

Triive

Marriage Preparation

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thrive@diocesekcsj.org

Book design by Dino Durando and Kristen Marquis

www.thrivemarriageprep.com

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Laurie Heap, M.D.



graduated from the University of Kansas Medical School in 2001. In medical school and her first year of residency, she recognized that many people were failing to thrive physically, mentally, and in relationships.

Because of these observations, Dr. Heap decided to resign from residency after obtaining a general practice license and began assimilating research in the areas of medicine, psychology, and neuroscience on well-being, happiness, relationships, and physical fitness. She has been speaking on these issues for the last 20 years and has met with over 10,000 people dialoguing and educating in small group settings along with personalized health coaching.

Dr. Heap has spoken in New York, St. Louis, Denver and Los Angeles. She speaks at hospitals for continuing education of nurses, physical therapy clinics, high schools, university campuses and sororities, as well as fitness clubs. Dr. Heap, along with her friend and colleague Krista Bunker (an ICU nurse at University of Kansas Medical Center), launched the THRIVE! KU program in 2012 with a small group of women. The program was adopted as a positive initiative by the Panhellenic Risk Council.

In addition to speaking about and educating individuals and couples on well-being, Dr. Heap has been published in *The American Journal of Health Promotion*, *Natural Solutions*, *Health and Spirituality* and was interviewed by *Better Nutrition*.

In 2018, Dr. Heap launched her corporate well-being program as a pilot for a Fortune 500 company. The program, entitled *Life in Balance* has been successfully increasing the satisfaction and well-being for the last five years.

Dr. Heap's mission is to empower people with the knowledge and skills they need to live a thriving life! She says, "Thriving alone is no fun—it has to be shared with everyone you meet!"

Stacy Mulder, M.S., CCCSLP, CFCP

graduated from Kansas State University in 2005 with a degree in communication sciences and disorders. As a speech language pathologist, she pursued her interest in neuroscience by initially working with patients recovering from strokes and traumatic



brain injuries. Stacy also worked as an early childhood therapist for years, helping young people to develop their speech-language abilities. Stacy's goal as an SLP has been to help people thrive in their lives and relationships by developing effective communication skills. After personally experiencing hormonal health and fertility problems as a young adult, Stacy completed the Fertility Care Practitioner program in 2010, to help others overcome these obstacles to thriving physically. She then began helping women and couples to become advocates for themselves with regards to hormonal health, fertility management, and infertility issues. As a speech-language pathologist and a Fertility Care Practitioner, Stacy's career focus continues to be helping all individuals thrive physically, interpersonally, emotionally, and cognitively in life and love. Stacy works as a certified FCP at an OB/GYN clinic and a family medicine practice in the Kansas City area.

Dino & Cathy Durando



Dino and Cathy married in January of 1998. After having a less than positive experience with their own marriage preparation process, they felt

called to provide something different for engaged couples that would help them see marriage as an important mission, a calling to do something great together!

After an initial career in hotel management, Dino has worked for the Catholic Church in several roles for more than two decades. He serves as the Director of the Office of Marriage & Family Life and the Office of the Domestic Church & Discipleship for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. He holds a BA in Theology and Philosophy and an MA in Theology and Christian Ministry from Franciscan University of Steubenville. He began his professional service to the Church as a Director of Religious Education in a 5,500-family parish, where he served for almost a decade. He has taught and mentored more than 1,500 catechists and other Church leaders. He has three workshops on the *Franciscan at Home* website, the method and format of which served as inspiration for the Thrive Learning Management System website. Raised Methodist, he was received into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1995.

Cathy works at the Center for Healing providing counseling to clients with a variety of needs. She earned her MA in Clinical Counseling from Franciscan University of Steubenville. Since 2002 she has served professionally in both parish and diocesan marriage preparation and provided pastoral care for the engaged and spouses in crisis. She wrote a curriculum for the formation of parents, and taught these classes for 7 years. Prior to marriage, Cathy served in the U.S.

Peace Corps. She has personally seen the health benefits of NaPro Technology (presented in this course).

Dino and Cathy have 10 children and live on a small farm near Kansas City, Missouri. Together they have helped bring the lay movement for families called Domestic Church to Kansas City in 2018. They serve this organization in local and national leadership roles.

Jonathan and Amanda Teixeira



In January 2012, then-FOCUS missionaries Jonathan and Amanda Teixeira had \$25,000 in debt and a deep desire to break free. A short

— and zealous — seven and half months later they wrote their last check to Sallie Mae and closed the doors on debt forever. Since kicking debt to the curb, they've focused on saving, investing and giving in a way that set them up for total financial peace for a lifetime.

Upon hearing their story, a few people asked them money questions — and they answered. That snowballed into hundreds of answers, speaking at events, providing financial coaching and founding WalletWin. They are authors of *How to Attack Debt, Build Savings, and Change the World Through Generosity: A Catholic Guide to Managing Money*, hosts of *The Catholic Money Show*, and creators of *The Catholic Money Course*, and *The Catholic Family Emergency Binder*.

Jonathan and Amanda live in Omaha, Nebraska with their three daughters.

The Thrive Online Story

The development of the Thrive program along with Dr. Laurie Heap began as a collaboration in 2015 with weekends for the engaged that combined work that Laurie had already been doing with elements of the marriage preparation program that Dino and Cathy Durando developed in 2003. The resulting program has been honed, following input from the thousands of couples who have taken this program, with the goal of providing engaged couples with the best possible information and approach. This workbook and the



accompanying Learning Management System (LMS) website experience is the result.

