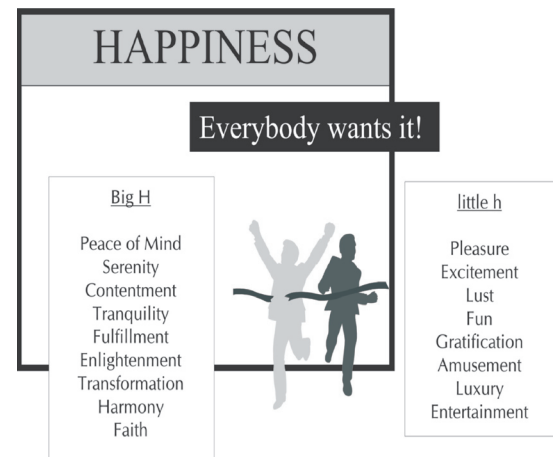


Figure 2-A

¹ Waterman, A.S. (1993) Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63(4), 678-691.

Won't Money Make Me Happier?

Researchers at the University of Michigan asked people what would make them happier and the unanimous response was “more money.”¹ This finding illustrates the confusion most people make between the Big “H” and the little “h.”

It seems to most of us that outside resources will make us happier. And that is true—sort of. More money will make us feel better temporarily, but it will not improve the quality of our lives. When the *Chicago Tribune* asked people how much money would make them happier, the result was enlightening. People who were making \$30,000 a year said that \$50,000 would really improve the quality of their lives—they wanted another 67 percent more money. However, when they asked wealthier people—those who made \$100,000 a year—the same question, they said they needed \$250,000. In other words, they could only be happier with 150 percent more money.²

When we fail to make the distinction between Big “H” and little “h” we assume that if we can amass enough little “h,” we can then convert it to the Big “H.” That is why our drive for material wellbeing never translates into psychological wellbeing. As we spend more time on getting a “better” life (little “h”), we have less time to spend on those activities that can contribute to the Big “H.”

In fact, as Swedish economist Stephen Linder pointed out, making more money takes time. That means that the time we spend making money becomes more valuable. Consequently, we begin thinking it does not make sense to spend our free time on anything but making money.³ As a result, we get to spend less time on those activities that bring us the Big “H,” such as listening to music, going for walks with friends, or spending time with our children.

Balancing Big H and Little h

We are not suggesting that little “h” is bad and Big “H” is the only good type of happiness. Our lives need a balance of the two. Big “H” gives us the stable platform on which we can live life during good times and bad. We all want to experience as much little “h” as we can, but as with many other things in life, too much little “h” can be counterproductive. Research has shown that within the United States the very wealthy are only a trace happier than people with average incomes.

This tells us that Big “H” has very little relationship with the little “h.” Except under extreme conditions, people with a minimum of little “h” can still enjoy a life filled with the Big “H.” Additionally, little “h” is more real when it is within the context of Big “H” because we can experience little “h” for what it is worth and not as the defining experience of our lives.

Since Big “H” is a product of a mature spirit inside us and is not dependent upon outside circumstances, any of us can, like St. Paul, develop the ability “to get along happily” (experience the Big “H”) in all things. The tools we’re presenting in this book will help you gain control over your thoughts and emotions so that you can maintain the Big “H” for a lifetime. The accompanying table (Table 2-A) shows you the differences between Big “H” and little “h.”

Happiness and Discomfort

As we mentioned earlier, little “h” and discomfort are opposites. They each drive the other one away. Just when you feel on top of the world, something from outside you can occur that takes away your little “h” and forces you to live with high levels of pain and discomfort. The only way to get rid of the pain is to find more little “h.”

On the other hand, the Big “H” stays with you even during times of high stress and emotional trauma. It allows you to have a sense of peace in the midst of emotional suffering and mental anguish. Many people have heard of others who live in the worst possible circumstances and yet have a tranquility that seems incomprehensible given the environment. Likewise, we know that some people who have “everything” will put a gun to their head because of their internal distress and misery.

1 Campbell, A. (1981). *The sense of wellbeing in America*. New York: McGraw-Hill

2 *Pay nags at workers' job views*. (1987, October 18) *Chicago Tribune*.

3 Linder, S. (1970). *The harried leisure class*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Happiness and Its Source

As Table 2-A shows, little “h” comes from the outside while the Big “H” resides within the recesses of your soul. We have learned from childhood that the good life depends on how well we succeed—either in our relationships or in reaching our goals. We bring this knowledge into adulthood and constantly strive for more and more little “h.” We have been told that we can have as much little “h” as we want if we learn to master our environment. In Western society the three most popular methods for instant gratification are what Pat and Terry call the “mouth solutions:” food, booze, and drugs. Feeling better is just too easy, which robs us of our motivation to seek deeper and more profound pathways to the Big “H.”

Table 2-A Two Kinds of Happiness

<i>Little h</i>	<i>Big H</i>
The happiness that comes from the absence of pain and discomfort	The happiness that comes from coping with pain and discomfort
Cannot coexist with pain	Can coexist with pain
Comes from outside you —LIFE	Comes from within you —SELF
Is easy to find because there are so many places to get it	Is difficult to find because there are only four places to get it
Only lasts a short while	Can last forever

Most of us know intuitively that long-lasting peace of mind comes from within. Unfortunately, this is a rather vague notion. It sounds good, but few know how to achieve it. The major goal of this book is to show you how to get this elusive experience. Since living a life of peace and serenity is not easy to come by, we would like to serve as your guides as you walk along the path.

