

WEEK 14 FAILURE OF NERVE ASSIGNMENT  
LESSENING STRESS WITHIN EMOTIONAL TRIANGLES

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A Paper

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By

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## **Abstract**

Sometimes relational systems are offset by emotional instability that causes patterns of behavior that are unfavorable towards building emotionally stable relational systems. An essential component in creating and maintaining emotional stability is a “well-differentiated” leader who can lessen the potential for emotional instability in relational systems (Friedman, 2017, p. 234). By using principles found within Friedman’s (2017) textbook, *A Failure of Nerve* and gospel-centered teachings from the biblical text, the researcher believes he can show how Jesus was a “well-differentiated” leader who demonstrated an ability to properly position himself to effectively manage potentially stressful situations in “emotional triangles” (p. 232).

*Keywords:* relational systems, emotional stability, emotional instability, well-differentiated leader, emotional triangle, stress, positioning

## LESSENING THE STRESS WITHIN EMOTIONAL TRIANGLES

Churches, families, schools and colleges, businesses and organizations, contain relational systems that need “well-differentiated” leaders (Freidman, 2017, p. 15) who can adequately navigate emotional responses and triangulation that takes place within these relational systems (p. 218). Rootes et al. (2010) defined differentiation as the ability to decrease “emotional reactivity within important relationships” (p. 90). One needs “optimal relational functioning,” which is the ability to focus on one’s individual and group emotional stability without neglecting the essential need for emotional well-being in both the individual and the relational system in which a person functions (Rootes et al., 2010, p. 90). Friedman (2017) posited that, negatively, “emotional triangles” can cause stress, even in the “most responsible or most focused member” (p. 219). Without well-differentiated leadership, the emotional triangle can become a stressful and toxic environment that consistently engages in controlling, reactive, and shaming interactions (VanVonderen, 2010, p. 26). Friedman (2017) observed that the “type of leadership that creates the least stress” is the most efficacious leadership (p. 232). In this paper, the researcher will show how Jesus displayed an ability to be in a potentially emotionally triangled stressful situation and provide emotional stability through his well-differentiated leadership presence and positioning.

### **A Gospel Perspective**

After Jesus finished his time of communion with his heavenly Father (Mark 14:35-42), a crowd consisting of Judas and “the chief priest and the scribes and the elders” approached Jesus to apprehend him (Mark 14:43 New American Standard Bible). Confronted with a moment of ungodly betrayal presented as sincere adoration by one of his twelve disciples, Jesus did not anxiously react to Judas’ actions (Mark 14:45). Jesus seemed to welcome Judas’ moment of

betrayal. However, Peter (John 18:10) displayed an anxious emotional response that revealed his lack of ability to properly navigate an emotional triangle from an effective position (Mark 14:47). Friedman (2017) argued that the position one takes in an emotional triangle can cause more or less stress (p. 233). Peter's positioning caused more stress (Mark 14:47), while Jesus' positioning created less stress (Mark 14:45-46, Luke 22:51-54). Peter's emotional instability could have "sabotaged" Jesus' emotional stability; however, Jesus demonstrated an ability to "de-triangle" without abandoning an emotional triangle or becoming "triangled himself" (Friedman, 2017, 234). Undeniably, Jesus did not fail to "maintain a well-differentiated position" (Friedman, 2017, p. 234).

What contributed to Jesus' ability to remain emotionally stable in an emotional triangle that displayed characteristics of instability? Jesus did not view worship as something to approach one day out of the week. He viewed worship as a lifestyle (Rom. 12:1 "spiritual service of worship") that consisted of frequent periods of intimate communion with his heavenly Father (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16; Matt. 14:23). Peter had the same opportunities as Jesus to commune with God to develop as a well-differentiated leader. Still, on three successive occasions, he chose to forgo a crucial moment of leadership development for the comforts of sleep and slumber (Mark 14:37, 40, 41). By consistently positioning himself before the Father in prayer, Jesus was able to constantly be in a "responsible position" where he could lessen the stress level of emotional triangles. Eventually, Peter would need to repent (Luke 22:32) of moments where he lacked well-differentiated leadership (Matthew 26:69-74; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27) and develop into a well-differentiated leader (Acts 2:14-40). If a Christian leader has failed to follow Jesus' model for well-differentiated leading in emotional triangulating, he or she

needs to repent and trust the Lord to offer his assistance in developing well-differentiated leading for navigating anxious relational systems.

### **Conclusion**

Leaders should always be aware of their ability and potential to lessen the stress generated by emotional triangles. Jesus Christ offers a perfect paradigm that leaders can emulate for providing an injection of emotional stability into emotional triangles that have spiraled into a moment or state of emotional instability. Jesus never allowed emotional instability to disrupt his emotional stability. However, he always approached emotional triangles tactfully and without letting his emotional stability reach a point of compromise. Leaders who are tasked with providing well-differentiated leadership in churches, businesses, schools, homes, and communities, would do well to implement the principles gleaned from reading, studying, and comprehending Jesus' foci for serving and functioning effectively in systems that are prone to emotional triangulating and instability.

Two of my main takeaways from *A Failure of Nerve* are 1) keep developing as a well-differentiated leader and 2) always be aware of my ability to regulate my relational systems by intentional moments of introspection for serving as a "step-down transformer" in those relational systems (Friedman, 2017, p. 246).

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