We made Thrive Marriage Preparation available online during the Coronavirus lockdowns and were surprised by the survey results. The online method produced

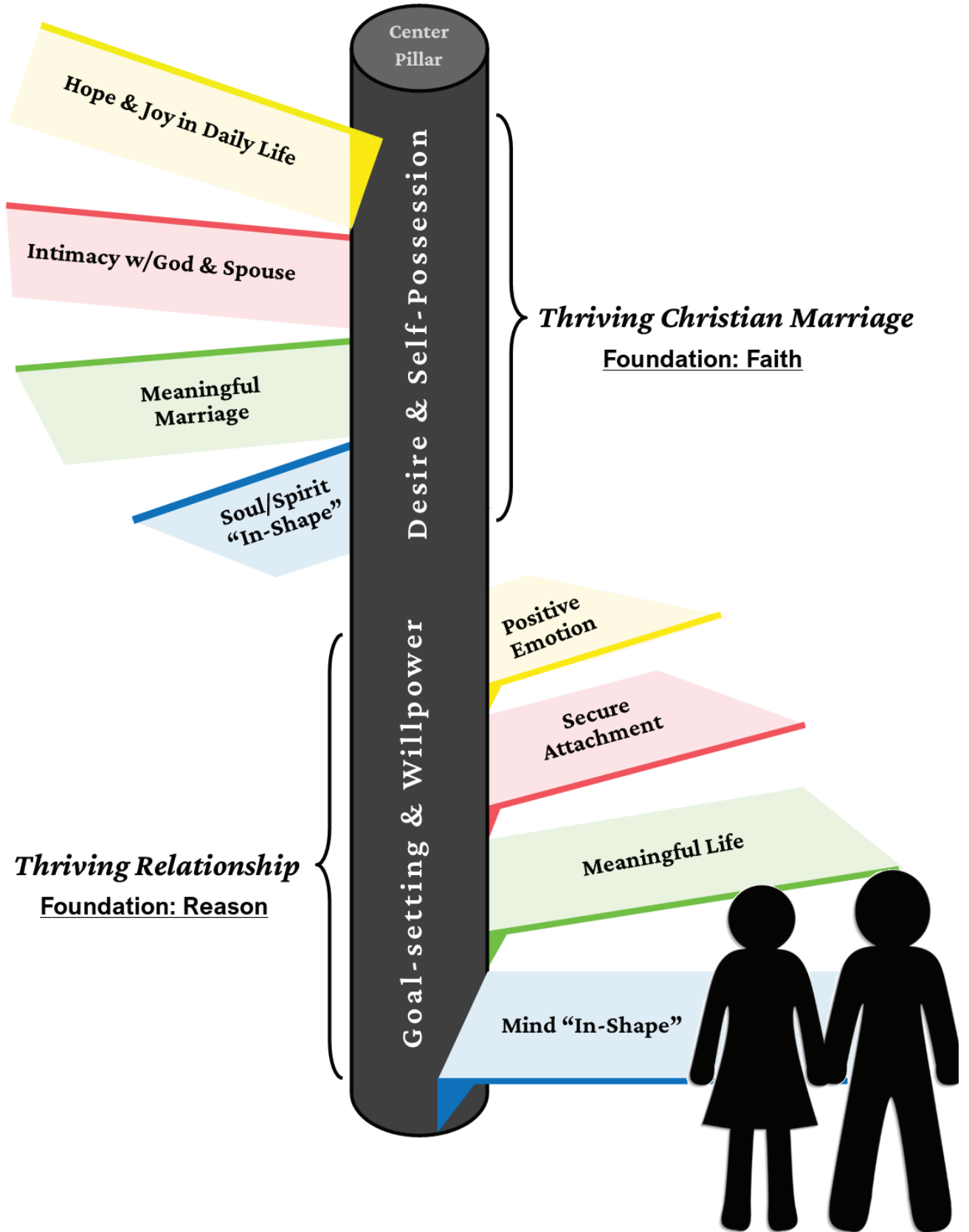


even better results than the in-person experience. With the development of our custom LMS, integration of mentor couples who provide feedback and guidance, and the learn and discuss at your own pace format, survey responses continue to show a marked improvement in the overall experience of our engaged learners (which was already very good).



We hope that you will find this time of learning and discovery a great blessing and a sure foundation for your lifelong journey of climbing the Spiral Staircase of a Thriving Marriage together!

Spiral Staircase to a Thriving Marriage



Part One

The Spiral Staircase of a Thriving Love

Empowering Couples
to build and sustain an amazing
Relationship

Overview: The Spiral Staircase to a Thriving Relationship

What is THRIVE! Together for Life?

Let's start by defining a thriving marriage:

How would you describe a thriving marriage? What do you think helps a couple THRIVE over 50 years together! How is marriage going today? How does love typically evolve in marriage? What percentage of couples are thriving 25 years into marriage?

Why do marriages fail to thrive?

Boost Happiness:

- 1) Three good things: Turn to your fiance and tell them three good things you love about them!
- 2) *You're awesome!* Exercise: People like to be told when they do something great! Come up with a word and a signal or sign that is code for "YOU'RE AWESOME!"

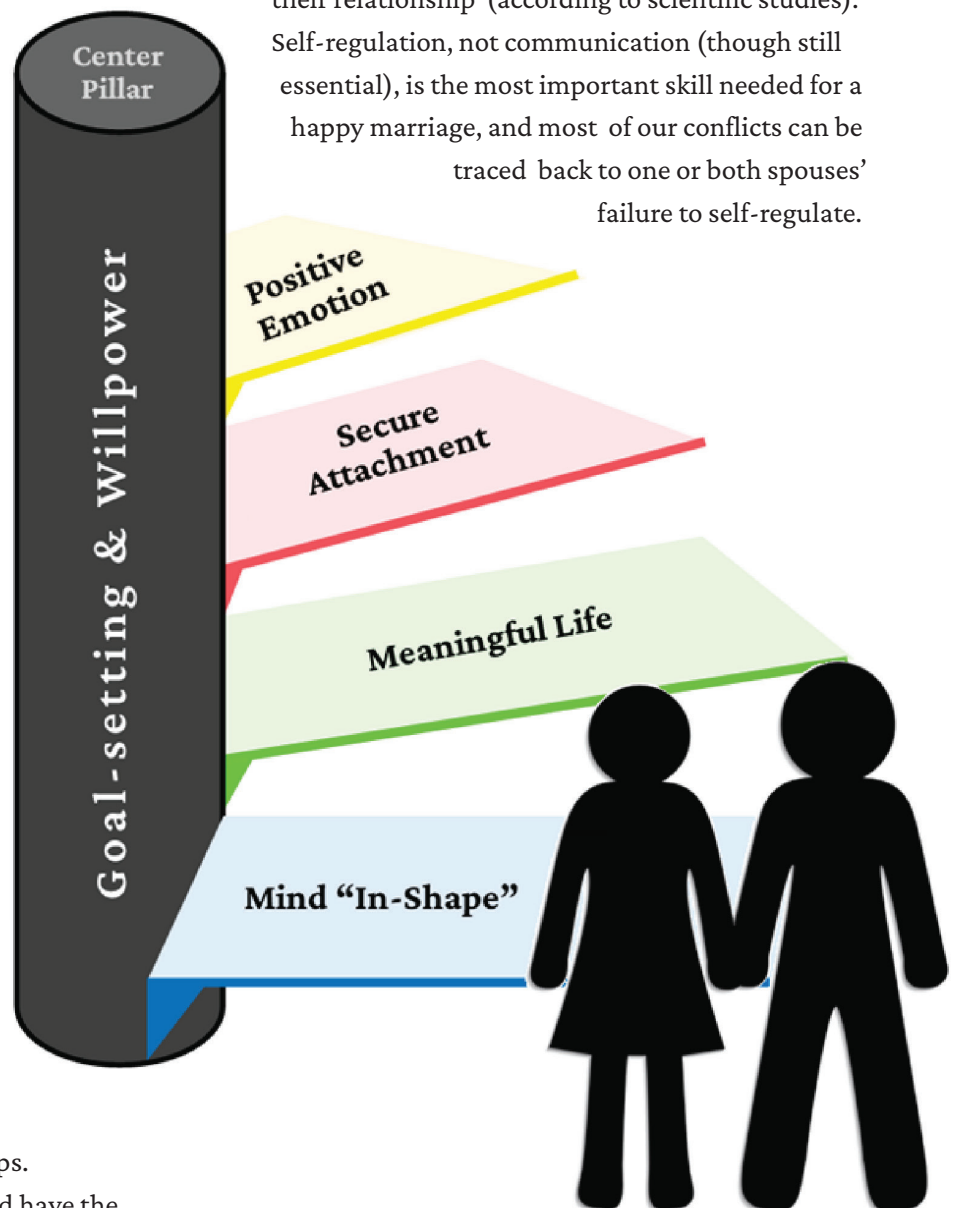
The THRIVE! marriage preparation program is aimed at empowering couples with the knowledge and skills they need to form the wonderful, awesome, gets-better-and-better-every-year marriage we all want!

