

Date Your Mate

RELATIONAL COURAGE
*A Guide To Creating
Loving Relationships*

NANCY HOUSTON

Date Your Mate
Clear Wind Publishing
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WELCOME TO DATE YOUR MATE!

Over the next six weeks, you'll begin a journey to grow, strengthen, and enrich your marriage. Whether your relationship is flourishing or in need of restoration, we believe that as you align your marriage with God's heart, He will work in ways beyond what you can imagine.

GROUP GUIDELINES

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

- 1. VIDEO/GROUP TIME:** Each week, you will watch the video and discuss the questions that are written for the group time.
- 2. GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE:** Make time each week to do this section. The questions and assignments provided are designed to draw you and your spouse into a more intimate relationship.
- 3. SHARE:** Come prepared to share with the group how the homework impacted your marriage.
- 4. PRAY!** Remember, God is for you and wants your marriage to succeed.

MAKING IT SAFE:

- 1. CONFIDENTIALITY IS ESSENTIAL:** What is said in the group stays in the group.
- 2. SPEAK ONLY FOR YOURSELF:** Please use "I" statements and avoid "You" statements.
- 3. RESPECT OTHERS:** Let everyone find his or her own voice (no side conversations or advice giving)
- 4. ALLOW FEELINGS:** Everyone needs to work through his or her own feelings. It's OK for them to cry or feel sad.
- 5. LISTENING:** Practice active listening by not interrupting, having eye contact and listening for the deeper meaning.
- 6. COME PREPARED:** You will receive as much as you dig in.
- 7. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY:** If you feel uncomfortable with anything in the group or among group members, share your concern with the group or with the leader.

CONTENTS

WEEK ONE: The Love Challenge	9
WEEK TWO: The Wrestling Match	23
WEEK THREE: The Resilient Child	37
WEEK FOUR: Caring For The Resilient Child	49
WEEK FIVE: Tender Love	61
WEEK SIX: Creating Sexual Passion	73
FINAL THOUGHTS	83

**THIS STUDY GUIDE IS A COMPANION TO
DATE YOUR MATE
SIX-WEEK TEACHING SERIES.
YOU MAY PURCHASE VIDEO SERIES AT
BETTERLIVESCOACHING.COM**



The Love Challenge

WEEK ONE



The Love Challenge

Week One

“The beginning of love is the will to let those we love to be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”
–Thomas Merton

WELCOME HOME TO LOVE!

SELF REFLECTION:

What would it be like for you to allow your spouse to be perfectly themselves?

What if you decided to take the focus off of changing them and instead focused on growing you?

How would this impact your marriage?

Ron and I are thrilled that you have decided to join us on this journey of marriage. We have come to believe that a great marriage is mostly about developing skills and changing our mindset about love. For example, maybe you have thought that love meant marriage would be easy, but what if marriage was meant to challenge and grow us all the days of our lives? Ron and I can attest that marriage is mostly effort, and it never happens automatically. But love is the greatest endeavor we will ever undertake, and it will challenge us to go beyond our limited views of what love is.

Love begins with mutual respect for the other and seeing them for the gift they are. Yes, your spouse is a gift, and remembering that will help tremendously. Immature love believes we can change a person and the things that are not appealing. Immature love sees people as home improvement projects; fixing this, tweaking that, replacing the undesirable, so we will have the perfect human who will love us perfectly. Love doesn't work that way. Mature love requires us to change our mindsets, look at ourselves, and commit to a lifetime of growth and development.

MARRIAGE IS A MIRROR

Truly loving requires us to get out of the smallness of ourselves so we can exchange our small “I exist” for God’s greater “He exists.” When He exists in the center of our lives, then love can flourish, mature, and expand, because He is love. When I exist, I am limited by my own narrow views of love, which are often filled with jealousies, comparisons, power struggles, and control issues. When this happens, love ceases to exist.

LOVE INVITES US INTO AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHANGE

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

The stresses of life can feel overwhelming, and we need to learn how to give grace to ourselves and our spouse.

- How many of you are in a stressful season?
- How is the stress of this season affecting your marriage?
- What does stress cost you personally?
- What are some ways you can lower the stress in your marriage?

The good news is that we were created to walk uphill—to do the hard things. To mature and develop and to create a life we want to be in, and nothing will help us mature like marriage will. We are here to live and not to sleep through life. We are here to learn how to love and not to be filled up with resentments and failed relationships. We can all do better! We were made to do better! Each of us needs something to live up to.

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the questions together.

Imagine I had a magic fairy wand and I waved it over your marriage, what would be different?

·How would you show up differently?

What skills would you need to practice?

THE HINDRANCES TO LOVE

Here are five hindrances we all practice that are not helpful to creating a loving relationship.

1. The need to be right.
2. The need to be in control.
3. Attacking or withdrawing.
4. Holding onto resentments.

5. Seeking revenge.

Which of these five are you more prone to reach for when you are upset?

ATTACHMENT

“Attachment and autonomy are vital for a healthy relationship. Lack of attachment leaves us lonely and walled off, lack of autonomy leaves us feeling powerless and hopeless. Working toward a balance will ignite your relationship in new ways.”

–Nancy Houston

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the questions together.

Which hindrance of love do you struggle with the most?

How do you think this affects your marriage connection?

WE ALL NEED SECURE ATTACHMENT

In our marriage, I ached for a deeper attachment with Ron. I feared abandonment. Not necessarily him leaving me, but I feared distance. Distance felt like punishment for me. It felt like rejection, and I had already had enough painful rejection from my family. Because I was desperate for attachment, I didn't know it was okay for me to even have much of a self.

Ron feared engulfment and losing his autonomy. He often felt engulfed by the emotions of his family. He felt overwhelmed by their emotionality and learned early to disconnect and create distance to protect himself from becoming engulfed by their tidal wave of

emotionality. He wanted to be connected to me but his fear held me at bay. Even though we loved each other, meeting these needs for attachment and autonomy was a painful wrestling match for us with no winners.

“Adults need attachment as desperately as infants do.”

–Nancy Houston

THE THREE ATTACHMENT STYLES

1 ANXIOUS PREOCCUPIED:

1. Require a greater level of attachment. Can feel needy.
2. Can be more passive because they don't want to risk losing attachments.
3. Often avoid conflict.
4. Do not have a confident sense of self.

SOLUTIONS:

1. Develop a stronger sense of self.
2. Breathing through fight, flight, freeze. Learn to modulate anxiety.

3. Get into your own hula hoop. You can be separate and connected.
4. Ask for what you need. It's OK for you to have needs.
5. Develop an independent hobby. Go to coffee by yourself. Learn to enjoy yourself.

2

DISMISSIVE AVOIDANT:

1. Highly individualistic.
2. Very industrious.
3. Don't love intense emotions-will distance.
4. Fear emotional engulfment.
5. Comfortable by themselves.
6. Invest less in relationships.
7. Don't express negative emotions.
8. Nightmare for them is the anxious attacher.

9. Don't want to be the caretaker.

10. Often very successful at work but struggles with intimate relationships.

SOLUTIONS:

1. Work on emotional blocks.

2. Become aware of emotions and learn how to express negative and positive emotions and ask for what you need.

3. Flex your emotional muscle with people who show emotion.

4. Volunteer to soothe someone.

5. Make eye contact when others are expressing emotion.

6. Recognize the benefits of attachment. Move toward attachment instead of away.

7. Practice empathy.

3

DISORGANIZED OR FEARFUL AVOIDANT:

1. Can be dismissive and act like they don't care.

2. Really want closeness and fear closeness so can feel erratic to others.
3. Embody both anxious and avoidant attachment styles.
4. Prone to anxiety/depression because of the difficulties in relationships.
5. Fear abandonment but want space - can cut others off if getting too close.
6. Sex life: may have many partners but not committed or deeply in love.