Happiness and Prospecting

A prospector wants to work at finding minerals that will have value. The easier it is to find a particular rock, the less value it has. Because little “h” comes from your environment, the sheer volume of resources to “feel good” is seemingly infinite. When we get discouraged, anxious or stressed, life offers many ways to feel better. If one source does not work, we can easily find another quick fix.

In contrast to the many little “h” sources, we will find that the Big “H” can only be found in four places, which we’ll discuss below. Four is a minuscule number compared to the entire universe of places where we can get the little “h.” The prospector can easily find gravel, but prospecting for gravel would not be cost effective, even though silicon (which can be made from gravel) is used for manufacturing computer chips. There is just too much gravel. It is not a scarce resource and so is less valuable. In contrast, prospecting for gold takes work and perseverance. When found, it is one of the world’s greatest assets. So it is with happiness. Little “h” is “gravel” in contrast to the “gold” of the Big “H.”

Happiness and Time

Another problem with living a life built exclusively on the little “h” is the short life span of the little “h.” The Big “H” can last forever if you stay tapped into the resources you are going to develop. When the occurrence of the little “h” evaporates, it is our nature to want it back as quickly as possible. We begin to believe the illusion that we can have a lifetime supply of little “h” if we could just control the source. If we could just get that person to love us more, then we could be happy forever. If only we could just have a guaranteed money flow, then we could be happy forever. If we could sidestep health problems, then we could be happy forever. If we could be certain that our children would grow up to be good people, then we could be happy forever. The notion that we have ultimate control of these events moves us to buy into the fantasy that we can control the outside world. When we try this, we set ourselves up for continual frustration and disappointment.

We spend an inordinate amount of time trying to control people, places, and things that are beyond our control. We worry about our children’s thoughts and feelings, we get stressed about the future, we feel guilty about the past and a whole universe of other circumstances we have absolutely no control over. We do this because

of a worldly belief that if only we could make life fit our wants and needs then we could be happier. Yet even when the world allows this to happen, we only achieve the “little h” kind of happiness, which is short-lived even in the *most ideal* circumstances.

B-E-S-T

By now you are probably wondering about those four sources of the Big “H.” There are only four—not three or five—because these four elements represent the four pieces of human nature: behavior, emotions, sensations, and thoughts. They are easily remembered by using their first letters to form the acronym B-E-S-T. We are people who engage in actions (*Behavior*) and we also experience certain kinds of feelings (*Emotions*). Physical *Sensations* are part of our daily happenings. Finally, we are creatures with an active *Thought* life by which we interpret, judge, assess ourselves and our surroundings.

You experience the Big “H” by properly managing your behavior, emotions, sensations, and thoughts. When your life is “out of sync,” it is because some or all of these four pieces are not working together in the way they should be.

People engage in destructive behaviors either by engaging in actions that are not in their best interest or by failing to act in ways that would be good for them. In a similar sense, few people understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy emotional pain. Consequently, they hang on to the unhealthy variety and try to get rid of the healthy pain. People in our society are also proficient at getting stressed (sensation), but few know how to rid themselves of stress in a healthy way. And finally, many people worry about life when they only need to be concerned. (See the Appendix 1 for the difference between worry and concern).

Try to imagine your life when each of these elements is being properly managed. Ask yourself the following four questions:

- What would my life be like if I could consistently choose to act in ways that were spiritually growth producing instead of ways that stunt my growth in God’s grace?
- What would my life be like if I were able to accept healthy emotional pain and knew exactly what to do to rid myself of debilitating, destructive emotional pain?
- What would my life be like if I could maintain minimal levels of daily stress regardless of the circumstances?
- What would my life be like if I could spent most of my mental energy being responsibly concerned about life rather than wasting time and effort worrying about events that are beyond my control?

Jesus teaches us that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, MSG). The Voice (i.e., “the thief”) wants you to stay focused on pursuing the little “h.” By keeping you concentrating on what you cannot control in the world around you, the thief tries to rob you of abundant life, keeping you from growing and becoming a mature believer. That abundant life is attainable by learning to master the B-E-S-T life. The Bible tells us: “A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches” (Genesis 2:10). We are going to look at the four areas that water the gardens of our lives as the most important and only things we can really control. As we do so, the B-E-S-T life becomes the *best* life—the abundant life. So how do you get the B-E-S-T, abundant life? You get it by managing the four parts we just mentioned: your behavior, your emotions, your sensations and your thoughts—the four components that make up all human beings. God created us this way. One or more of these four parts relate to all other aspects of human nature. For example, spirituality, as an innate aspect of human nature, is the combination of our thoughts and behavior.

Property Lines

The property line that surrounds your garden contains your behavior, emotions, sensations and thoughts. These are the parts of life you are responsible for and the only things you have any control over. Everything else outside that property line is ultimately beyond your control. People are not puppets. As much as we would like

to, we cannot control our kids, our spouses, our friends, neighbors, or associates. We can persuade, teach, influence, discipline, request, but the final behavior of others is solely in their control. Any time you spend thinking about trying to control people or things outside your property line wastes your time—this kind of thinking is called worry. Spending your energy inside your own property lines is the most productive, character-building and growth-promoting thing you can do.