The Center Pillar

Effective, mutual goal-setting and the willpower to make them happen are the foundation, or the center pillar, of thriving relationships.

Unless we can set goals together and have the

willpower to make those goals happen, we can learn all kinds of fabulous information but will never actualize it. Mutual goal-setting helps get a couple on the same page with short-term and long-term life vision. The amount of self-regulation, the term psychologists use for willpower, is directly proportional to the amount of success a couple enjoys in their relationship (according to scientific studies). Self-regulation, not communication (though still essential), is the most important skill needed for a happy marriage, and most of our conflicts can be traced back to one or both spouses' failure to self-regulate.





Step One: Discover the Powers of Your Mind

Our capacity to focus, live a balanced life, and communicate are three keys to success in life and in love. However, we live in a distracted, stressed-out, fast-paced, speak in sound bites world! Focus, balance and communication don't just happen naturally anymore. We are not suggesting we need to go back 100 years, but we do need to proactively develop these three necessary skills. Step one in the spiral staircase will introduce you to three mental strengthening exercises that will enhance your focus, increase balance, and help you communicate well with your spouse. This is the outgrowth of a powerful mind.

Step Two: Authentic Happiness and Living a Meaningful Life

Step two focuses on debunking some common myths on what actually makes us happy. According to psychologists, we will find satisfaction in life and love if we are living a meaningful life, rather than just a pleasant one. We need to focus on developing the characteristics of happy people and form a couple's mission statement to infuse happiness and meaning into all of our goals and shared interests. An essential part of a thriving love revolves around a mutual meaning and mission in life!

Step Three: Secure Attachment Style

How we connect as a couple has a particular style. That style affects the amount of happiness and satisfaction we experience in our relationships. We get this style from how we were raised by our parents and by our experiences in past dating relationships. In step three, couples will learn about each other's style and how to either change this style (if needed) or

maintain it to increase intimacy and satisfaction in their relationship.

Step Four: Positive Emotion

How we view situations, how we respond to setbacks, and the general tone of our attitude and home matters. That is, it matters if we want to enjoy the life we build together. Positive emotion is both a result of all the previous steps in the spiral staircase, as well as a step that can be actively developed. We will discuss how a positivity ratio of approximately three positive emotions to every one negative emotion is self-fueling! A couple can boost this ratio by first knowing the ten positive emotions so that they can be tapped at any time. Then, couples can learn to intentionally decrease gratuitous negativity in their lives. The goal of this final step of the staircase is to accentuate the positive and use necessary negatives to your advantage.

The spiral staircase, with its center pillar and four steps, is the road map to continual growth as a couple. The thriving relationship model is in the form of a spiral staircase because with each step, you will grow and develop a different aspect of life. Eventually, you circle back around but are at a higher level than you were before—so you start again! This is a case in which even the sky is not the limit. So don't settle for ordinary. Choose to become a power couple! With each turn around the staircase you will discover new and exciting ways to develop as individuals and as a couple. In 25 or 50 years, you will understand that this mutual, thriving love and life has always been within reach.



Chapter 1

Get a Life with Perspective

**Mutual goal-setting is part of the center
pillar of a THRIVING marriage.**



Get a Life with Perspective

Forming a Life List & Goal Setting

Mutual and holistic goal-setting is a part of the center pillar of a thriving marriage. Thriving is how we feel when we are growing and developing together as a couple. It is an ongoing process rather than a state we achieve and complete at one point in time. We can't put "satisfying marriage" on our to-do list, and then check it off as accomplished. The center pillar of the spiral staircase to your thriving relationship—meaning the support that keeps the whole thing from crashing down—is made up of effective goal-setting and the willpower to make those goals happen. We need a steady flow of goals and achievement to make "We feel AWESOME!" happen in the day-to-day, and even moment- to-moment, of life.

If we want to set effective goals, we need to start with *perspective*. This means we need information on how to give goals a certain *personality* and *accountability*. Let's begin by brainstorming your thoughts and dreams in order to lay out a road map to your best, gotta-have-it life and relationship!

Make a Life List

Most people have heard of a Bucket List. What do you want to do in life before you "kick the bucket?" We put things like go sky-diving, travel Europe, run a marathon, etc. on a bucket list. This is a helpful perspective in some ways because we tend to think big and check any inhibitions or fears at the door. It is unhelpful in other ways because the focus is on our impending death, rather than a life lived to the fullest, and many of the bucket list goals do not enhance daily life. So we are going to begin to brainstorm on what psychologists call a Life List. Life lists include everything you



want to do before you "kick it," but it goes deeper than that! When you start a life list, you look at major areas of importance (love, finances, education, recreation, etc.) and view these areas from different perspectives to determine your goals. Gaining perspective means taking time to consider our own mortality and how fear affects the dreams we have for our life—both in the long-term and the short-term.