SOLUTIONS:

1. Flex your emotional muscles with people who show emotion.
2. Volunteer to soothe someone.
3. Make eye contact when others are expressing emotion.
4. Practice empathy even in the small moments.

5. Practice breathing techniques to calm the anxiety.

6. Do reality checks.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the question together.

Which attachment style do you most relate with?

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Adults who share a secure attachment with their spouse are more prone to learn positive ways to manage emotions, relationships, and stressful situations. They can share needs with one another and feel comfortable with closeness. They can enjoy connection and separateness without distress. They are able to modulate themselves emotionally.

ATTACHMENT PAUSE:

If you are comfortable, take a moment and go chest-to-chest and belly-to-belly with your spouse.

Breathe. Breathe into the count of four and hold it. Breathe out to the count of four.

Feel your nervous system relax as you experience this connection with your spouse.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

*“For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother,
and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh,”
Genesis 2:24 (AMP)*

What did your caretakers teach you about attachment?

How were you treated when you were sad, disappointed, or hurt as a child?

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the question together.

Turn to your spouse and say, “I am committed to putting in the effort to build a secure attachment with you.” How does this feel for you?

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

This week, here are a few ways you can empower your marriage connection. In the blank, write how you will implement this in your marriage this coming week.

How is understanding how your spouse grew up helpful for your attachment?

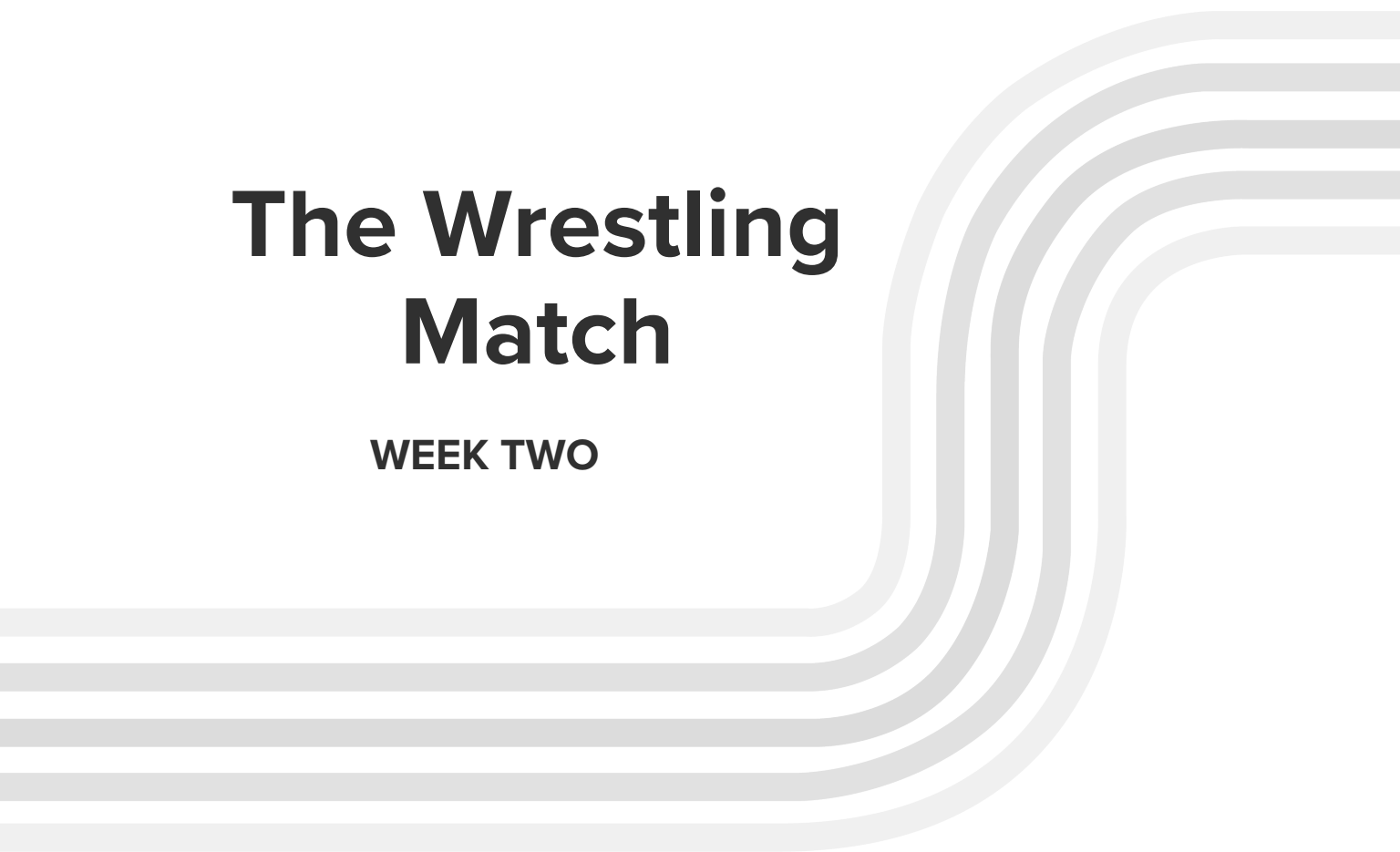
What would it look like for you to ask your spouse what they need instead of assuming what they need?

How can I use my self-expression to say what I need?

Daily pauses for chest-to-chest and belly-to-belly pauses, breathing in and breathing out.

The Wrestling Match

WEEK TWO



The Wrestling Match

Week Two

LEARNING TO HOLD THE TENSION

SELF REFLECTION:

How did you and your spouse experience attachment in your marriage last week?

If you practiced chest-to-chest and belly-to-belly connection, how was it for you?

When did you feel the most connected to your spouse this week?

Every couple is going to have to negotiate closeness and distance—attachment and autonomy—connected and separate. This is actually a familiar dance that we learned in childhood with our caregivers. Most likely, we lean naturally toward one end of the spectrum of attachment or autonomy polarity while hoping to avoid the tension. However, it requires a significant amount of maturity to live in the tension.

Adults who share a secure attachment with their spouse are more prone to learn positive ways to manage emotions, relationships, and stressful situations. They can share needs with one another and feel comfortable with closeness. They can enjoy connection and separateness without distress. They are able to modulate themselves emotionally. Researchers have concluded that those who have secure and solid attachments are far more likely to thrive in every area of life, health, finances, relationships, and career.

“For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh,”
Genesis 2:24 (AMP)

Repetition = idea of value and significance

- Speaks to leaving or differentiating from family
- Significant relationship with a marriage partner

YOUR SPOUSE IS YOUR HIGHEST PRIORITY

- A woman’s biggest need is for understanding. *“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...” (1 Peter 3:7a, ESV)*
 - What does it look like in your marriage for you to feel understood by your spouse?

- A man’s biggest need is for appreciation.
 - What does it look like in your marriage for you to feel appreciated by your spouse?

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the questions together.

Ask your spouse, “How would it impact our marriage if I clearly communicated that you are my highest priority?”

How can I make you feel like you’re my #1 priority?

WHAT IS AUTONOMY?

When we talk about autonomy we have to think of healthy self-differentiation. There is going to be tension, but you find a way to thrive in the distinction. To have a healthy sense of self, you need to know and understand who you are. Healthy self-differentiation is actually aiming for a balance between attachment and autonomy.