One morning before school Pat had a conflict with his young son, Kyle. He had gotten ready early and had earned the privilege of a few minutes of video games. When the time came for him to stop playing, he protested, claiming he needed more time. Pat gave him the choice of stopping then or losing his privileges for the day. Kyle protested loudly in a shrill and whiny voice as he turned off the T.V. His pain was clearly visible. In the past Pat had reacted to these displays by getting “plugged in” to his arguments. This time he recognized that his son’s pain and the expression of it were outside his property line. Realizing his son’s

behavior and emotions were inside the boy’s property line, not Pat’s, gave Pat the tranquility to simply endure the outburst until it subsided. Pat and Kyle continued to school without any further trouble. This was a defining moment for their relationship. Pat learned that, when setting limits on his son’s behavior, he did not have any right to change the way Kyle *felt* about his parenting and its consequences. Kyle’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors were in his property line. Pat was not responsible for and could not control them. It is his duty as a parent to structure his child’s life, not assume it is his prerogative to control the way his children feel about the structure.

Table 2-B shows those things that are inside and outside your property line. Studying this chart will give you a feel for the difference between the reality inside you and that of the world outside your property line.

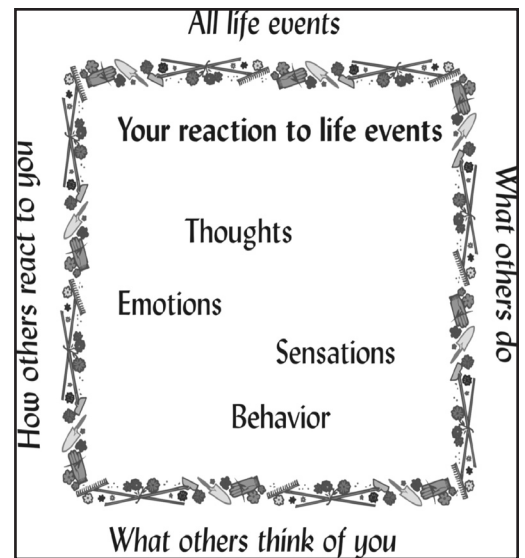


Figure 2-B

Table 2-B. Property Lines

Things Within (potential control)	Things Outside (no control)
Behavior	What others do
Emotions	What others think of you
Sensations	How others react
Thoughts	Life events

The Annoyance List

Finding out what bothers you is the first step for recognizing whether you have any control over annoyances. Below is a list containing various daily occurrences that often annoy people. If the situation or person described is annoying to you, place a check next to the statement.

- A person telling me how to drive.
- Subscription cards loosely tucked into magazines.
- Getting a telephone busy signal or a phone without an answering machine.
- To see reckless driving.
- To hear someone talking loudly on their cell phone.
- To see an adult picking his or her nose.
- A person telling me to do something when I am just about to do it.
- A person continually criticizing something.
- A person being sarcastic.
- Junk mail whether the Internet variety or the paper kind.

- To have my cell phone go dead, my PDA lock up, my computer crash, or my GPS stop working.
- To have my thoughts interrupted.
- A person putting his or her hands on me unnecessarily.
- A person adjusting my TV set or car radio.
- A person giving me a weak handshake.
- A person picking his teeth.
- A person who does not know when to go home.
- A person continually trying to be funny.
- Being asked almost constantly to do something.
- To be evaluated critically by a relative stranger.
- Movies on TV that take as much time for commercials as for the movie itself.
- To have to walk on slippery sidewalks.
- Computerized telephone operators.
- To hear a person talking in the movies.
- To be unable to find a restaurant seat.
- To hear loud music I do not like.
- A person watching me work.
- A door that squeaks when I close it.
- To hear racial remarks about someone.
- Someone frequently telling me about the person who is his or her romantic interest.
- Too much discussion of sex in mixed company.
- To have to kiss an unattractive relative.
- To have strangers talk to me when I want to be left alone.
- A person talking a great deal and not saying anything very important.
- Having to listen to a sales pitch I do not want to hear.
- Listening to too many TV commercials.
- A person interrupting me when I am talking.
- To have drivers cut me off in traffic.
- To be at a boring party and not being able to leave.
- Not being able to find my car keys.
- Being stood up for a lunch or dinner appointment.
- A person who criticizes what I wear.
- A person who tries to convert me to something (political party, religion, etc.).
- To find a hair in my food.
- To run out of gas.
- Rude or discourteous people.
- Not to be listened to.
- To be given impractical suggestions.

This list is merely to help you identify annoying situations that trigger each of the B-E-S-T components. When some of these situations happen to you, your ensuing behavior may be something you later regret. Your emotions may force you to do that dumb thing (you might clench your teeth or your fists). The sensations in your body may chew up your insides (your muscles might tense, your palms might sweat, maybe your breathing becomes rapid or shallow, your heart might start beating faster). Your thinking may go off on some destructive tangents (you may believe that someone is out to get you).

The more of these items you can identify each day, the more you will find the outside world running your life.