Reflect

When will you take time as a couple to work on your Life List?

Forming a Life List

Looking At Life From Different Angles

Gaining perspective by looking at the different areas of your life from various angles is important to a meaningful Life List. Viewing goals while considering your mortality is helpful to motivation. It gives you a sense of timing and urgency. It also enables you to prioritize your Life List to ensure the maximum effect on well-being.

Ask yourself and each other, “What would I do in each of the following areas of life if I knew I only had one day to live?” Then change the perspective to one year, and finally consider your goals in light of the idea that you only have 10 to 20 years left. This is not to depress or scare you, but psychologists have found that



looking at our lives from the perspective of “We only have a limited amount of time!” drives us to act in a way that is the best version of ourselves.

The second angle from which to look at your goals relates to conquering your fears. Looking at life and asking the question, “What would I do if I were not afraid?” is another perspective that can be highly illuminating as well as motivating. We have many fears: of change, of being wrong, of telling the truth, of being different, of thinking for oneself, of disappointment, of disapproval, of looking stupid, of pain or discomfort or stress in the near future, of one’s real motives, of standing up for one’s values, of failure, of something

new, of being vulnerable, and of so many other things. Some of these fears are reasonable and some are not so reasonable. Unfortunately, all of them can hold us back unless we put them aside while setting up our Life List. But don’t let them! Check your fears at the door as you begin to brainstorm what you want for your lives together.

Another way of gaining a bold and brave perspective is to ask yourself, “If I was a superhero, what powers would I have, and how would I save the world?” Also answer, “If my spouse was a superhero, what superpowers would he/she have, and how would he/she save the world?”

Researchers did this superhero exercise with a group of college students to test the effect of fear on behavior. The experimental group was asked to write down what they would do if they had superpowers... how would they save the world? The control group was simply asked to write about how they would like to help the community. In the months following the exercise, the superhero group became more involved in community outreach and charitable organizations than the control group (Nelson & Norton, 2005). In another study, researchers looked at participants’ helping behavior within a virtual reality game. The participants who were given the superpower of *flying* in the simulation (versus simply *riding* in a helicopter to complete the task) subsequently exhibited more prosocial behavior in the real world (Rosenberg, Baughman & Bailenson, 2013). This is the power of perspective in changing how we act. By imagining something without limits, like being a superhero, people acted more like one in real life!



The First Step to a Thriving Marriage

Enough theory. Now it's time for action! So, are you ready to put pen to paper and get started with your Life List? Come up with some goals for these ten categories. Make your *his* and *hers* lists separately, and then we will take some time to combine them into joint goals.

Health/General Self Improvement: This category is a way for you to break down your fitness and health goals, such as, "I will exercise at least three times per week," or "I will only eat pizza on the weekends." Mental strengthening exercises and general self-improvement goals also fall under this category. You will discover some goals to put in the general self-improvement category as you ascend the steps of the spiral staircase in this book.

Finances: It is smart to start understanding and setting financial goals while young and/or just starting out together. Do you have financial goals for earning and saving money? Do you want to own ___ by the time you are ___ years old? Do you want to pay off your student loans by the time you are ___?

Recreation and Hobbies: Do you want to learn a new sport, visit a new place, become better at playing an instrument, or spend more time with friends or family?

Learning: Do you want to attend a certain graduate school, take time to study something just because it interests you, or develop new skills in your professional field to make you more competitive in the job market?

Volunteer Work and Charities: Do you have a cause that you are passionate about or a certain problem you would like to help solve in society? Where and how

can you use your talents to make the world a better place?

Home: Do you want to get more organized? Do you want to redecorate a room or certain space in your home or apartment to make your environment more pleasant and relaxing? Do you want to change the tone of your home by changing your attitude?

Friends: Do you want to increase your circle of friends or perhaps get closer to a fewer number of people? Do you want to try and be a better friend by taking more time to just hang out? By being more thoughtful and considerate? Or perhaps being less guarded and more open with the friends you already have?

Love: How will you invest time, energy and focus on your relationship to make it better every year? Do you need to learn to be more trusting and secure? Do you want to be more considerate, sincere, open or loving?

Family: Do you want to be a better wife, mother, daughter, or husband, father, son? Express more gratitude and show more appreciation? Do you take members of your family for granted, or do they need your help, love or attention in any way? How can you make sure your family knows how much you care for them?

Spiritual Goals: If you are a spiritual person, are you trying to grow spiritually? Are you plugged into a higher purpose for your life? What is your mission, and what legacy do you want to leave behind on this world? If you belong to a certain religion, are you trying to grow in your knowledge and understanding of it? What are you doing for your soul/spirit?

**Key
Concept**

Share your list with your fiancé or spouse. Use your individual lists to form a joint Life List.

Making a Life List

Where do we begin?

Sometimes the idea of sitting down and brainstorming an entire Life List is overwhelming and prioritizing goals is difficult. A helpful exercise to narrow your focus and concentrate your efforts towards growth is to do a Life List index card shuffle.

Here's how it works:

- 1) Tear out the detachable Life List card pages in the back of this book (see Appendix) and cut them apart horizontally. You should each do your own set. See the sample card at the bottom of this page.
- 2) Organize the Life List cards into three piles:
 - Pile one: Areas of life that you feel are going really well! You have some clear goals you are accomplishing and that are bringing you satisfaction.
 - Pile two: Areas of life you feel are going ok, but with a little effort and focus have the potential to shift to pile one.
 - Pile three: Areas of life that are frustrating or that you are neglecting and could use some work or attention.
- 3) Next choose one area of life from each pile. It is helpful to capitalize on an area that is going well, invest in an area of life with potential to go from ok to great and then address one area that is a void or frustrating to you.
- 4) Set one short-term goal and one long-term, big-picture goal (that reflects the ideal you are going for in this area of life) for each of the cards you have chosen.
- 5) Share your cards and goals with each other, discuss how you will support each other's goals, and set some mutual goals in this area. You may also choose to summarize your choices on the following pages.

Sample Life List Card (front and back); see back of Appendix for detachable cards

LOVE
What is the long-term ideal I am going for?
What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?
What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?
What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?
What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?



A Life List for Her

Come up with some goals in each of these ten categories for yourself.

Do not forget to consider different perspectives as you look at these areas of life:

1) Health/General Self-Improvement:

6) Home:

2) Finances:

7) Friends:

3) Recreation and Hobbies:

8) Love:

4) Learning and Career:

9) Family:

5) Volunteer Work and Charities:

10) Spiritual Goals:

A Life List for Him

Come up with some goals in each of these ten categories for yourself.