- It’s the ability to thrive in the inherent tension between these two processes
- It’s not about creating distance but distinction
- It’s the ability to care for others’ needs while holding onto and affirming your own needs
- You don’t allow others to define you
- You hold on to your distinct sense of self, while staying in close connection with those you love

PAUSE FOR SELF REFLECTION QUESTIONS

List five attributes that describe you.

What do you want/don't want for your future?

What do you like?

What are you feeling right now?

What are you thinking?

Your spouse has needs for appreciation and acceptance, empathy, validation, and feedback. Being able to hold your needs and your spouse's needs means you are able to have healthy self-differentiation. I believe a couple can love each other deeply, but, if they don't know how to balance attachment and autonomy, it's going to be challenging.

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the questions together.

How would it feel if I could remain my distinct self while staying deeply connected with you?

SIGNS OF HEALTHY SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

- You have a solid sense of self
- You recognize and are able to distinguish and express what you think, feel, and want
- You seek understanding rather than agreement
- You can self-validate and self-soothe

AUTONOMY THAT CAUSES MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- Do you relate more to the dismissive and avoidant attachment style or the clingy and dependent attachment style?
- How have you experienced either the dismissive or clingy response in your marriage?

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

What was the reaction of the important people in your life when you started asserting yourself?

- What meaning did you make of their reaction?

Did you have the freedom to make age-appropriate decisions?

- Was age-appropriate rebellion against authority allowed as a teenager?
- Was your “no” heard?

SIGNS OF LOW SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

- Low self-acceptance
- Low confidence
- Perceive self as unlovable and even ugly
- Perceive self as inadequate, incompetent, or not good enough
- Low self-validation or self-esteem, which may depend on what significant other thinks of them

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the question together.

How does autonomy work in your relationship with each other?

THE TENSION BETWEEN ATTACHMENT AND AUTONOMY

In marriage, healthy attachment and autonomy require a great deal of maturity. Marriage isn't about alleviating the tension but rather how do we navigate the tension. Often, we fragilize each other, which causes us to avoid important conversations. Learn to live in the tension. It is a requirement for a healthy, differentiated marriage. The tension is good!

What does this tension look like in your relationship?

Practice together:

Deep breathing to stay calm and hold the tension.

YOUR BRILLIANT DEFENSE SYSTEM

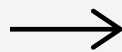
BUILDING AWARENESS OF WHAT YOU DO IN THE RELATIONSHIP DANCE

Physiological survival responses to a perceived threat or danger are automatic. Not only is it important for us to build awareness around what we do, but it is important to build awareness of how we came to do what we do. Your defense mechanisms are not bad; they were an intelligent and brilliant way to keep yourself safe. I call this exquisite coping.

**PHYSIOLOGICAL SURVIVAL RESPONSES
(AUTOMATIC AND LEARNED)
TO A PERCEIVED THREAT OR DANGER**



FIGHT



**EXPLOSIVE TYPE, "I AM
RIGHT, YOU ARE WRONG"**



FLIGHT



**WITHDRAWING TYPE, "I DON'T
FEEL SAFE AND NEED TO GET
AWAY"**



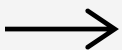
FIX



**SENSIBLE, REASONABLE,
LOGICAL, FACTUAL TYPE**



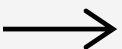
FAWN



**PLEASER WHO GIVES TOO
MUCH AND EXPECTS TOO
LITTLE**



FOLD



GOES LOW AND GIVES IN

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the question together.

Some of us do all the above. Some have a more predictable pattern.
Take a moment and reflect: What's your response?

True Freedom is Freedom from our Automatic Reactions

We are body, soul, and spirit, and true freedom is freedom from our own automatic reactions. This requires us to calm our systems so we can respond instead of react to situations.

Let's move out of automatic responses that are now disruptive to our love relationships.

There are two types of conflict: destructive and constructive.

In **destructive** conflict you:

- Are stuck in the blame game
- Attack or defend
- Have overly big reactions
- Allow grievances to gather steam and then explode
- Weaponize partners vulnerabilities
- Communicate in absolutes (you never, you always)
- Turn behaviors into character assaults
- Have a lack of resolution
- Don't listen to the other or attempt to understand

In **constructive** conflict you:

- Ask for talk-time to bring up difficult conversations that are necessary
- Illuminate negative patterns that need to be addressed
- Provide an opportunity for healthy problem solving
- Amplify the need for the relationship to grow and change
- Become educated on how to disagree and still stay connected

CONFIRMATION BIAS

In confirmation bias, we collect evidence that reinforces our judgments and beliefs about the other person.

1. Overemphasize the negative.
2. Overlook the positive.
3. Bids for connection or positive moves get buried beneath the lens of criticism, contempt, stonewalling, and defensiveness.

ATTRIBUTION ERROR

When you are rude it's because you had a hard day. When your partner is rude or abrupt it's because they are a bad person or just don't care about you.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

What is your typical confirmation bias?

Where do you hold the tension in your body when you engage in destructive conflict?

What is your part?

How does it feel when you are solving conflict in constructive ways?

What are you doing differently?

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

“Let every wife be supportive and tenderly devoted to her husband, for this is a beautiful illustration of our devotion to Christ. Let every husband be filled with cherishing love for his wife and never be insensitive toward her.”
(Colossians 3:18–19, TPT)

How does tension show up when you are wrestling for connection and autonomy? What does tension look like in your relationship?

- This week, practice together deep breathing to stay calm while holding the tension.
- Practice asking for what you need directly without criticizing or complaining. For example, instead of saying, “You work all the time and don’t care about connecting with me!” Try saying, “I miss our connection. Would you have time to connect on Saturday?”

The Resilient Child

WEEK THREE



The Resilient Child

Week Three

*“Respond gently when you are confronted, and you’ll defuse the rage of another. Responding with sharp, cutting words will only make it worse ...
A touchy, hot-tempered man picks a fight, but the calm, patient man knows how to silence strife,”
(Proverbs 15:1,18, TPT)*

SELF REFLECTION:

Have you experienced some changes in your marriage because you are putting forth effort?

How does the effort you are putting forth feel for you?

NORMALIZING HARMONY, DISHARMONY, AND REPAIR

Every relationship is going to experience episodes of harmony, disharmony, and repair. It's a normal part of every relationship. The periods of harmony are comforting and build attachment and enjoyment. They are a wonderful part of being connected to another human. Disharmony serves its purpose as well by causing us to look at our own behaviors and how we are doing relationships. Disharmony can make us appreciate more deeply when we are in sync with one another. If we listen and ask ourselves what the disharmony is about, we may realize that it's time for some open, honest, conversations. Topics that have been swept under the rug for prolonged periods of harmony suddenly are demanding a platform, a voice, and a time to listen and negotiate differences.

Harmony:

- Comforting
- Builds attachment
- Enjoyable
- Connecting

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the question together.

Talk about a time of harmony and how that felt?

Disharmony:

- Urges us to look at our own behavior
- Appreciate more deeply when we are in sync
- Makes it obvious it is time for open, honest, truthful conversations
- Demands a platform, voice, and time to address topics swept under the rug

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the question together.

What would it be like if we started seeing disharmony as a gift?

DISHARMONY

“Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye but fail to notice the beam in your own eye?”

(Matthew 7:3 BSB)

Repair is needed when disharmony has taken over. To repair, we must self-regulate. When you learn how to regulate you, and you don’t expect your spouse to regulate you, repair can happen. This might look like you going for a walk, deep breathing, taking a cold shower, or doing whatever it is that helps your nervous system to calm and your heart beat to regulate. Self-regulation is the ability to remain calm, be curious, and have compassion.