Sensations vs. Emotions

Behaviors and thoughts are easy to distinguish, but the difference between emotions and sensations is often confusing. People name both experiences by the same word, “feelings.” Emotions and sensations are different though they may occur simultaneously. Examples of emotions include happiness, sadness, anxiety and fear. Sensations are *physical* feelings: urges, appetites, pains, muscular tensions, fatigue. These all come from our bodies and that is what identifies them as sensations. Recognizing the difference between the two is critically important. See Table 2-C

Table 2-C Two Manifestations of Feelings: Sensations and Emotions

Sensations are.....		Emotions are.....	
“Feelings” associated with the stimulation of a sense organ or with a specific body condition.		“Feelings” that derive from our limbic system in the brain. They may be triggered from conscious thoughts or our “silent assumptions.”	
Rapid, improper breathing	Sexual urges	Depression	Sadness
Muscle tension	Hunger	Guilt	Remorse
Racing mind	Thirst	Resentment	Anger
Muscle pain	Sleepiness	Helplessness	Weakness
Body fatigue	Cravings	Irrational Fear	Rational Fear

The Domino Metaphor

One difficulty in managing the B-E-S-T components is that they are interrelated. When you change one component, you affect the others. We use the metaphor of dominoes to understand these relationships. The memory device, the acronym B-E-S-T, helps us remember the inner *components* within the domino metaphor, but it does not tell us the order of the dominoes.

It’s important to know the never-changing order of these dominoes: *Life, Thoughts, Feelings* (emotions and sensations), *Behavior*, and *Consequences*. Some people find this confusing at first. Eventually, it will become clearer. Then, you will find this idea to be a powerful foundation on which you can build as you apply the promises of the Bible, living out the life that God wants you to have.

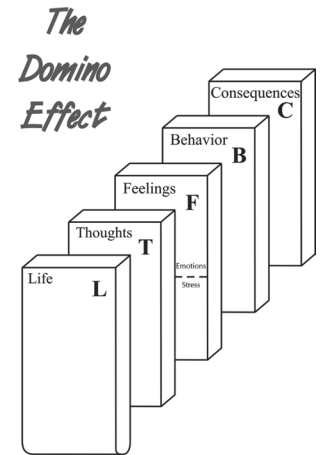


Figure 2-C The Domino Line-Up

The Behavior-Consequence Connection

It is often easier to understand how the dominoes work by looking at the last domino and working toward the front. The last domino (consequences) represents what happens because of your behavior—it is not about how you personally feel about your behavior. If you throw a chair through a window, the consequence is a broken window and maybe a broken chair. If you consistently treat your friend badly, the consequence is a broken friendship. Some consequences you are now living with have been the result of your behavior. If people are angry or disappointed with you, it is likely you have done something to make that happen. Your behavior can result in many life consequences—things you either did or failed to do. This relationship between behavior and consequences is easy to understand. It is important because it is the foundation for personal responsibility. We want our children to learn this at an early age so they can grow up to be good citizens.

The Emotions-Behavior Connection

The next connection—between behavior and emotions—is also easy to understand. Most of us are aware of how our emotions drive our behavior. We may mope when we are sad or discouraged; we may be noisy and boisterous because of our excitement when our team wins; we may act thoughtfully when we feel a sense of

importance as we are engaged in a meaningful discussion. It is well accepted that emotions can be powerful drivers of behavior. If you ask someone “why” they did something, a common response is: “Because I felt like it.”

The Thought-Emotions Connection

Unfortunately, the next link is the difficult one to grasp. When asked why we feel a certain way, our response is likely to point to something or someone in our outside world. One powerful example is the feeling of falling in love; another common source of overpowering feelings occurs when we lose a loved one. Most people point to the outside world out of habit. “If that hadn’t happened, then I would not feel this way.”

We want to show you that the truth is deeper than this. With one specific exception (a physiological response), it’s what you think, not what happens to you, that is *always* the source of your emotions. Your emotional responses result from the way you interpret outside events. If you are late for an appointment with your boss and miss it because of car trouble, your feelings about the missed appointment will depend on how you interpret the missed appointment. If you thought the boss might have scheduled this meeting to criticize or fire you, you might find yourself feeling relief that the car trouble was causing you to miss the appointment. On the other hand, if you thought your boss was going to promote you to vice president, but would likely choose someone else because you didn’t show up, you would be worried sick or angry about the car trouble. We want you to get used to accepting the fact that all your emotions (both painful and non-painful) are caused by your thoughts, whether you are aware of them or not.

Although the insights of cognitive psychology have been available for several decades, Christian authors are beginning to integrate these ideas into our understanding of the successful Christian life. One of the cleverest titles in the Christian book market is Joyce Meyer’s *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind*.¹ She writes from personal experience that personal freedom and peace of mind are experienced by overcoming negative thinking.