Do not forget to consider different perspectives as you look at these areas of life:

1) Health/General Self-Improvement:

6) Home:

2) Finances:

7) Friends:

3) Recreation and Hobbies:

8) Love:

4) Learning and Career:

9) Family:

5) Volunteer Work and Charities:

10) Spiritual Goals:



Our Life List

Combine your individual goals into a Couple Life List.

This couple Life List should be something you revisit together and often over time. As your relationship grows and develops, so will your goals. If you are at the dating stage, comparing these lists would be a good way to initially assess whether you have a compatible mission in life. If you are married, make sure you look at different perspectives (especially that of your spouse) to see how you can fit your individual goals:

1) Health/General Self-Improvement:

6) Home:

2) Finances:

7) Friends:

3) Recreation and Hobbies:

8) Love:

4) Learning and Career:

9) Family:

5) Volunteer Work and Charities:

10) Spiritual Goals:

Life lists are adapted from the book *Creating Your Best Life* (Miller & Frisch, 2009).

Your Goal's Personality

Now that you have your Life List started, we are going to refine it by giving each one of your goals a certain personality, or in other words a set of distinctive traits and characteristics. Just as your personality affects what you do and how you relate to other people—a goal's personality drives what you do and how you relate to it.

Let's take a look at some of the distinctive traits that goals can adopt. Then, run each item of your Life List past these characteristics. When necessary, rephrase and reframe your goals with a personality that will make them easier to accomplish.

Approach vs. Avoidant Goals

Your goals can either be exciting and approachable or grouchy and avoidant.

Approach goals, like approachable people, help you go toward a positive outcome. They involve projects you are excited to make happen, such as:

- I want to be in the best shape of my life by this summer.
- I want to rock my finals and increase my GPA.
- I want to discover a cure for cancer and win a Nobel peace prize.
- We want to be debt-free by _____ so that we can take family vacations or generously donate to a charitable cause.
- We want to have a date night every week so that we stay connected as a thriving couple.

Avoidant goals are designed to avoid a negative outcome. Avoidant goals, like negative people, do not



inspire you but can motivate you. Examples of avoidant goals include:

- I do not want to be 20 pounds overweight by the end of this year.
- I want to get through finals without tanking my GPA.
- I just want to get through this university program so I can move on to _____ .
- We do not want to “just get by” when it comes to finances.
- We do not want to settle into just “sticking it out” in marriage like that couple we know.

When we set approach goals alongside avoidant goals, we are more likely to achieve them. We are also going to be happier in working toward a positive outcome that will help us avoid a negative result. Approach goals boost our heart rate, and we just cannot wait to get started! So take a look at the goals on your Life List to create a balance between what you want to approach and what you are avoiding.



Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Goals

Intrinsic goals are those you set for yourself. They come from your own genuine desires, values, and interests. Extrinsic goals are goals set for you by others or are those that you pursue because you think you should accomplish them. We put our hearts and enthusiasm behind intrinsic goals, but we tend to go after extrinsic goals out of a sense of duty or obligation.

Review the items on your Life List, and get rid of any extrinsic goals. Keeping these kinds of goals on your list will frustrate you rather than result in well-being or a thriving relationship. If you have to keep something that feels extrinsic (or that is important to your spouse but not to you), find a way to make it your own. Write down some *why's* underneath the *what's* on your list. Unless you own your goals, they may never come to fruition.

Conflicting vs. Leveraged Goals

Goals on our Life List cannot undermine or conflict with each other. Goals should, however, be leveraged so that they feed into one another. We need to take a broader perspective to look at all our goals and how they fit together. This is especially important when two individuals are combining their individual Life Lists into a Couple Life List. Look for conflicting goals, and resolve the conflict by prioritizing or by changing the timetable when necessary. Goals can conflict on different levels. If you want to live in the woods by yourself, but you also aspire to have a wonderful husband/wife and family...these are just conflicting. You have to choose one or the other.

Some career or education goals are just about timing. At the top of my Life List is the goal to be an awesome mom who is remembered by my kids as “always



there.” I also want a PhD in psychology or behavioral neuroscience. These goals are not mutually exclusive, but it is a matter of right timing. When my last child goes to college, I will probably go, too. Don't worry- I won't pick the same college!

Big conflicts are easy to identify and resolve. It is the more subtle conflicts that truly block people from achieving goals. This gets into the specifics of moment-to-moment choices. We all want to have our cake and eat it, too! There is often a tension between long-term goals and short-term enjoyment, so we need to identify the conflicts and make a plan to maintain a balance. Conflicting goals at this level are called temptations.

A psychologist's definition of temptation: A stimulus can only represent a temptation with respect to a higher-level goal. **A temptation is anything that presents itself in day-to-day life that takes you farther away from achieving one of your goals.** There are two types of temptations. The first type, called *clear-cost temptations*, are “crystal clear.” If we do this, it will be a nuclear bomb to an important goal. Sleeping with someone other than your spouse is definitely going to wreak havoc and most likely end your marriage. This is very obviously in conflict with your goal to have an awesome relationship! For most

people, it is not hard to avoid indulging in a momentary pleasure like this for the sake of a long-term goal.

The second type of temptation, called an *epsilon-cost temptation*, is less clearly identified as a conflict to a long-term goal. This is especially true in the moment-to-moment choices. **Epsilon-cost temptations are ones in which “a single consumption experience has negligible negative consequences,” but the cumulative effect of repeated indulgence over time results in failure to achieve a goal.** Because the effect is not immediate, it is sometimes hard to even identify something as an epsilon-cost temptation. One main purpose of the four steps in the spiral staircase model of your thriving relationship is to shed light onto these types of obstacles.

Epsilon-cost temptations are often small or overlooked, and yet significant conflicts. If you are consistently failing to achieve a big-picture goal involving health, happiness, or love, I can almost guarantee that there is some epsilon-cost choice you are making on a consistent basis that is acting as an obstacle to your success.

Examples in dieting and fitness goals are obvious. Eating one cheeseburger and fries combo meal as a reward for sticking to your diet and exercise plan over



the previous couple of weeks does not equal a significant weight gain. However, a continuous series of “cheat” meals with fast food adds up over time. Buying something once to make yourself feel better (a little “retail therapy”) doesn’t equal massive credit card debt. Hitting your favorite online store frequently or dinner out every night, however, will

interfere with your long-term couple goals to eliminate debt or save funds to purchase a home.