Repair:

- Needed when disharmony has taken over
- Ability to remain calm, curious, and compassionate
- Calls for humility
- Conflict is normal (Do you dismiss, defend, protect, run away?)
- Become skilled and eloquent in resolving conflict
- Build a bridge, don’t burn it down
- Become a skilled listener

Repair is a time for humility. It’s a time to walk a mile in the other person's shoes and not defend yourself, belittle their emotions, dismiss them, or avoid the conflict. Conflict is a normal part of relationships. The skill is in the ability to repair.

Are you able to repair?

Do you listen when someone says this was hurtful, or do you dismiss them?

Do you tend to defend yourself?

Stonewall?

Shut down?

Run away?

None of these are good strategies to repair a relationship. We all need to become more skilled and eloquent in resolving conflict. Think of repair like building a bridge to this person you love, instead of blowing up the bridge. Put aside your needs for a few moments and listen—really listen—to what your person is telling you.

MARRIAGE REFLECTION:

Turn to your spouse and discuss the questions together.

What do we do when we have conflict?

- Do you dismiss?
- Do you defend?
- Do you protect?
- Do you run away?

When making repair, ask yourself: “Is there one tiny shred of truth, or one thing done that was hurtful? If yes, then do everything you can to repair.”

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

What are some of the elements of becoming a skilled listener? Get a picture in your mind of someone who is a really great listener. What is it they do that is different from others?

For repair to happen sometimes the magic words might sound like, “Honey, I love you, and I can see you are upset. I don’t want you to hold on to whatever it is that is bothering you. You deserve better than that. Let’s talk and work this out.”

As humans, we can hurt one another’s feelings. You don’t have to understand why your spouse’s feelings are hurt; all you have to do is join them. If amends are needed, the offender can say, “I can see that I have hurt you. I’m so sorry. You are the person I love, and I don’t want to treat you this way.” “I’m sorry,” are magic words.

- **Ask yourself: Is there one tiny shred of truth?**
- **One little thing you could see that you did that was hurtful?**
- **If yes, then do everything you can to repair.**

If there isn’t truth in what they say, but instead they are just in a bad state and taking it out on you, then say, “Honey, I can see you are upset. I can be compassionate toward you, and I can also hold on to myself. I think you are taking this out on me and that doesn’t feel honest. I’d like to know what’s going on with you?” You might ask, “Hey, I can see you’re a little off right now ... what might be going on with you?”

THE ART OF LETTING GO

“These mountains that you are carrying, you were only supposed to climb.”
–Najwa Zebian

FORGIVENESS IS TRICKY

- Know what to and what not to let go of
- Recognize good reasons you can't let go

Another skill to practice in the repair process is the ability to let go and forgive. Forgiveness is a tricky topic for so many. I'm not talking about letting dangerous, narcissistic, malevolent, boundary-hating people back into your life. No! Never. Don't do it! Maybe there is a really good reason you can't let go. Perhaps this relationship you are in isn't safe, or maybe you have felt very unsafe from things that happened in the past and you are plagued with outsized feelings. Instead, I'm talking about how all of us hurt other people's feelings.

WE ALL HURT EACH OTHER'S FEELINGS

- Say things we shouldn't
- Miss cues
- Preoccupied
- Stressed out
- Insensitive

We say things we shouldn't, we miss cues for connection, we can be preoccupied and out-of-touch, stressed out, and insensitive. Welcome to being human. So, when someone has treated us in one of these ways, it's part of the repair process to assess:

1. Ask, “Was this person just not thinking and didn't mean to hurt me?” Then practice acknowledging, “Ouch! That hurt,” grieving it for a moment and then letting it go.
2. Name to tame: your left brain needs information to help calm the emotional right brain. Name your emotions. For example, say, “I feel sad, disappointed, hurt.” Giving your left brain that information to pass to the right side of your brain will help you tame what can feel like out-of-control emotions. Otherwise, it feels nearly impossible to let go of hurts.

3. Was this intentional? Then say, “Hey, when you said _____, I felt _____. It would help me if you would _____.” Ask for what you need and then receive it.
4. If a person has hurt you in significant ways, the first step is for you to:
 - 1.) Acknowledge the pain
 - 2.) Locate where the hurt is stored in your body
 - 3.) Describe and name your emotions
 - 4.) Grieve and process the pain (you may need a good person to listen and contain you)
 - 5.) Evaluate if the person who hurt you cares and is willing to do the hard work of repair
 - 6.) If they are willing and have pursued repair, be willing to receive and let go of the hurt.

Remember, we forgive others for our own sake.

Holding on to resentments, hurts, bitterness, and unforgiveness are all ways we poison our own body, soul, and spirit.

Revenge enjoys replaying hurts and hurting the other person for hurting us. It isn't helpful and doesn't heal the relationship.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

1. Are you holding unresolved grief, hurt, or sorrow?
2. Have you processed that pain with a safe person?
3. Is there someone you need to forgive and let the offense go?
4. Is there a hard conversation you need to have with someone?
5. Pause and check your heart. What needs to happen to repair this relationship?
Is it repairable or is it unsafe?

Mostly, what gets in the way of healthy relationships are unresolved hurts and trauma.

THE RESILIENT CHILD

The resilient child is the part of you that adapted and learned to do whatever made the most sense to you growing up in the face of emotional neglect; physical, verbal, or sexual abuse; or any other human violation. Your resilient child was the part of you that adjusted to whatever your environment tossed your way, and you needed to figure out how to cope. Children are survivalists. The resilient child is the part of you that figured out how to survive but now doesn't know how to thrive as an adult. We think of this as our adult self, but it's really a kid's version of what an adult looks like.

Somewhere between the young child and the mature adult is the resilient child. The resilient child shows up when we are triggered, tired, stressed, or scared.

Many people live large chunks of their lives from the stance of the resilient child. This behavior can be expressed as sometimes aggressive or codependent.

RESILIENT CHILD



MATURE ADULT

BLACK/WHITE

PERFECTIONISTIC

KNOW IT ALL

RELENTLESS

RIGID

HARSH

CERTAIN

CUTS OFF

ENMESHED

TIGHT IN BODY

REACTIVE

UNSKILLED

NUANCED

ADAPTABLE

REALISTIC

FORGIVING

FLEXIBLE

WARM

YIELDING

CONNECTED TO SELF

SELF DIFFERENTIATED

RELAXED IN BODY

RESPONSIVE

SKILLED

HOW CAN WE HELP THIS RESILIENT CHILD?

RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE

Until we recognize and appreciate all this resilient child has done for us, it won't let go and let the mature, adult self lead.

What to recognize and appreciate about your resilient child:

- They were brave and brilliant and figured out ways to cope.
- They worked hard on your behalf and got you through.
- Name five things your resilient child did for you.
- Affirm your resilient child's purpose:
- Say to yourself: "Now I am here—the functional, mature adult—and I will love you and take care of you and help you to mature. You are no longer on your own. You don't have to live by yourself."

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

Name five things your resilient child did for you.

Express appreciation for your resilient child and for your spouse's resilient child.

Caring For The Resilient Child

WEEK FOUR



Caring For The Resilient Child

Week Four

CARING FOR THE RESILIENT CHILD IS HOW WE BEGIN TO SELF-LEAD

Self-leadership is the most empowering way to live your life. It enables you to own yourself, which includes your emotions, your desires, your needs, and making requests. Imagine a world where each of us takes full responsibility for what we feel, think, how we act, and what we do with this one precious life we have been given. One of my favorite sayings is, “If you will be a wise and loving parent to yourself, your relationships will be based on love and desire instead of need and desperation.” Self-leadership begins with the 8 C’s necessary to develop a self. These eight characteristics will change your relationship with yourself and with others.