Some people find it difficult to accept the equality of thoughts and emotions. They think one is more important than the other. Psychology has shown us they are of equal importance even though one proceeds from the other. Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges are convinced that Christian leadership is at its best when the two are in equal proportion to one other.² Whether the heart or mind is more important is not a question of theology but psychology. God gave both to us to use for the glory of God. Mark Noll, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, has shown us how some Christians have hindered God’s work in the world. He writes that Christians often neglect paying attention to matters of the mind.³ This neglect of our mental life is contrary to Paul’s teaching. He states it plainly when he says, “There must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes.” Ephesians 4:23 (NLT)

Dominoes and the Big “H”

This idea is important for learning how to live the abundant life with the Big “H.” When all your dominoes are standing, you will be experiencing the Big “H.” The problem is that when you look closely at the Dominoes chart (Figure 2-C), you will see that the first domino—life, the outside world—has a round bottom. It does not stand up easily and when it does, it is not for long. This indicates life itself. The outside world is constantly crashing into our personal space. Sometimes it does so in an annoying way that we can shrug off. Other times, life hits us so hard we wonder if we will ever recover. Almost reflexively, we reach down and try to put the first domino upright. Even when we succeed, it will eventually fall again, knocking all the other dominoes down. When the dominoes stand up for a while, we get to experience the little “h.” When they fall, the chain reaction starts again.

The Domino Effect

We are going to teach you how to begin using a different strategy. Look again at the graphic (Figure 2-C) with which we open this section on The Domino Metaphor. Instead of trying to keep the first domino (life events) from knocking over the other dominoes, you will learn to change how you use the second domino (thoughts). You will learn how to lift the thought domino off the table, slather the bottom of it with super glue and firmly place it back

1 Meyer, J. (2002). *Battlefield of the mind: Winning the battle in your mind*. Joyce Meyer Trade.

2 Blanchard, K. (2006). *Lead like Jesus: Lessons from the greatest leadership role model of all time*. Nashville: W Publishing Group.

3 Noll, M. (1994). *The scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

on the table. When the glue dries, the second domino will be immovable, no matter how hard the first one hits it. The writer of Proverbs reminds us, “be careful how you think, your life is shaped by your thoughts” (Proverbs 4:23, TEV). Our personal experiences in life are often the effect of an unseen chain reaction. This chain reaction can lead us to believe that our lives are not our own. We become convinced that we are victims of a cruel and unfeeling world. We might even come to the conclusion that a God who is uncaring and even vindictive rules the universe. We call this chain reaction the “*Domino Effect*.”

Thoughts and Personal Control

The first lesson you need to learn is that God wants you to acquire the skills to control this chain reaction by taking control of the thought domino. God designed humans to have to react to an unpleasant (or maybe even a pleasant) life event with an automatic thought response. Your brain wants to understand what is happening. It becomes a cluster of perceptions, interpretations, judgments and other mental activity. The most powerful thing you can do to transform your life and live more in God’s will is to change the way you think about certain life events or triggers. We will use the words *life* and *trigger* interchangeably to describe the Life domino. The Bible tells us throughout that controlling the second domino, our thoughts, is an imperative step in obtaining the abundance of blessings God wants to bestow upon us when we conform to God’s will.

Adam and Eve’s Dominoes

Look at “Adam and Eve’s Dominoes (Figure 2-D).” We have taken some liberty with the Scripture here because Genesis 3 does not tell us what they were thinking or even feeling. Genesis goes directly from the temptation (Life Domino) to their eating the forbidden fruit (Behavior Domino). Nevertheless, it is very easy to speculate that in the second domino the Voice was tempting them with thoughts like: “How wonderful it would be to know all that God knows” or “You can’t stand knowing that wonderful fruit is right there in front of you and you can’t have even a single bite!” or “maybe you misunderstood what God was saying,” or perhaps “just one little bite won’t hurt anything; besides, you’ve been good, you *deserve* it and, after all, I (the serpent) am only trying to help.” This style of negative thinking results in helplessness—a feeling that the pressure is too great to resist. This emotion often leads people to destructive, rebellious, escapist behaviors. No one needs to guess what the consequences of Eve’s and Adam’s actions were. Their close relationship with God was broken and they were expelled from the garden, with the result that humanity has suffered ever since.

Silent Assumptions

The discovery by modern psychology that thinking produces emotions only reinforces what the saints and prophets have been telling us for ages. Until recently, what was not clear was how unnoticeable some of that thinking really is. The scientists call it “automatic thinking” or “silent assumptions.” Some of our thoughts occur so rapidly that we cannot even perceive we had any thought at all. They seem hidden. Normally, we only perceive the audible thoughts in our daily lives. Destructive, paralyzing emotions such as guilt, anxiety and depression signal us that more devious thoughts are occurring quietly and rapidly enough to be just beyond our ability to perceive them.

Research has shown that the emotional effects of uncovering and replacing negative thinking with positive thoughts can produce the same pleasant brain chemistry as antidepressants. As a testimony to this, Pat was able to quit taking the prescribed antidepressant Serazone after mastering the materials we are presenting here. One of the key facilitators in one of our classes also was able to kick the habit of depending upon antidepressants as the only way to find relief from emotional pain. But please don’t misunderstand what we are saying here, and heed this cautionary note: *In some cases, depression and panic disorders can be very serious and even lethal. We are not implying that all readers will be able to stop taking their medications. There are brain chemistry issues and other factors that must be taken into account on a case by case basis.*

