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Preface: How to Use This Book

This book and workbook is designed to help you become familiar with the concept of **self beliefs** that, along with foundational beliefs and relationship beliefs, form your personal belief system. We will work within the context of seeing all persons as being **blessed, known, good and loved**. We will begin by defining belief systems, and the connection among beliefs, feeling states, and your body's responses to situations and relationship issues. Belief Systems Therapy is designed to encompass not only what we think and believe (which is the realm of Cognitive Therapy) but also our feeling-states (emotions and the deeper affect, which we will access through journaling and guided meditations) and our physiological responses. We believe that attending to all three aspects of our selves offers the best hope of learning to change the beliefs that interfere with our happiness and relationships. Also, in general we would consider our spirituality to encompass and transcend all these aspects of our lives. So as we strengthen and heal our belief systems, become familiar with our emotions and affects, and trace our physiological responses to understand our whole selves better, we are also healing and growing spiritually.

The central exercise in the book is **"Identifying your family of origin map, Your Map of the World,"** which was developed by Gregory as he worked with clients between 1989 and 1993. Your map is the key to unlocking the mystery of why and how you go through life recreating your early childhood relational patterns. If you attend a workshop, you will have a chance to do some of the exercises there; but they will be most helpful if done over a period of time. The tape, *"Blessed, Known, Good and Loved: Belief Systems Therapy - Introduction"* can guide you as you work through the full book/workbook. The exercises in Chapters One through Five should be worked through in order, as each builds on concepts presented in the preceding chapters. Chapters Six through Eleven introduce different ways of applying belief systems insights to relationships, and can be read in any order.

We introduce belief systems and their role in relationships through an interview with Gregory, televised in 1992, which offers an overview of why we developed this work, and how it might be helpful to your life. At the end of the book is Chapter Twelve, which develops the foundational belief that we are all, at the depth of our beings, blessed, known, good and loved. You will find examples from Christian scripture, as well as other spiritual writings, to support this particular foundational belief system. The Appendix offers some background on the development and theoretical basis for Belief Systems Therapy.

In the balance of the book, we introduce Gregory's concept of *Continuity of Care*, look more closely at the Emotional Fields of the family, explore the function of triangles in relationships, and consider person's roles in family systems through the lens of belief systems. Once you have grown in your understanding of how these systems shaped your self belief system, you will be ready to begin the long term healing process of identifying and changing specific negative self beliefs, so that you can enjoy healthier relationships and begin to celebrate life as a new being, immersed in the sense of being blessed, known, good and loved.

Throughout the book, we will offer examples drawn from our own life experiences, as well as from stories told by clients and group members. When names are used, they are fictionalized, and details altered to protect confidentiality. The sources of all other quotes are detailed in the Bibliography.

The authors' beliefs and goals

We would like to share some of the beliefs that form the background for this book, and our goals in writing it.

We believe

- that emotional and spiritual health are interconnected, and that inner growth and healing is a necessary part of moving toward a life of greater joy, peace, love, kindness, gentleness, intimacy, relational harmony, freedom from fear, authenticity, inner strength
- that every person has inherent worth, and the capacity to grow spiritually and emotionally
- that humans can change and transform; we are not “stuck” forever
- that every person does the best he or she can at any given time, given the limitations created by their biological state (“nature”) and their personal life experiences (“nurture”)
- that we are also shaped by our culture, which includes forces that often impose roles, expectations and limitations on us all, and that the effects on girls and women may be different from the effects on boys and men, so that any system of healing and growth must be sensitive to the effect of those cultural differences, as well as the individual’s “nature” and “nurture”
- that healing insights can be found in the Judeo-Christian bible as well as other spiritual or sacred texts, and writings from other times and places
- that those of you who are reading this book can make the changes you want in your life

Our goals are:

- to provide tools and models to facilitate growth and healing
- to increase empathy and compassion, by experiencing greater awareness of our own and others’ emotional and spiritual growth issues and struggles
- to promote spiritual and psychological maturity
- to create a unique “lens” (Belief systems therapy) for individuals and groups to work with as they grow and heal

Introduction: A Conversation about Belief Systems Therapy

In 1992, I (Gregory) had a private practice in Pastoral Counseling in Florida, and was offering workshops on Belief Systems Therapy and the role of our belief systems in relationships, specifically how our beliefs form, and the effect they have on developing and maintaining intimacy. In December 1992, I was interviewed for a television program in Key West prior to offering a series of workshops there. Parts of the interview, with some additional material, are offered here as a prelude to our exploration of belief systems.