Cancelling your date night once because a friend that you rarely see comes to town for a visit will not be detrimental to your marriage, but consistently putting your one-on-one time second to someone or something else will cause you to grow apart rather than thrive as a couple.

Take a few moments to look at your big picture goals, and try to identify some epsilon-cost temptations that are holding you back!

Goal:

Epsilon-Cost Temptations:

Goal:

Epsilon-Cost Temptations:

High vs. Low Goals

Do not sell yourself short! This is where fear comes into play. And ladies, you need to be aware of the fact that women are notorious self-doubters. Set goals that push your limits! Do not forget to keep asking the questions, “What would I do if I was not afraid?” AND “How will I save the world?” When you play it safe with your goals, they become devoid of the challenge we need to grow and lead to boredom.



Conceptual vs. Specific Goals

In order to have goals with real teeth—the kind you will make a reality in your life—you need to break the big picture down into specific actions that are measurable. These are small tasks you can mark off a list every day. This is what is known as a SMART goal: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, Time-Sensitive. But we need to take it beyond SMART and into genius mode!

Lay out specific goals. Break big-picture goals into smaller steps with deadlines. Keeping track of your progress is essential once you form specific resolutions. Measuring progress can be done in the notes section of your phone, on your planner, on an Excel spread sheet (my husband’s favorite method), or in a goal tracker app on your iPad. The Strides goal tracker is an app you might want to check out.



Epsilon-cost choices come into play here. The little specific activities that will get you to graduation, a promotion at work, increase your health, foster good friendships, and to a thriving romantic relationship will involve identifying the little things that you do

consistently to block you from achieving these goals. Once you identify these little specifics, then you pick one or two at a time to work toward changing. Ultimately, this takes willpower, which is our next topic of discussion.

Take a moment today to lay out some specific steps to take toward your top three goals.

Goal:

Step 1)

Step 2)

Step 3)

Meaningful vs. Pleasant Life

Goals can be geared towards either a meaningful or a pleasant life. Goals that align with your values and deeply held beliefs are value-driven and usually intrinsic. Psychologists have found that people are much happier if they are striving to live a meaningful life versus a pleasant life (stay tuned for more on this later). Take a look at the goals on your Life List, and label them as meaningful or pleasant. If a goal is geared only towards the pleasant, add something to it! For example, if you say you want be independently wealthy by age 30, add to this goal a “so that I can help ___in the world!” statement. This adds meaning to a goal that could be just about comfort. Adding meaning equals greater life satisfaction.

Goal-Setting with a Productive Personality

Setting goals with these distinctions in mind can make your life both easier and more successful. So the next time you write down a goal on your Life List, make sure you give it the personality you deserve! Having an ongoing conversation about your joint goals on the Couple Life List will help you grow *together* as a couple over the years.

Helpful Hints

After you give your goals a good personality, all you need are a few more practical tips to make sure you achieve them.



Write it down.

Start a goal journal, make a spreadsheet, or plug it into your phone. There are goal-setting apps you can download to keep track of

goals that have been set and accomplished. Search “goal tracker” in the app store, and pick one. Find an app that allows you to plug in your goal and mark it off when accomplished. You will be 3 times more likely to achieve it because you have recorded it.

Rewards and penalties: Rewarding yourself for success and penalizing yourself (or yourselves for joint goals) when you fail can be a powerful motivating force. Because it is effective, websites have been developed to help people put this type of accountability in place. Stickk.com allows you to plug in an amount of money that will either be donated to your favorite charity if you achieve your goal (or you keep your funds) or to a charity you despise if you fail. Or you can set your own

rewards and penalties at the end of each week or month or year, depending on the goal. For instance, if you reach an important savings goal, reward yourself with some extra splurge money in the next month’s budget plan.

Putting rewards and penalties in place can be particularly helpful in the struggle against epsilon-cost choices that are hard to change. If you put in strict penalties and really awesome rewards, it could turn these small, tricky temptations into clear-cost choices. Take a look at some of the small, specific goals on your Life List. Put in place some rewards and penalties that will transform an epsilon-cost choice into a clear-cost choice.

Goal:

Reward:

Penalty:

Goal:

Reward:

Penalty:



One of the most wonderful things about romantic relationships and marriage is that you can hold each other accountable. You will have someone to celebrate with when a goal is achieved and someone to encourage you when you fall short. One goal you can set is to meet for morning coffee or a snack (or cocktail) one night a week to review your progress towards your goals. Discussing both your individual and mutual goals will increase intimacy, communication, cooperation, and respect.

Run your goal past this checklist to increase your success:

Goal/Category:

Perspective

What would I do about this goal if I had one day to live, one year to live or 10 years to live?

Would I change this goal if I wasn't afraid of _____?

If, yes, then how?

Personality

Phrase your goal so that it is an *approach, intrinsic, and high* goal:

Is your goal *leveraged*?

Is it in conflict with other goals?

Which goal is more important right now?

Is it specific?

What will you work on daily, weekly, yearly to accomplish your goal?

Is your goal geared towards a *meaningful life or a pleasant life*?

If it is *pleasant*, can you make it *meaningful*?

How?

Rewards and Penalties

What is at least one reward and one penalty that will help keep you on track?

Conflicting or Leveraged

Is this goal conflicting with any other goals on your Life List?

What are some epsilon-cost choices that block you from achieving this goal?



Chapter 2

Get Lucky; Love Smart

**Knowledge of the brain on love is essential
to getting the marriage you want.**



Love Smart

A thriving, life-long love begins in your head.