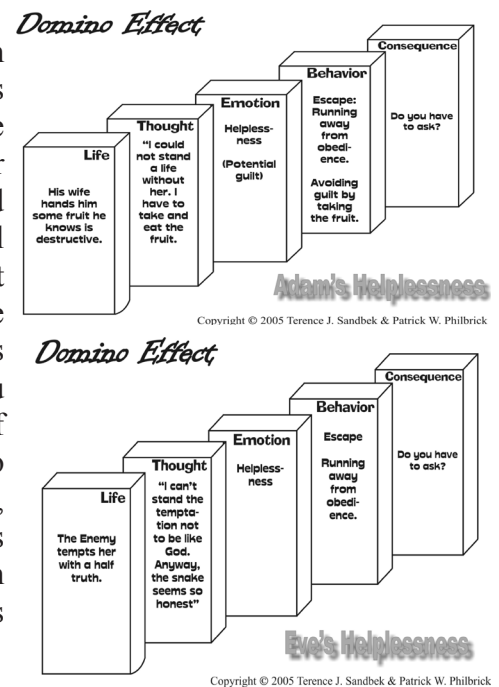


Figure 2-D

We also want to make another important clarification here. We are not talking about the “unconscious mind” in the strict Freudian sense when we speak about silent assumptions. Currently, psychologists refer to the unconscious, not as some independent mechanism that determines our fate, but as the place in memory which may take more work to access. As we begin show in chapter 4, you can all learn the skills of uncovering your self-talk that may be residing in the unconscious. All your thoughts are potentially accessible to you. Some of them are so quick and silent, perceiving them is impossible unless you slow your mind by writing out your thoughts.

Recently in one of our classes, while doing an exercise that helps us uncover those silent assumptions, one person discovered that he had about five separate negative thoughts occurring in less than one second. The Voice uses the speed of our minds against us. As we have mentioned, its favorite two weapons against you are speed and secrecy. The Voice “knows” that it can use this facility to introduce destructive, distorted thoughts through these channels. They will be processed so rapidly that we normally are not even aware of their presence.

The “Life” Domino and Choice

There’s one important consideration to note about the “life” domino (the trigger or activator for thoughts, emotions, behaviors and consequences)—the matter of choice. Often, we can *choose* our environment, the context in which we live out our lives. In many cases, we can control what neighborhoods we live in, where we go to school, the friends we have, the churches we attend, or even whether or not we go to church or hang out at the local bar instead. The context in which we place our life as a result of our own choices affects us because of the domino effect. Other times, life circumstances force us to live in a specific context that we have *not* chosen. Those situations, too, need to be seen in terms of the domino effect.

The Worry Cycle

Our dominoes do not always fall in a straight line. After the chain reaction from the life domino to the consequence domino has taken place, it may seem as if the consequence domino runs around to the front of the line and becomes a new life domino. Many people describe to us that they feel as if they are always running in circles. When the dominoes turn into a circle, it looks like Figure 2-E. We have changed some of the language to more accurately fit the real world.

Not all of life sets off a vicious cycle. Only certain situations in life activate the Voice. There is a big arrow between the situation and the Voice. This represents the speed at which certain situations set off the Voice. The often appears swiftly and silently. Psychologists call this a “conditioned response.”

As you follow the arrows you notice the Voice then sets in motion toxic emotions (described in more detail in the next chapter) and excessive stress. These events are highly uncomfortable for us so we are motivated to do something to relieve us of our discomfort. Being creatures of habit, we will usually try something that has worked for us in the past. For most people this would include behaviors that drive away emotional pain and discomfort. Unfortunately, this action brings us the little “h” but not long term resolution. Then the Voice starts hammering us about what we just did to feel better. The cycle continues—much like an imaginary perpetual motion machine. Many of the people we have worked with tell us that this Worry Cycle is exactly the circle they keep running in.

The Voice keeps us running in circles by lying to us. These lies include incorrect perceptions, wrong interpretations, false predictions and irrational beliefs. These warped messages can be about you, the world around you or the relationship between the two. When we capture one of these distorted messages, we take the first step toward spiritual and emotional growth. In chapter 7 we will show you the five steps you will use to defeat these Voice lies and to replace them with the truth. Internationally acclaimed author and pastor of one of the largest churches in Southern California, Rick Warren, writes in his *Purpose Driven Life*: “Spiritual growth is the process of replacing lies with truth.”¹

The Voice Cycle

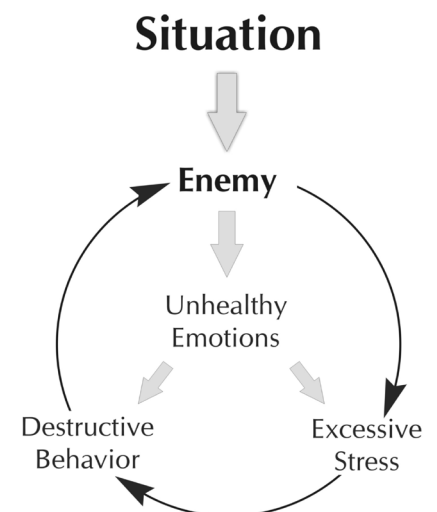


Figure 2-E

1 Warren, R. (2002). *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Embarrassing Example

The following is an example of how destructive the Worry Cycle can be. Although, only slightly exaggerated, it is based on a true story about Pat. The names have not been changed to protect the hero of this story. The story began as Pat was driving home from work (We will use abbreviations at the beginning of each sentence to denote which domino it would fall into: L=life, T=thought, E=emotion, B=behavior, C=consequence).