Key West TV Show - Dec. 1992

Interviewer: Tonight we are going to be talking about intimacy and to some degree, what blocks intimacy in relationships. And what's underneath that is: what is that we believe about ourselves, and about others, that gets in the way of intimacy? Gregory, when we talk about intimacy, what is it that we really seek, in your opinion?

Gregory: I don't think that there's any question that all of us seek intimacy, and that we seek warmth, love and affection. I think that's just part of our nature as human beings, as spiritual beings. And I believe that we can identify specific ways of being in the world, in relationship-specific feeling states that we inherently seek out that move us in the direction of greater intimacy with ourselves, with others, with the world around us, emotionally and spiritually.

Part of my work as a pastoral counselor has been to develop a core belief about who we are as people, which is that to identify ourselves as being *blessed, known, good, and loved* at the core of our beings is really important. That identity becomes a foundational belief. And everything I do in my life, I want to be congruent with that foundational belief. A sense of being blessed, of being welcomed, a sense of being welcomed here, of being welcomed when I walk in my front door, of being welcomed when I get up in the morning by my family, and my spouse, is really important to my sense of who I am. And I will strive for that and want that. I will seek to be known, in a relationship that's safe, so I can feel free to be myself. And the sense of being loved—to be cared for, to be able to care for, to have that kind of mutuality in a relationship, that's what intimacy is about. It includes a sense of belonging, a sense of mutuality, a sense that within who I am, I have a sense that I am good.

For a closer look at what it means to be Blessed, Known, Good and Loved, see Chapter Twelve of this workbook.

However, what happens is that as we grow up, things happen to us and the things that happen to us sometimes move us in a direction where I don't necessarily believe those things (that I am blessed, known, good, and loved) about myself. I don't believe that I'm innately good. I don't believe that I'm really welcomed here. An example of how that might come about—if you have a young child who's playing with their toys in the middle of the living room floor, say a 2, 3, 4, or 5 year old, and Dad or Mom comes home in the evening and is kind of irritable. And the child's very innocently very nicely playing on the floor really having an unconsciously wonderful time; and the parent says (somewhat harshly or impatiently) to the child, "What are you doing in the middle of the floor?" And the child in that innocent state is met with what feels to him like a hurtful statement, or a negative statement. If that happens enough over and over again (which as a parent I realize I sometimes do things ritualistically—things in a sense that I wish I did not do, and I have to look at that myself), if that happens to that child over and over again, than that innocent state, that playful state, that spontaneous state will begin to be combined with a feeling of being un-welcome, a negative. And that child will slowly, depending upon the intensity of those words from the parent, will begin slowly to internalize that "there's something wrong with my natural playful state, my natural sense of expression as I play." Then that child will begin to adopt a negative belief about self— "there's something wrong with me, with my innate self because every time I express my innate self, I'm met with something that is negative and hurtful" and that child will become really inhibited about expressing that side of him.

Interviewer: And that's what we bring into our relationships?

Gregory: Yes, we bring the decision not to express our natural self into the relationship because of the pain that's attached to it.

Interviewer: Do we hope that somebody will see beneath the veneer of our inhibitions and let us free so that we can be natural?

Gregory: Yes. I think not only do we hope for it; I think we spend our lives seeking it. Those adjectives I use—they are alive. They are dynamic—being blessed known good and loved—and when I feel that, I have a good feeling about who I am. It's a confident feeling and it's a feeling that's mindful of myself and mindful of others. It's not a feeling or belief that would cause me to be intrusive, nor is it a sense that would lead me to withdraw. It's a sense that I can be present, that I can safely be mutual in a relationship, and I can receive care and I can give care.

Interviewer: For all the parents that are out there freaking out saying "Oh my God I do that every day, one way or the other!" isn't some of this to some degree inevitable—we give too much or too little to our

kids—we either jump too hard on them or we give don't give them enough structure?