8 C’S TO DEVELOP A SELF:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. COMPASSION | 5. CURIOSITY |
| 2. COURAGE | 6. CONNECTEDNESS |
| 3. CALMNESS | 7. CREATIVITY |
| 4. CONFIDENCE | 8. CLARITY |

If you are cold, critical, and harsh with yourself, disconnected and distant from the vulnerable, tender, places within you, you will be hindered from giving and receiving the love you desire. Self-awareness is a willingness to believe that we are not yet fully developed, but we are in the continual process of developing. This adult development process is an invitation to growth and a time to practice self-compassion. *Harshness heals nothing.*

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

How would these eight characteristics change your life if you were to put them into practice?

If you were to bring a calm self to your relationships, how would that impact those relationships?

Are you critical, harsh, or dismissive with yourself?

- How is this impacting you?
- How would you guess it is impacting your relationship with your spouse?
- How could you connect with the vulnerable, tender places within you?

Self-Awareness is the courage to believe we're not yet fully developed; rather we are in the continual process of developing.

WHY WE NEED BOUNDARIES

- Distinguish yourself from other people
- Sense of where you begin and end
- Allows you to choose what to share of yourself with others

Healthy boundaries help you distinguish you from all other people. Boundaries give you a sense of where you begin and where you end. It enables you to self-differentiate from others and fully belong to you so you can choose whom you want to allow in.

When we are desperate, we compromise who we are and stop listening to our own intuition.

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF BOUNDARIES

1 RIGID BOUNDARIES:

- Hold other people at arm's length
- Struggle to share emotions without being engulfed by them
- Intimacy and attachment feel scary

2 POROUS BOUNDARIES:

- Over-involved and enmeshed with people
- Struggle to say no, often take on too much
- People pleasing feels like a survival mechanism

3 HEALTHY BOUNDARIES:

- Includes physical and psychological limits
- Communicate what is important to them using "I"
- Good boundaries + self-esteem = intimacy

If you have low self-esteem, you will teach others that it's okay to take advantage of you. You will live life in the one down position and either give too much of yourself away or wall yourself off from relationships because they overwhelm you. Or you will go in the other direction of a "one-up" position and see yourself as better than others, having all the answers, being the smartest person in the room, and intimidating others to get what you want. You may go so far as to be a bully. Both are shame responses and neither build positive, long-term, intimate, loving relationships. We must deal with the universal emotion of shame. Shame says "we are not good enough" or "we are better than." It constantly questions our value and worth.

Before we can ask others into deep connection, we need to be a person with whom others can connect. If we don't know how to express our desires, we will shut them down and feel like a resentful victim. If we are over-boundaried or walled off, we can come across like a bully or avoidant of closeness. Intimacy requires bringing a self into the relationship. A self that knows what it desires and communicates those desires with clarity and kindness is working on distinction versus distance, and holds onto their own needs while caring for the needs of others as well.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

Healthy boundaries reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and help us create healthy relationships.

Why do you think that is?

How would having healthy boundaries help your marriage?

Are your boundaries rigid, porous, or healthy?

- Are there circumstances where that shifts?

2 KINDS OF BOUNDARIES: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL

Psychological Boundaries:

- Where you end and others begin
- Functions to protect you and contain you
- Shields you from the world and the world from you

Think of your psychological “skin” similar to a grapefruit rind. Like the outside of a grapefruit, your psychological boundary has an inside and an outside: the outside protective part of the boundary shields you from the world; the inside containing part shields the world from you.

Containment is your capacity for restraint:

- Stops you from leaking anger, rage, sexuality, certainties about right or wrong onto others
- Stops you from acting on inappropriate impulses
- Dead-stop contracts and time-outs

If you grew up in an environment without containment, these muscles will be weaker and you will need to exercise them more. Fully developing the containing part of your psychological boundary is a necessity for healthy relationships. Without it you will behave inappropriately and even offensively. People with weak containing muscles are intrusive, and use strategies of control, unbridled self-expression, and retaliation to get what they want or believe that they deserve. When you commit to relational courage you stop making excuses for uncontained strategies—your own and others.

Physical Boundaries:

- Respect other’s physical and bodily space as well as insisting that others respect yours
- You do not touch someone without consent
- You don’t get physically closer than they want
- You don’t go through drawers, emails or texts
- Your sexual boundary is one specific example of physical boundaries
- You have the right to determine whether and how someone touches you for the purpose of sexual arousal or release

The outside of the rind protects you from others' intrusive behaviors just like containment protects others from you. Growing the protective layer of your psychological boundary is a necessary skill for closeness. It allows you to be both connected and protected at the same time. People whose psychological boundaries are weak are vulnerable to the most powerful person in the room.

How does the protective part of your psychological boundary work?

1. When someone is giving you feedback, you listen and then ask yourself, "Does this seem true for me?"
2. You are the judge.
3. If some part or parts of what you are hearing seem true, you let that part in. Only then do you have feelings about it.
4. If part of it feels untrue, you keep that part out.
5. Sometimes others' images of you are just their projections.
6. You don't need to get offended or high and mighty.
7. You have the wisdom and humility to appreciate that getting things wrong and imagining all kinds of nonsense is what we humans do.
8. You remember that you are just as capable of making up equally unjustified nonsense!

What happens when our protective muscles are underdeveloped in our relationships?

1. Whomever you are with will determine your mood.
2. Positive people will lift you up.
3. Negative people will bring you down.
4. Angry people will either get you angry or you will easily surrender to their rage.
5. You have little capacity to stay grounded in your own skin.
6. You will be emotionally vulnerable and then your options are limited to losing strategies of control or withdrawal.

Protective boundaries allow you to stay connected and engaged with what's being said, without the need to stop it or run away from it.

What about people who are too boundaried?

1. Their resilient child learned to stay safe by living behind walls.
2. Their psychological boundary is rigid instead of flexible.
3. They are behind a wall and take nothing in, don't listen, and are closed off to ideas.
4. Walls can look like: silence, words, anger, intoxication, preoccupation, charm, humor, condescension, intellect, helpless fatigue, social media, etc.

They need healing for the good reasons they build the walls and reassurance that they can be protected and connected.

When you lack boundaries, you are connected but not protected. When you are behind a wall, you are protected but not connected. Neither condition builds lasting intimacy.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

Overall, do you feel:

- Connected, not protected
- Protected, not connected
- What is one thing you can begin to practice to feel both connected and protected?

Setting boundaries is not as simple as it sounds. It requires courage and self-compassion. If we get hard on ourselves about setting boundaries, we can find ourselves:

- Worn out and feeling like a doormat
- Feeling anxious to speak up for self
- Unable to do it, so we "shut up and take it"
- Blame and shame, end up feeling angry and defeated
- Micromanaging others to stay safe

Your voice is inside of you somewhere. But you just don't know where to find it. When we focus on the lack of healthy boundaries, we focus on the problem and create more stress.

WHAT WE FOCUS ON GROWS

Pay attention and understand your conditioning is how you learned to survive.

It may sound like:

- You're fine, get over it
- It's easier just to take it
- They didn't mean it like that
- Try harder and maybe they'll stop

STEP 1

Notice the voice of shame. It shows up when you begin changing.

It may sound like:

- You deserve to be treated this way
- Who do you think you are?
- You're not worth more
- You're acting like a fool

STEP 2

Pay attention to your intuition. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Connect to courage and ask "what if" questions:

- What if I can trust my intuition?
- What if I am a beloved child of God?
- What if I do deserve to be treated with respect?
- What if I am confident and courageous?