- L:** Pat had received a performance review at work that day and it had not gone well. His boss had made some “suggestions” for areas of improvement and had even made a wisecrack about Pat’s weight.
- T:** While driving home he was thinking, “That jerk, he has no right to talk to me that way.” Just then he saw a 7-Eleven and thought, “I’ll show him; I’ll have a brownie.”
- E:** Pat is feeling a strong degree of resentment about now.
- B:** He stops at the 7-Eleven and buys a brownie, completely blowing his diet restrictions for the day. [Yes, we know this sounds stupid and irrational—how does buying a brownie get even with his boss? This is the way the Voice works].
- C:** He returns to the car defeated by his own behavior.

Now, the consequence domino becomes the next life domino:

- L:** Pat has exceeded his own desire and goal to limit his daily calorie intake. He has made a mistake.
- T:** He thinks: “What an idiot! Why did I do that? I shouldn’t have done that. I should know better!” He now believes he is a loser for making such a dumb mistake.
- E:** Pat is beginning to feel very guilty about his misguided attempt to retaliate against his boss. His guilt makes it necessary to punish himself for making such a dumb mistake (buying a brownie).
- B:** His guilt guides him to another 7-Eleven and he has another brownie!
- C:** His body gets more calories

Again the consequence domino becomes the life domino for the next sequence:

- L:** Pat returns to the car feeling even more defeated.
- T:** He thinks, “What a worthless loser I am! Maybe the boss was right? I really am worthless. I can’t even control my diet.”
- E:** Now he’s beginning to get depressed as a tide of worthlessness begins to engulf him.
- B:** Since Pat is worthless anyway, he might as well do what any good loser would do—Yep, have another brownie!
- C:** Back into the store he goes—and on and on and on goes the Worry Cycle.

You can see how drugs, alcohol, shopping, sex, or any other common human activity could easily replace the brownies in this example.

Concern vs. Worry

Believing that things cannot go wrong is foolish. Life will never be completely easy or pain-free. The first domino will always fall. When we anticipate and plan for problems that are likely to occur, we are showing concern about how life treats us. And such concern is good. Concern leads us to do things that improve us rather than wasting time worrying about things that we can’t do anything about. When we are concerned, we are problem-solving. We are looking for constructive solutions to problems. When we *worry*, we are not solving problems but are spinning wheels and using our imaginations in unconstructive ways.

The main difference between concern and worry boils down to control. Worry focuses on things outside ourselves, which we cannot control, and often leads us to take the wrong kind of action. Concern, on the other hand, comes from recognizing our limitations and doing what we can to make ourselves and the world better.

By making a habit of setting aside some quiet time each day and writing about those things that are on our minds, we can distinguish between what we can control (concern) and what we cannot control (worry). We can then learn to accept the things we cannot change and take constructive steps to change what we can.

Writing

Learning strategies on how to switch from worry to concern helps you to better live in God's grace. The only way you can learn those strategies is by writing—a lot! Why do we keep insisting you must write and write and write? The answer is simple: You are learning mental skills.

If you are seriously committed to change and to experiencing more of the grace of God, you will need to list all the negativity you can recall each day. As one of the authors (Pat) puts it, "I begin each item in my writings with the prayer, 'Lord I'm worried that ...' Soon I have a list of all the things that have been bugging me lately; especially those things that I had not yet fully addressed but were sort of background worry. From this list I can rapidly address the things that I cannot change or influence at all, and I write, 'Accept' across it."

You can only make changes to those things you can perceive and understand. Some people try to skip this important and vital first step. They want to get the next lesson and find the easy, magical formula they think is waiting for them. We have bad news for you. No easy formula exists. We have found that the more you write, the more you grow and change.

Summary

1. Although everyone wants to be happy and is constantly striving for it, the little "h" happiness is not sufficient for the abundant life. The Bible affirms the importance of the Big "H" as a necessary ingredient for living in God's plan.
2. You can only experience the Big "H" when you manage your God-given property well. This is more difficult than it sounds. In one of Jesus' parables (Mat 13:24-25), he tells the story of someone who planted good wheat seed in his field. When he was sleeping, an enemy came and spread weeds among the wheat, and snuck away.
3. The Voice wants you to be a poor tender of your garden where the Big "H" is located. It does this by convincing you that you can only get the little "h" which is outside your garden.
4. Within your property line you need to learn how to manage your thoughts, emotions, sensations and behavior. Of these four, the most critical is your thought life because this directly affects the other three.
5. Each of the four Big "H" ingredients is related to each other like a line of dominoes. When they are all standing, they represent a life of the Big "H." Events continually push the first domino (Life) over. The Voice makes certain that the second one (Thoughts) will topple easily and knock over the rest.
6. Since you have no control over the stability of the Life Domino, your only recourse is to make the Thought Domino immovable. This is the goal of *The Worry Free Life*.
7. To gain control over your dominoes, you must first learn to distinguish between them. Managing each domino requires a separate skill set. If you do not know which domino you are dealing with, then you will not know which skill to use to manage it.

Assignment #1

To help you get a better understanding of your property lines, you can take the Property Line Quiz. We have given our opinions on the answers at the end of the quiz.