Gregory: Yes. I know, with my work schedule and other adults I know with their work schedules, the relationship with our children is really tenuous. How do I carve out enough time? Or how do I put myself in a particular feeling state—and at this point I'm taking responsibility for myself, for being in a particular feeling state. For example, if I've just had a day where I've been out working for 10 hours, and it's been hard, and I'm really down and maybe even irritable if the end of the day wasn't so hot—when I walk in that front door there's a natural tendency to take that negative energy into that front door and just spread it out all over the living room and into the kitchen. When that happens, that child who is needing me, and appropriately so, that child experiences that negativity. I've been learning in my life (and I'm by no means saying that I do this one hundred percent)—I'm becoming conscious of working this out myself, so that as I walk through that front door, I am aware that I have a responsibility to say to myself “now wait a minute, this feeling is about the workday's things. It is not this child's, it is not of this house.” And I need to take responsibility to say “take a breath; who are you?” and even in a sense “how am I going to instill in that child the sense of being blessed, known, good, and loved?” And I'm not saying that we do that every day, because that's a lot of thinking and a lot of processing, but the more I do that, and the more I begin to feel that, then it begins to happen in a natural way. So when the child's playing in the living room, I might have a tendency, if I've had a hard day, not to interfere with the child's play as I walk in but to go do something else to take care of myself in some other way. Or I might even seek the opportunity to sit down on the floor and play with the child, really letting go of what happened that day and just enjoy the time. But to interfere and become intrusive with that child is a violation of that child's rights.

Interviewer: So back to intimacy, part of what we're saying here is that it is inevitable, that all of us have some degree of negative self beliefs that we walk into a relationship with, and we're going to confront that. And one of the things that you're going to be doing by coming into the Key West area is teaching a series of workshops that will help people uncover what their belief systems really are.

Gregory: Yes that is true and the first part of this work is really educational. We explore who we are as human beings, how we relate to one another, and the purpose of our relational styles. I cannot stress enough that there is a purpose to our relational styles. So if I am relating in a way that is self-destructive or hurtful, there is a purpose behind that and I need to discover and work on what the purpose is.

- Interviewer: Gregory, in terms of the purpose of belief systems: would you elucidate that a little bit?
- Gregory: The purpose of any set of belief systems is an attempt to have to intimacy and mutuality and to protect self. That child that was injured will adopt a belief systems that there's something wrong with my natural will and expression. That belief system will stop that child from expressing that will, that natural self, which protects the child from being hurt. So the purpose is to protect ourselves, while at the same time we are trying to get our needs met in a way that produces a mutual intimacy in a relationship. So the purpose is protection. I think it's very important to understand that the purpose of the belief system is a positive one even though the belief system may be a harsh judgment on self. It may be "there is something wrong with me." Or it may be "I don't have a right to have a caring, nurturing relationship" or "I can't put myself in a way of life that would produce a caring, nurturing relationship." The belief system has a positive intention and, in a sense, that needs to be honored. This severity of the negative belief system and the intensity with which I hold it corresponds to the pain behind it. And we need to be really sensitive to the pain behind those decisions to protect self.
- Interviewer: In your workshops you help people to identify how it is they shoot themselves in the foot and prevent themselves from getting what they actually want?
- Gregory: Yes in such a way that helps not only to identify how they do that, but also to begin to develop strategies and different ways of life so that needs get met in a caring sensitive way.
- Interviewer: One of the things I was really fascinated by when we first started talking tonight is your thinking about how our culture right now is in a very special time and that this is an opportunity for us to really reformulate our belief systems in a way that involves everything from politics to spirituality. Would you summarize that for us please?
- Gregory: Looking at our history there was an intense time going through World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. We prided ourselves on being the industrial giants. We adopted beliefs that we were special, because we were these industrial giants protecting the world. Something else went along with that: we began to adopt beliefs that correlate with the industrial foundation. And we began to adopt roles that correlated with those beliefs, roles that perpetuated the industrial way of life in which we live in. An example of that might be that a person would continue to work in a factory knowing that statistically they would be likely to die at 65 after retiring at 63, with only 2 years of retirement; and even knowing that, people still committed to that role. That was a

common sort of thing that happened in working in the industrial world. What's happening now is that's beginning to break up; and just as in moving through a divorce, or a family crisis, the roles are beginning to break. It's just like when the tree breaks you can look in the tree and read the life of the tree. And that is what's happening now—the roles are beginning to break, which offers an way to really examine ourselves and the beliefs that we have about ourselves, and the beliefs that we have about our community, the beliefs that we have about our nation, and our roles—and we have an opportunity to do some real changing. However that cannot happen unless there's a sense of safety, and a sense of trust.

Interviewer: And because there is so much transition, there's a lot of anxiety; for example we don't really know what's expected of us as men and women anymore.