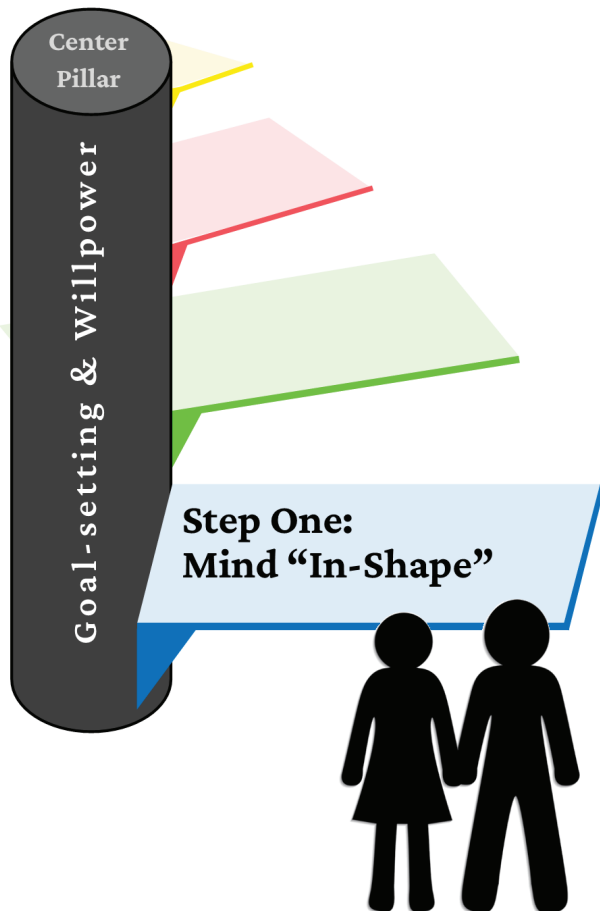
We've established that goal-setting and willpower are essential to a thriving relationship. Now that this *central pillar* is in place, let's start climbing the spiral staircase! But before we ramp up the willpower for the upward journey, we need to know what awaits us at the top. We can set the goal to have a thriving love, but what do we really mean by that? Let's start by talking about the kind of love we desire.

What do we want?

Discuss the following questions together:

- How would you describe a thriving marriage?
- What kind of love do you want for your marriage?
- Come up with some adjectives to describe the feel and tone of your love: How does love typically go in marriage?
- When marriages fail to thrive, fizzle into boredom, or end in divorce, what do you think happened, and why?
- Why do you think a large percentage of couples do not end up with the thriving marriage they hoped for on their wedding day?
- Is love about luck, or is it all in our heads?

Steps to a Thriving Relationship



When we look around at the state of most marriages today, we are not inspired by the general population. Some have given up on the idea of a good marriage, doubting that a life-long, thriving love is even possible. We see that most couples just settle into parallel living, boredom, sticking it out... or perhaps consider lifetime love as merely an act of the will, devoid of passion and feelings.

If you look at cutting-edge research in emerging areas of science today, we can conclude that couples are

operating in an information gap. The typical approach to love includes some major obstacles to couples fostering the love of their dreams. These hidden pitfalls can cause a couple to spiral down into the typical poor relationship habits that are too often experienced today.

As a result of the general population, there is a tendency to think we are at the mercy of luck when it comes to happiness in marriage. Let's reconsider that ideal couple we discussed at the beginning, who is very obviously still in love at the 50-year mark. We have all seen that cute older couple still gah-gah over each other. She looks at him adoringly, and he is still trying to get frisky and grab her butt on the dance floor at their anniversary celebration. They both still have that unmistakable twinkle in their eyes.



This kind of love is possible. We have witnessed it. What is it about these exceptional couples that have produced these results? How can we have a love infused simultaneously with passion and a warm intimacy? What is going wrong in the typical approach to relationships today?

Do you hear other people talk about how “lucky” they are to have found each other? Counting on this common viewpoint of luck robs you of the hope that you can impact how your life plays out. We want to empower you with the knowledge to set goals that will build the skills you need to have a very *atypical*, thriving relationship—for a lifetime!

So, let's start closing the information gap in the department of love and relationships. To understand how to have the kind of exhilarating, intimate love we

all desire, we have to start, not with the heart, but with the brain—that is the brain science of love.

The Brain on Love

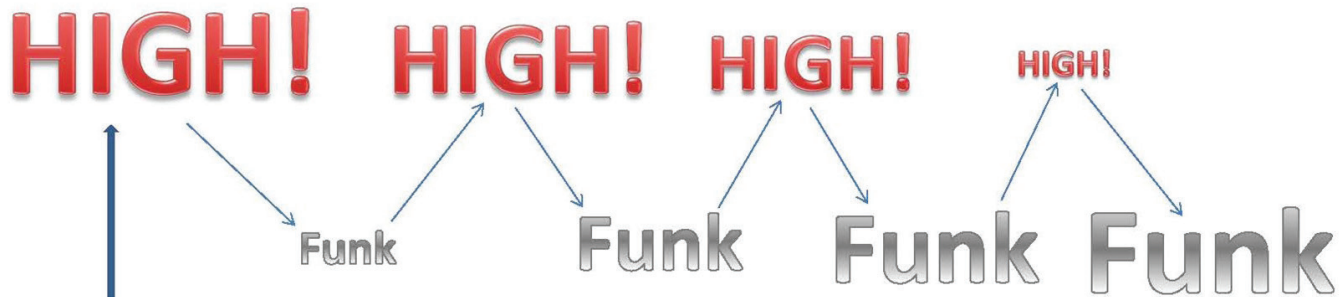
Love is an interesting emotion. There are two feelings to love. The first one is an exhilarating, passionate, frenzied feeling that is difficult to satisfy. The second feeling is warm, safe, relaxed, and calming. This one is more like being curled up together under a blanket in front of a blazing fire.

These two modes of love reflect the two chemicals that are produced by the brain in response to intimate relationships: *dopamine* and *oxytocin*. *Dopamine is the chemical associated with passionate exhilaration*, and *oxytocin is associated with calm, glowing warmth*. These two chemicals need to be in balance within the brain to achieve the type of lifelong love you want. Let's take a closer look at each love chemical.

Dopamine: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Dopamine is produced by the brain in anticipation of a pleasurable experience. Large amounts of dopamine are released by the brain in anticipation of sex. Actually, there is a MASSIVE amount of dopamine released in anticipation of sexual activity.

Dopamine is good because it fuels the passion side of love and gives you a euphoric high. It is exhilarating. It is a feel-good chemical. The brain on dopamine says, “woooooo-hooooo!” You may be thinking that a chemical in your brain that gives you a huge high sounds great, right?



*Distressed
state of
mind...*

But there is a catch. Dopamine comes with several downsides, especially if you are talking about a life-long love.

Dopamine is highly addictive and

drives addictive behavior. In animal studies, it has been shown to be more addictive than methamphetamines and crack cocaine. Dopamine can cause us to “flip our lids”, putting the downstairs brain in the driver’s seat. Essentially, this means dopamine can drive us to go after the next dopamine fix before using the upstairs portion of the brain to think through the short and long-term consequences involved (more on this in Chapter 3).