Table 2-D

Property Line Quiz

<i>Define which of the following situations are within your property line which one's are not. Remember, only those things that are within your control are within your property line.</i>	In	Out
1. Your mother is mad at you because you ruined her Thanksgiving by not coming for dinner. Instead you had dinner with your friends.		
2. You are angry because the car in front of you just cut you off.		
3. Your wife/husband calls you stupid because you forgot to pick up one of the things on the shopping list when you went to the store.		
4. You know people at work who you insist do not deserve a promotion. This situation gets you to hate your job and only perform at 50% when you are there.		
5. For years you have been mad at your parents because you think they favor your sibling more than you.		
6. Your teenage son is hurt and upset at you because you decided you could not afford to buy him the new motorcycle you promised him.		
7. You overhear your coworkers talking about how selfish they think you are because you accepted the promotion for a job that they themselves wanted. You clearly knew they wanted the job, and they <u>have been with the company longer than you.</u>		
8. Your husband/wife/child makes you feel so angry when they forget to do things you asked them to do.		
9. "Life Sucks!!!!!! Nothing good ever happens to me. I'll never feel like I did in the good old days."		
10. You are a husband and your wife says, "We've got to talk." You instantly panic.		
11. You are a wife and when you try to tell your husband you feel hurt about something he said, he replies, "I don't want to discuss it" and walks out the room. He refuses to talk to you for four days.		

This is how we see property line issues in the situations above:

1. You cannot control your mother's anger—only your response to it.
2. You cannot control the behavior of the other driver, but you can decide whether you want to feel angry.
3. You cannot make your spouse stop calling you names; you can speak up about how you feel about it.
4. Of course good things happen to people who do not deserve them. However, it really has nothing to do with whether you like or dislike your job. It is still the same job.
5. It is unfortunate that your parents may have favored your sibling. You can't change it, so find a way to adapt.
6. Your teenage son has a right to be upset even if it is for the wrong reasons. You can choose how you want to deal with it.
7. No one has the power to stop the wagging of tongues. How you handle it is within your property line.
8. You need to decide whether anger is something you want to feel or if it is a motivator for getting them to

- change. You do not have to be angry. Or you can choose to do so. It is up to you.
9. Life goes on for good or bad. Your only choice is what you are going to do about it.
 10. Get used to it, men. Women need to talk. Learning to listen and be a part of their verbal world is much better for you than avoidance and panic.
 11. You cannot control your husband's behavior. If it is important you tell someone about how you feel, you will need to find alternatives: a close friend, a relative, a professional counselor.

Assignment #2

Dominoes Questionnaire

As with Pat's story, your next step is to figure out the dominoes for some of the annoyances in the Annoyance List on page 21. The questionnaire below can help you to do this. This writing assignment will help you get a better sense of what is inside and what is outside your property line. When you experience difficult times, it may seem as if you have a big pile of mixed up dominoes. The following *Dominoes Questionnaire* will help you learn the difference among all your dominoes

You may use the *Annoyance List* or think of an incident in your life that was difficult for you to handle. When it was happening, you may have experienced it as something devastating and overpowering. In actuality, that overwhelming event was composed of several smaller pieces. Those pieces are the five dominoes. This questionnaire has six parts because we have broken the third domino—feelings—into its component parts: emotions and sensations/stress.

Each domino has a few common suggestions from other people's experiences. Although these will help you get started, you will probably check the "other" box and add more items. The only domino that will not require an answer will be number six, the consequence domino. Domino six, like number one, refers to something outside your property line. It always pertains to something that happened in the environment as the result of your action

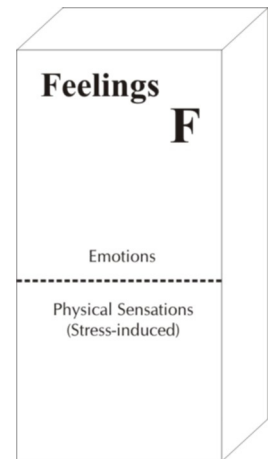


Table 2-E Dominoes Questionnaire

Name of Annoyance _____

Life Domino

- Were you at work or home?
- Were there other people present?
- Were you doing anything unusual?
- Was anyone making the situation difficult for you?
- Others?

Thought Domino

- Were you putting yourself down?
- Were you using labels about yourself?
- Was your thinking muddled?
- Was your mind racing?
- Others?

Feelings Domino [Emotions]

- Were you feeling depressed?
- Were you feeling guilty?
- Were you feeling helpless?

- Were you feeling resentful?
- Were you feeling anxious?
- Were you feeling fearful?
- Others?

Feelings Domino [Sensations]

- Were you feeling nauseous?
- Did you have butterflies?
- Did you have a headache?
- Were you tired or fatigued?
- Did you have a panic attack?
- Did you hyperventilate?
- Were your muscles tense?
- Others?

Behavior Domino

- Did you shut down and do nothing?
- Did you punish yourself?
- Did you run away?
- Did you retaliate?
- Did you avoid something?
- Did you insulate yourself from others?
- Others?

Consequences Domino

- Did you end up in the hospital?
- Were you abandoned?
- Did anyone try to hurt you?
- Did you lose anything; e.g., your job?
- Others?

Writing Tip

Learning to sort out the dominoes will establish a solid foundation for learning the skills in the rest of this book. You want to complete at least one Dominoes Questionnaire each day until you have internalized the ability to quickly sort out the dominoes in most of your life situations.

Continue to complete your 3-column diary that you began in Chapter One of this book. The more pages you fill, the better the foundation you will have for learning new skills