STEP 3

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

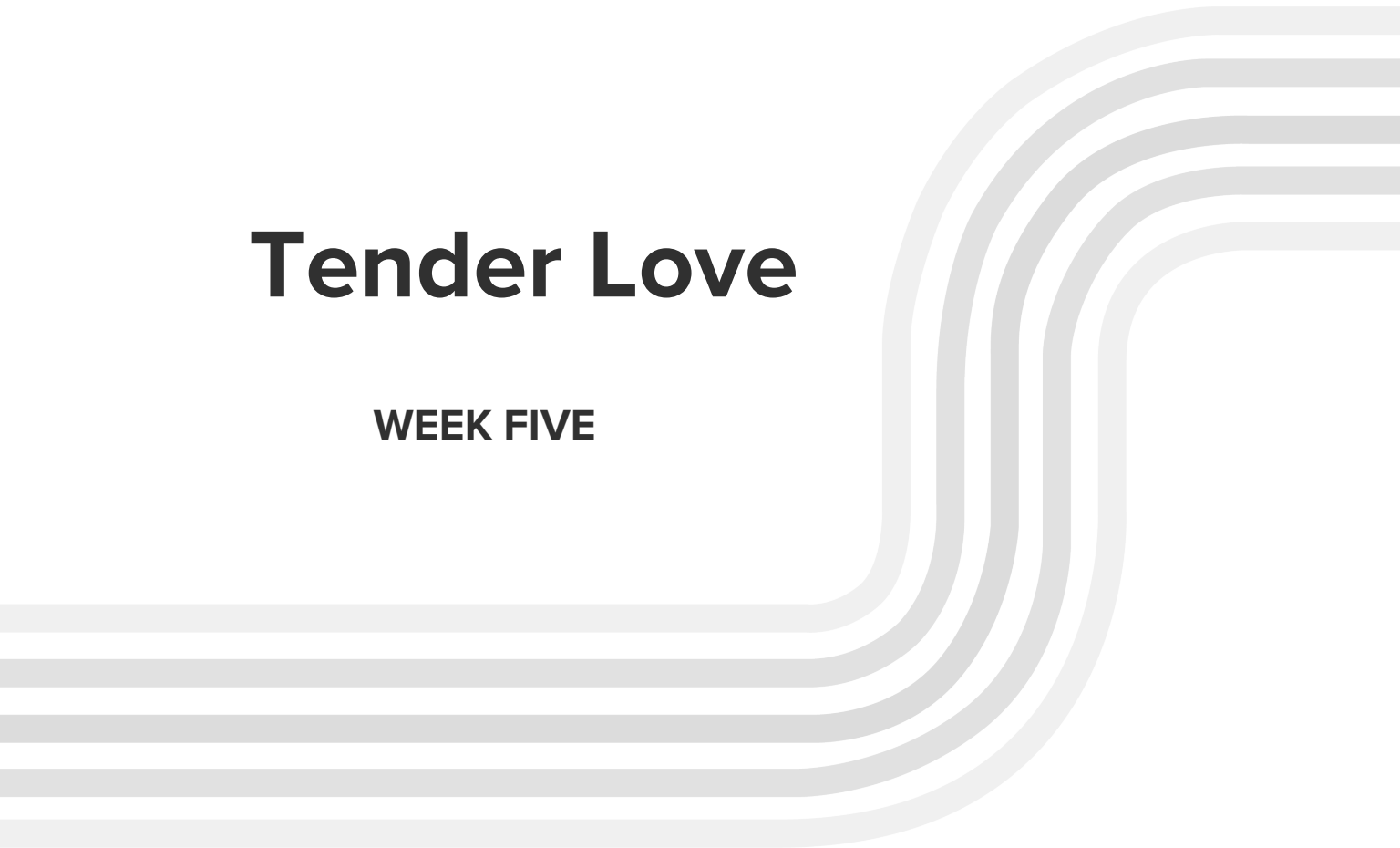
Pay attention to the messages you are taking in and receiving.

Tune into the voice of shame and say, “Thanks but no thanks.”

Ask yourself “what if” questions? What if we could create something great that we both want to be in?

Tender Love

WEEK FIVE



Tender Love

Week Five

*“I will hold your heart as tenderly as I hold my own.”
–Nancy Houston*

We have spent time looking at the unhealthy and unhelpful ways we do relationships and how we can grow in becoming more skilled. Now it's time for us to turn our attention to how we can show tender love and establish relational courage. It takes courage to love well, even if those around us aren't feeling particularly loving.

FOUR STRATEGIES FOR WINNING AT LOVE:

1. Practice empathy and having compassion.
2. Tune in and be present.
3. Remember you love this person.
4. Stay calm and connected.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

Which of these four do you most need to tune into?

How would this help you become more loving?

The thing is, when someone is the speaker, you (the listener) aren't. You are the listener, and that is your role. So quiet yourself. Get centered by remembering you love this person. Envision your hand over your mouth if needed. And really listen. Listening well is an art form.

- Approach with humility instead of being high and mighty. "I can listen to the person I love."
- Listening well is an art.
- We love to talk, we love to defend, we love to be right, we love to know it all, we love to prove our smarts, we love to justify our behaviors.
- We love to think about our rebuttal vs. actively listening.

When someone is the speaker, you aren't.

1. What is this person saying?
2. What is the meaning of what this person is saying?
3. What is this person psychologically experiencing?
4. How can I put myself into their shoes?
5. How can I meet the need this person has?

Empathy is one of the greatest, emotionally intelligent skills you can learn.

It is known as the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with being able to imagine what they may be thinking or feeling. It helps us connect with others at a deeper level.

You can grow yourself in empathy. Start by listening and putting yourself in this person's shoes for five minutes. Breathe, calm yourself, tune in, stay present, and be a generous listener. Having empathy for others is an excellent way to raise your own self-esteem. Practicing empathy feels good and is good for you.

You may have been raised in a home that displayed very little empathy for others. As a result, empathy may not come naturally for you. That's okay; I want you to see it as a skill to learn. Unless you have had physical or psychological damage, you can develop empathy

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

On a scale of 1-5, (with 5 being high and 1 low) where would you rate yourself on empathy?

Did you receive empathy from others growing up?

Was empathy modeled well for you?

Does empathy come naturally for you?

BUILDING EMPATHY:

1. Become curious about those around you.
2. Focus on similarities rather than how different you are.
3. Put yourself in their shoes.
4. Listen and share yourself; practice a balance of giving and receiving.
5. Slow down, breathe deeply, and quiet your anxiety.

CHECK LIST:



Don't make it complex.



Ask for feedback and coaching.



Commit to practicing the skills.



Engage in grief work as needed.

We all want to be treated with empathy. It's the golden rule of relationships: "Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself." Don't make it complex. As you can see by the suggestions above, developing empathy isn't rocket science. It's a skill to be practiced

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

Have you thought of empathy as a skill to be developed and practiced vs. as either you have it or you don't?

How would practicing empathy improve your marriage and relationship?

As you focus on growing empathy, ask the people around you if they see improvement. If they don't, then put some coaching around building empathy. You may have grief work to do concerning the lack of empathy you received from your caregivers.

FIVE STRATEGIES TO BUILD TENDER LOVE:

1. Move from complaining or criticizing to making a request.
2. Communicate with love and understanding.
3. Respond with generosity.
4. Empower each other to win.
5. Treasure your partner.

Turn your complaints into a request...ask! Why is this so hard? Complaining about what you haven't asked for is counterproductive.