Gregory: With this change all roles are changing. I mean it was really clear before—we had the corporate man, we had the woman at home, we had two or three kids we were raising up, and the roles we saw on television were for the most part the roles we aspired to. This is where the money was and where the wealth was. Now all that's changing, because our world is not dependent on factories—it's dependent on how we think, and how we relate to one another in the job setting, which is interconnected with negative belief systems too. Am I setting myself up in my work to have a two-year stay, and change every two years, because I'm setting myself up to be excluded somehow? So to understand our belief systems would be beneficial for the work world as well as intimate relationships.

So, once I begin to identify that, “Yeah, there is something breaking within me. There's been three generations of Steelworkers in my family, and I was designed to be a steelworker, but that system doesn't exist anymore.” Do I sit passively or do I take a look at who I am and take some initiative to say, “well I can become something else”? Is my identity so tied up into the past or my beliefs about myself that I can't, that I'm paralyzed? Who am I outside what I was trained to be? I begin to ask those kinds of questions, and if I ask those questions in an environment that's caring, that I can get feedback, that I can have engagement with rather than being tightened up with the pain of the exploration, then I can begin to relax, I can begin to explore, and maybe some of who I more naturally am can begin to come to fruition. I begin to share that and I might even pick a profession that is more congruent with who I naturally am, and not with what is expected of me or what I was told to be.

Interviewer: “Who I naturally am” seems to be such a fluid phrase the way you say that. But as a female or as a male, how do we come together? It seems like we have the possibility for wearing so many different hats. But again there is that kind of confusion, and if we begin to

understand one another, I imagine that as couples we would really find a lot of surprises in your workshops. People kind of look at themselves as individuals and in their families and wonder what do I expect of myself?

Gregory: I think the greatest hope in doing these workshops is that I'm going to learn to get my needs met in a more sensitive, caring, nurturing way, and that I'm going to have the skills to be able to share with another person, so that as I work on this as an individual and this individual works on whatever needs to be worked on from their history, then I will have better skills and strategies to invest in the relationship and bring about harmony, to bring about care, to have less tension, less anxiety, more trust and safety. In a sense, you have a person who commits to this other person in the relationship, and they just automatically contribute all sorts of relational styles, all kinds of positive beliefs, and all kinds of negative beliefs, and we just do it—it's just there. There are three entities: there is *this* individual, and *this* individual, and there's the relationship. So what happens is the individual needs to be honored; so we begin to unpack what was placed into the relationship unconsciously, both positively and negatively, we'll look at all of that. And what we find out is I've put something into the relationship I didn't necessarily want, looking at it consciously, I don't want it in there. So maybe I have a struggle with being passive aggressive, which is a clinical term which means that if I get angry at somebody I can't be direct with them with my anger out of fear or whatever may come to my mind, so I do something else around the back or something that's passive but yet aggressive. Well if I look I may find I have contributed that to the relationship because that's a pattern that I learned in my childhood, because every time I got directly angry somebody hit me so I decided not to do that any more, which makes a lot of sense for a kid to do. But if you're talking about a relationship as an adult it doesn't make a lot of sense. So if I put that style in there, this work helps me to pull that behavior out, take a look at it, where it came from, and work with it in such a way that I get the caring and nurturing that I need to be able to be direct. So I don't store that anger up and have explosions or go out and do something that's self-destructive or just suppress that within myself and not be really available for the relationship. So when that part of me expresses that anger, it happens in a way that's not threatening, that keeps the relationship safe, and I'm able to be direct and have my say, because I have a right to have my say. It doesn't mean I'm always going to get my way, but I do have the right to share and to negotiate for my way and not automatically assume I can't have it.

Interviewer: Oftentimes in couples' workshops I've heard women say I really want us to do something with our relationship, but I can't get my husband or my boyfriend or my lover to come. What might you say that would assist viewers to consider it, basically males who

say, “I would never do anything like that; that’s not something I would do.” How would you motivate them to be a part of this? It seems like we as men have a harder time being willing to explore this. Are we that much more protective?

