

Helping Couples Connect Deeply as God Intended

“Naked without shame” instructs that God’s intention for couples was that each spouse was to be known completely by the other and yet completely accepted. But this deepest of connection cannot be experienced in the same way since sin and its brokenness entered our world. Yet, the goal for spouses is still to be deeply connected. Discussion will include how helpers assist spouses to grow in acceptance of each other, see their lack of connection as their real problem, and connect deeply as God intends.

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I. The Trinity—A Picture of Connection for Couples

- A. The Three Persons of the Trinity interpenetrate.
- B. The Three Persons of the Trinity “dance” in relationship with each other.
- C. In the relational dance of The Trinity the Three are simultaneously Distinct and Interdependent.
- D. This full connection yet distinct relational dance is the operative principle of the universe.
 1. Everything is in relationship, with God of course, but with other things in the universe as well.
 2. People grow and are transformed in and through relationship.

II. God’s Goal for Persons and God’s Goal for Couples

- A. “Naked without shame” God’s intention for couples was that each spouse was to be
 1. Known completely by the other and yet
 2. Completely accepted.

III. Hindrances to Deep Connection

- A. Deep connection cannot be experienced in the same way since sin and its brokenness entered our world, but the goal for spouses is still to be deeply connected.

B. Sinful Attitudes

1. Me first
2. Fear of Trusting Others

C. Defensiveness

1. Defensiveness equals a declaration that a person is not willing to listen.

D. Relationship failure in families and society

1. Few models of safe and enduring connection.
2. Changes how we think about getting married and staying married.

E. Fear of risking relationship failure

1. Fear of betrayal
2. Fear of painful losses

F. Fear of risking relationship success

1. Rather leave an “escape hatch” than be “all the way in” the marriage
2. Fear of risking opening your heart
3. Fear of risking honesty

IV. A lesson from living with horses

A. Bill Barnes’ “One Minute Portrait”

1. “The number one thing that motivates a horse to be with you is peace. And that also is with people.”
2. Peace looks like “settled, grounded, who know where they are going, who are directed, and have self-confidence, and also are trying to be a servant to those around them.”
3. “You’re really working more on yourself than you are the horse. And that’s a real art.”

B. Understand the nature of the horse (and people).

1. The horse is prey to predators, so it is always on guard.
2. The horse is watching to see if you can be trusted again.
3. It is like there is a new horse every day. They need to be reassured regularly.
4. All spouses are similar in that they can take on the tendencies of those that are prey, needing to be reassured regularly that they are safe with you and that you are there for them.
5. Spouses, whether they know it or not, are watching to see if their spouse is safe and can be trusted.

V. Helping Couples Connect Deeply

- A. Help couples see that their lack of connection is their real problem.
 - 1. Talking collaboratively is the solution to problems. Such talking is more likely when connection is strong.
 - 2. Such talk can be thought of as solving the moment rather than solving the problem.
 - 3. Intimacy may be just a sentence away. The needed conversation begins with a confiding or acknowledging sentence that could invite the spouse to respond in a similar way.

- B. Help couples SEE each other better.
 - 1. Tuning in
 - 2. Curiosity
 - 3. Explore First and Questions First (Analysis and Explanations Last)

- C. Help couples HEAR each other better.
 - 1. Help couples assume their spouse wants to be understood.
 - 2. Help couples remain curious about what is important to their spouse.
 - 3. Help couples hear the heartfelt feeling or hope underneath the accusation from or silence of their spouse.

- D. Help Couples ACCEPT each other better
 - 1. Help spouses practice honoring the differences of their spouse.
 - 2. Help spouses allow their spouse to influence them. This requires the maturity needed to be open about your own shortcomings, yet hopeful for growth.
 - 3. Help wives and husbands repent from the assumption that all would be good if their husband or wife would become just like them.

- E. Help spouses GROW continuously.

Suggested Readings:

Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart. Second Edition. William Doherty. Guilford. 2013

8 Keys to Building Your Best Relationships. Daniel Hughes. Norton, 2013.

Created for Connection: The “Hold Me Tight” Guide for Christian Couples—Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love. Sue Johnson and Kenneth Sanderfer. Little, Brown, 2016

Counseling Couples in Conflict: A Relational Restoration Model. James Sells and Mark Yarhouse. IVP. 2011