TURNING COMPLAINTS INTO REQUESTS

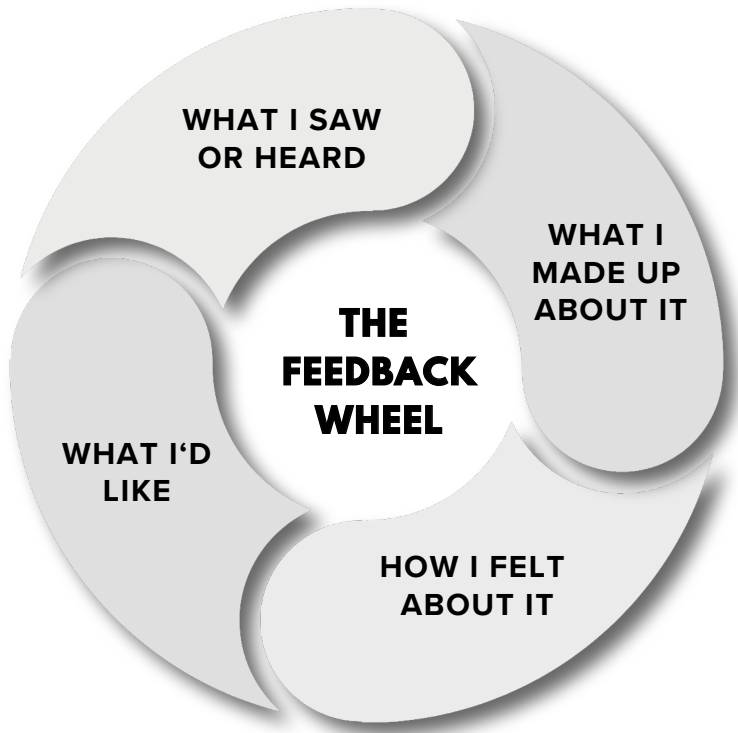
- You have needs and desires
- You risk possible rejection or disappointment
- It feels risky to shake it up
- You must risk hard conversations
- Identify what you want and ask for it
- Stop compromising and make peace with partner's limitations
- Assert yourself in a healthy way

You must learn how to assert yourself in a way that is neither passive nor aggressive.

Stop complaining about what you have not asked for.

It is counter productive.

You will never get what you want if you don't learn how to ask.



1. Observation

2. Thinking

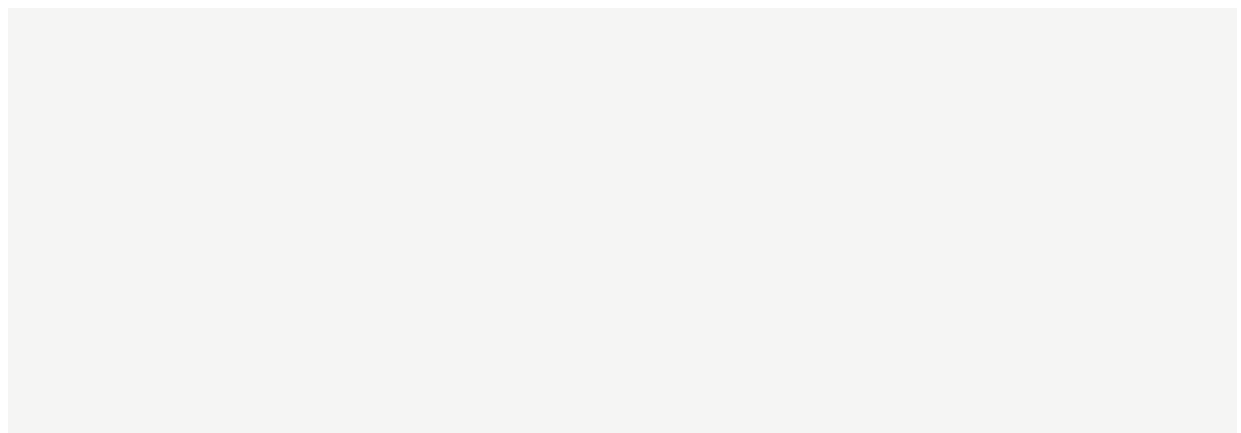
3. Feeling

4. Asking

5. Let go of the outcome

GROUP REFLECTION:

Pause the video and practice using the Feedback Wheel in your groups.



Begin by asking your partner if they are willing to talk. Center yourself and check your motivation.

SEVEN PRIMARY EMOTIONS:

- Anger
- Fear
- Guilt
- Joy
- Love
- Pain
- Shame

You love this person. Act like it.

- How a conversation begins is typically how it will end—start softly

You want to have a relationship with this person.

- How can you communicate understanding?

A soft start-up can make all the difference in the world. If it starts with short, curt answers, impatience, or superiority, I can promise you it will not end well. Pause, take a deep breath. This relationship matters to you, and you want to have a relationship with this person. Think about how you can communicate understanding. Research shows that even just repeating what your loved one said and asking if you got it right can help the other person feel heard and understood.

For example, if you want your partner to help more in the kitchen, empowering language sounds like, “It means the world to me when you help keep the kitchen clean. Would you empty the dishwasher every morning? It would make my day, and I would feel grateful.” Vs. “You never help in the kitchen; I have to empty the dishwasher every morning on top of making breakfast for the kids and lunches and getting them off to school.” Do you see the difference?

There is no request made and so the other person cannot win. They just got chewed out for being unhelpful instead of being asked kindly and respectfully to lend a hand. Empower your person to win! Here's the thing; even if they refuse, consider your asking to be a big win for you!

Generosity of heart is a beautiful gift.

- *Most people want the best for others*
- *Show your generosity to listen, extend love, and show compassion*
- *Research benefits of being generous*

Research shows that if you bend down and hand a stranger something they dropped, you receive a dopamine hit, which increases your happiness.

Empower each other to get what you want.

- *Tee the ball up for your person*
- *Aim for your person to win*
- *Even if they refuse, your asking is a big win*

Picture your life without this person.

- *We all have annoying traits; move past them and imagine*

Take a moment and picture your life without this person. Yes, of course, they have some annoying ways about them. Guess what? So do you. So do I! Close your eyes and feel their absence. Tears fill my eyes when I do this exercise. I can't imagine not having my husband's presence, hearing my sons' voices, seeing my daughters-in-law's smiles, listening to my grandchildren's laughter, and seeing their eyes light up with delight.

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

Which listening skills can you practice this week?

How can you tune in to your emotions and non-verbal responses this week?

When do you feel the most tuned into your spouse?

When do you feel like your spouse is the most tuned into you?

Creating Sexual Passion

WEEK SIX



Creating Sexual Passion

Week Six

“Physical pleasure is God’s idea, not the devil’s. We are created as sexual beings with sexual desire.”

-C. S. Lewis

Sex can be a very sensitive topic depending on how you were raised and what your experiences have been. We want to be sensitive and compassionate about this topic. Please don’t judge yourself or your spouse harshly for any reason.

How you were raised and what your experiences are shape your comfort around discussing sex. Let’s be sensitive and compassionate.

You may have built walls around this topic for good reason. Or perhaps you have a sexually permissive past with no boundaries. I am positive if you took the time to unpack your sexual history you would gain understanding as to how you were shaped and formed sexually. If you don’t like sex, there is a good reason. If you are sexually obsessed, there is a good reason.

This is a zero judgment zone. If we judge ourselves or others harshly, we cannot reconcile this part of our lives.

Our harshness keeps us stuck. Harshness heals nothing!

We are all sexual creatures. It's wired into our systems.