Gregory: It seems to me that the men have a more difficult time moving in and understanding and expressing feelings. Some of the men I work with I ask, “how you feeling?” I have to ask several times and it’s not a pushy kind of way, but for the men, some men actually can’t come up with the feeling because they don’t have the vocabulary to identify the physiological state that they’re having as a feeling. And so education is needed. If we’re asking people questions they really don’t have an answer or a vocabulary for, it’s abusive in a sense, and as a counselor if I do that it’s abusive for me to do that. So I need to understand what’s going on with that person and how they’re operating and what they’ve learned about themselves, so they need some exploration that way. I can say this—that if the men will come and work and just take time to see if it makes sense, to see if it’s logical to you—men like to be logical—so come and see if it’s logical to you. If it is, begin to work with it. If you work with it, it has been my experience that the men who have chosen to do that have benefited from it and their relationship has benefited from it, and they’ve gotten their needs met in such a way that they really feel good about who they are and feel OK about what they need to express to their partner.

Interviewer: Would you give a summary of what goes on in belief systems workshops and in couple’s workshops?

Gregory: What we do in these workshops is very honoring to whatever set of beliefs a person brings in and you can expect that we are quite aware that the beliefs are there for protection. So what happens is, there is an exercise that we do that identifies what the beliefs are that we have in our lives, and how we internalize them and how they have an effect on us. In a sense what we do is we work on what relationships may have been intrusive in our lives, and what relationships may have been absent, and what relationships were nurturing. As a result of the relationships that were intrusive and absent there’s a negative belief that was adopted. I try to get around it but I can’t get around it – it always seems to turn out that way. So we form and we understand the family shape—in a sense how the person identifies their map of the world because how people relate to you in your early childhood—5 to 10 to 15 years old—this forms your perception, your map of the world. For example Columbus had a different view, a different map of the world. A lot of people had a map of the world that the world was flat and they were committed to the view that the world was flat. They were trained that the world was flat and you couldn’t argue with them or anything. And when Columbus said, “well wait a minute, maybe it’s not flat,” they argued against Columbus. Well

indeed the world is not flat but they would have lived and died for their belief that the world was flat. That's what happens to us as children. We adopt beliefs and we're committed to the beliefs that we adopt because this is the balance that we have struck in this world and how we survive in this world. Then I've discovered that I have some beliefs that say the world is flat and it helps me to say now wait a minute, maybe that's not the shape of the world and I have the map but the territory's really a little different. And I'll begin to open up to explore this kind of thing.

Interviewer: So this is a workshop of self-discovery?

Gregory: Yes, and we will discover the map and after discovering the map there is some intentionality about how would you want your world to look—what self beliefs would you want to have? And we'll work on strategies to counter the negative beliefs if you want to do so.

Interviewer: And the couple's workshops?

Gregory: Well the couple's workshop is similar—the introduction is similar because it's similar work; but then there's a process in which we were go about finding out why *this* particular person, and what was the purpose of *this* person's choosing *this* person, and how the relationship perpetuates the negative and positive beliefs. And so in a sense there's a dance going on in the relationship that perpetuates the positive and negative beliefs. That dance is clearly identified, which will help disrupt the style of relationship that's hurtful, and that perpetuates the negative beliefs.

Interviewer: So a positive outcome is maybe not to get stuck in the same fight that's been going on for ten years.

Gregory: Clearly that is the goal: not to get stuck in the same fight that's been going on in the 10 years of the relationship. If it's been going on for ten years in the relationship, maybe it's been going on for 15 or 20 years prior to that as well. The goal is to learn how not to do those things, and to catch the triggers that happen within myself that produce that response so I can take responsibility and I can stop that kind of interaction myself. And then that gives me a chance to engage in a relationship in such a way that's more direct with my needs and with who I am.

Interviewer: Can you talk just a little bit about grace? It's a concept that usually we talk about in theology, but it's a very important statement and concept and experience internally.

Gregory: A sense of grace—even when I talk about it I breathe deeper and I can feel myself being more at ease. It's almost a sense of separateness, that I'm OK, that all is well within me, that I have a contact with my higher power that's warm and loving, and that I

am able to relate to other people in the same way. And that there is not anything within myself that is not acceptable to my higher power or to others in its pure state. And it's a confidence of that truth. It's also a confidence that when I make decisions that are not congruent with myself being blessed, known, good and loved, that's not the end of the world and I don't need to judge myself. That I know that I am in the presence of people in community who are loving, and I know that I have worked hard to get that type of community, and I know that my sense of my higher power, my spiritual self, that I cannot within my power break that love. I cannot do anything that will break that energy coming to me which is caring and loving. It's a belief and conviction that that's absolutely true. So that no matter what happens in my life, that sense of grace always stays intact.