- **Instead of normalizing, we have shamed, repressed, or expressed it in unhealthy or unhelpful ways. Or, we've disconnected from it/see it as a bother.**
- **Our sexuality is part of who we are, and gives us drive and energy to go out and face the world.**
- **Sexuality is a gift that cannot be ignored or silenced, or acted out on in irresponsible ways. Care for yours + your partner's sexuality.**

You can have sex every day and not feel a thing. Mostly because the world we live in has reduced sexuality to an act. The things you repress sexually will come out of you in some unhealthy ways. So tune in to what is going on with you sexually.

- **Our sexuality was meant to be deeply tied to loving our own bodies and that of another human.**
- **Doorway to a deeper connection and being known.**
- **Making love is meant to be filled with mutual pleasure and delight.**

BE FELT, BE KNOWN, BE WANTED. SHARE PLEASURE TOGETHER.

Making love is meant to be a giving and receiving of mutual pleasure because we are in a love relationship. True intimacy is a doorway to deeper connection with the one you love. It is more than two bodies acting out on each other. It is about deep knowing and being known. It is meant to be filled with mutual pleasure and mutual delight. A time set apart to be felt, known, wanted, and to share sexual, erotic pleasure together.

“Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? Certainly—but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to ‘stand up for your rights.’ Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out.”

(1 Corinthians 7:1–5a, MSG)

WHAT IF IT ISN'T ALL THAT?

SIX CAUSES FOR SEX NOT WORKING:

- 1 Lack of sexual education**
- 2 Came from a home that didn't talk about sex, or if they did, they did it in shaming ways**
- 3 Bad sexual experiences**
- 4 Religious and rigid teachings about human sexuality (God and Sex)**
- 5 Marital discouragement around sexuality (sexual pain, porn, infidelity, harshness, insensitivity, life, mismatched sexual desires, rejection, anger)**
- 6 Never given permission to play, flirt, experiment, have fun together, be sensual and erotic**

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

Do any of these sound familiar to you?

Who talked with you about human sexuality in healthy, helpful ways?

NINE WAYS TO HAVE A RE-DO

- 1 Educate yourself in healthy and helpful ways.**
- 2 Seek help for unresolved shame, sexual pain, trauma, challenges, addictions.**
- 3 Make it safe to process, grieve, and forgive what hasn't worked.**
- 4 Make it safe to talk; respect boundaries, desire mutuality, experiment.**

5

Attend to your physical and sexual health.

6

Prioritize foreplay, slow down, make time, arouse your partner.

7

Prioritize sex and stop waiting for the mood to strike.

8

Normalize sexual issues and don't catastrophize.

9

Give yourself and each other permission to play.

Reclaim what was meant for good.

GROUP REFLECTION:

Turn to your group and discuss the questions together.

If you were to pick two of the above, which two would you pick to work on?

Have you connected sex with play?

KINDS OF LOVERS



Selfish and want to take



Selfless and just want to please



Lazy and don't give it much thought



Focused and all they can think of



All needs are in the sex basket



Generous and willing to embrace play

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER:

- What kind of lover do you want to be?
- Take a moment and consider that question. What would need to happen in the relationship for sex to become mutually pleasurable?
- What would need to happen in you?
- What would you like to see in your partner?

- What would the ingredients be for a lifetime of lovemaking together?

THE ART OF NEGOTIATION

1. How often would you like to have sex? (“I don’t know” isn’t an answer.)
2. How can you negotiate differences?
3. Navigating and negotiating male vs. female sexuality
4. How female sexuality changes over time
5. How do you ask for what you like

SEX IS GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR MARRIAGE

- *Lower depression rates*
- *Boosts immune system*
- *Natural pain relief*
- *Improves heart health*
- *Older you get = better you get*

SEX RELEASES GOD’S PHARMACY

- Oxytocin: Hormone of love
- Endorphins: mood elevators, relaxers
- Dopamine; feelings of pleasure and arousal
- Prolactin: helps with sleep
- Testosterone; regulates male and female sex drive

WATCH OUT FOR: DEMAND-WITHDRAWAL

Instead: Invite, Entice, Flirt, Play, Be considerate, Loving, Affectionate, Kind

- Attend to the emotional connection
- Meet your partner's needs
- Communicate your own needs in a loving and respectful way

***BE OPEN TO MAKING THIS PART OF YOUR MARRIAGE
A PRIORITY.***

GROWING YOUR MARRIAGE

Pick two areas you will be curious about for your sex life this week.

How can you make sex a priority in your marriage?

Final Thoughts



Final Thoughts

God said everything He made is good. That includes you. You are a gift. The humans you have a relationship with are a gift. It can be easier for us to believe we are inherently bad instead of inherently good. We can believe we are unlovable and unworthy of love and so are others. But imagine with me a world where you treat yourself as if you are a gift made in the image and likeness of a good God, and you receive those around you as a gift.

Create a vision where you see yourself as a gift to others and others to you and then see where this new vision will take your relationships. I challenge you to commit yourself to relational courage. The courage to believe your mature adult can help that resilient child be less reactive and more solid; the courage to practice loving others the way you would like to be loved, respecting your own and other's needs; the courage to calm yourself and respond with generosity and empathy; the courage to pause and remember love. Relational courage, which requires strength of mind and heart, will lead you and your relationships to something extremely beautiful and exquisite. You have shown relational courage by showing up for the last six weeks of this course. You have been brave, and I want to challenge all of us to keep going, keep practicing new skills, becoming less clumsy and more eloquent on this journey of embracing mature love.

Connect With Nancy



betterlives

www.betterlivescoaching.com

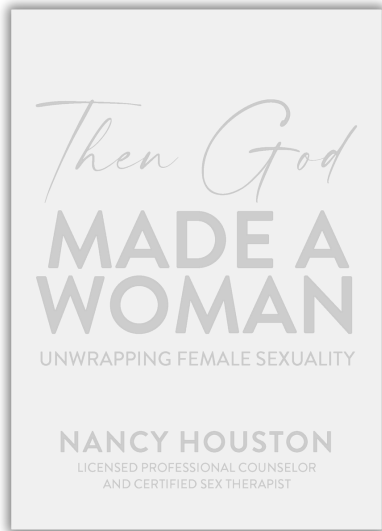


asknancyhouston



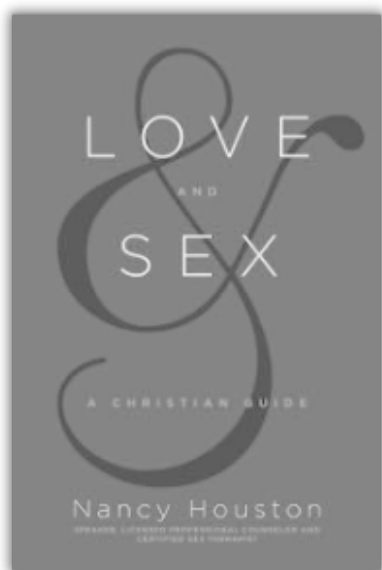
The Nancy Houston Podcast

Other Books by Nancy



In *Then God Made a Woman*, Nancy Houston challenges the misconceptions that have shaped our views on female sexuality and invites women to rediscover the divine design behind this sacred gift. With biblical wisdom, candid insight, and deep compassion, Nancy explores the truth about sexuality, the impact of shame and brokenness, and the path to reclaiming what God originally intended.

Then God Made a Woman will guide you toward healing, freedom, and a renewed perspective on God's gift of female sexuality.



In *Love & Sex*, Nancy Houston provides a compassionate view of human sexuality. Through the lens of Scripture, she unpacks the good God intended when He created humans as sexual creatures, while recognizing that many people haven't experienced sex in a positive way.

You won't find a critical examination of dos and don'ts, but stories of redemption, grace, and hope.

You will understand how you were shaped and that you are more than your sexual behaviors.