As soon as the pleasurable high is over, the dopamine levels plummet and crash. When this happens, the brain freaks out and screams, “I WANT MORE DOPAMINE,” and frantically searches for more. This is why dopamine drives addiction. During the crash, we experience irritability, anger, depression, or are anxious and agitated. Think about movies you have seen in which a drug addict needs more drugs. This is the feel (although an extreme example) of a person whose brain is craving more dopamine.

Unfortunately, the brain often does not realize this is what is happening (following sexual activity), and it can cause relationship problems. This crash is why people may raid the fridge or go out on the balcony for a couple of smokes after sex—to re-up the dopamine levels in the brain.

During the dopamine crash, a person’s brain has a hard time thinking objectively, but frequently the person doesn’t know that this is clouding his or her decision-making and vision of reality. A brain screaming for more dopamine becomes very short-sighted and apathetic about anything outside of dopamine-seeking activity. The effects of dopamine on mood, judgement, and perspective are three really good reasons you want to make sure you have your desires under control by building and maintaining your willpower (self-regulation). The next chapter will include an extensive discussion of the importance of self-regulation.

And last, but definitely not least, dopamine is problematic to committed relationships because the brain can develop a tolerance to it. This is the ugly side of dopamine. In a dopamine-driven sexual relationship—any time between two to four years into the relationship—sexual partners adapt to the experience and can no longer get a “high” off of being together. There are only two options for renewing that feeling of exhilaration and sexual interest at this point. To get that thriving relationship back, you may need a counselor to help you reset the dopamine receptors in the brain. This is difficult but possible and definitely worth it. Unfortunately, all too often a person chooses the devastating alternative of introducing a new sexual partner when the passion has fizzled out, which is a major cause of failed relationships.

This can happen to men or women, but the male brain is particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of dopamine. The adaptation of the brain to dopamine and the resulting loss of attraction and interest in a sexual partner has nothing to do with how good-looking or how “skilled” a lover the other person may be. The covers of celebrity magazines reveal evidence of this phenomenon every day. J Lo, Sandra Bullock, and Jennifer Aniston (or any other supermodel celebrity you can think of) have all been cheated on or traded in for a “newer” model. This has nothing to do with how they rate on the attractiveness scale. These women are beautiful! Unfortunately, they (like most of us) are lacking important information about how dopamine works.

Dopamine-driven sexual hedonic treadmills (hereafter simply referred to as *the treadmill*) leads to the boredom of adaption. *The treadmill* helps explain the often-expressed sentiment, “I don’t know what happened. I still love you, I’m just not *in love* with you anymore.” It’s actually your dopamine receptors screaming, “Give me something new!”

Love in Balance: Oxytocin to the Rescue

Dopamine is good in that it fuels passion. Everyone wants to have a love that is passionate, but the adaptation of dopamine receptors and the effects of the crash on mood and judgement are problematic. These effects block us from a thriving, *atypical* relationship. In fact, it is an underlying reason for disillusionment we see in typical relationships.

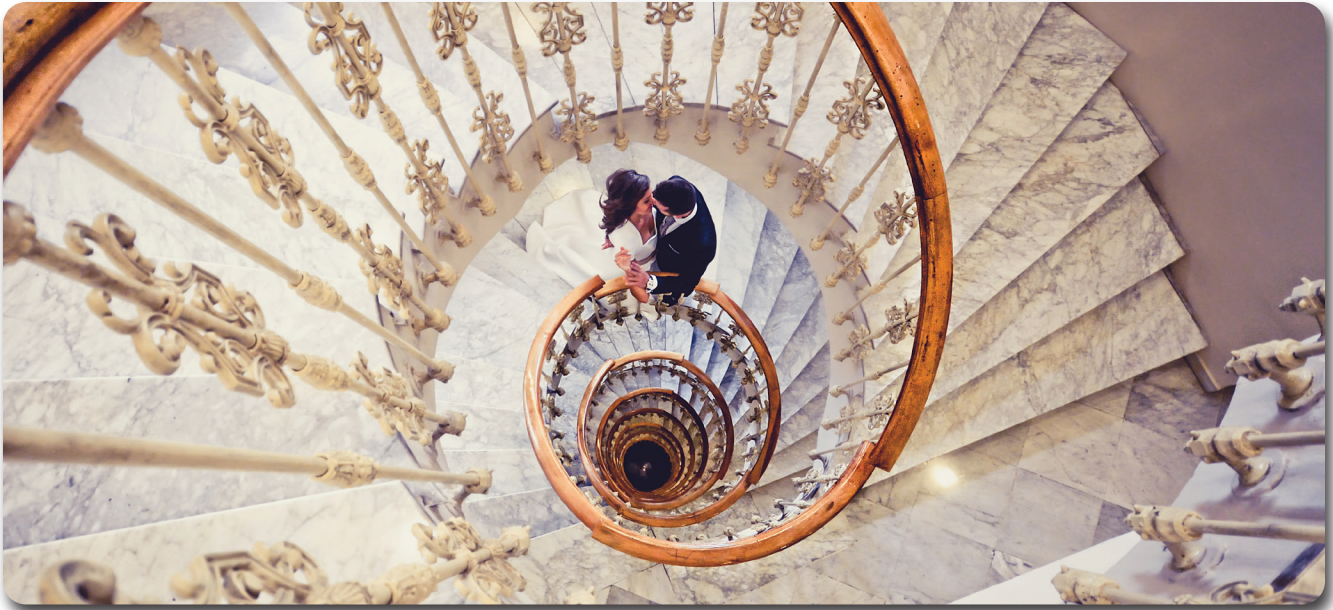


The good news is that love doesn’t rely on dopamine alone. Oxytocin is a chemical produced by the brain during sex and during other intimate, loving interactions. It promotes what psychologists and brain scientists call *secure attachment*. It gives us a feeling of love, intimacy and devotion that has a calm, focused, and steady warmth to it. Oxytocin leaves a person feeling satisfied, not hungry or desperate for more.

Oxytocin does not lead to adaptation within the brain, so the feeling of intimacy never diminishes. Instead, it actually increases over time. Oxytocin also tempers the dopamine crash and calms the brain, so it isn’t screaming for more dopamine. This effect helps with self-regulation and protects the *upstairs brain* (the thinking and reasoning part of the brain) from being hijacked by the dopamine-seeking *downstairs brain*. Oxytocin balances out the downside of dopamine so that you can enjoy the passion without the negative impact on judgment, focus and perspective. It is amazing how the human body works!

Reflect

We all have hedonic treadmills running in our lives. Consider the four main appetites (food, money, sex, power) to identify any treadmills that may be dragging you down.



Given what we have learned about the neuroscience of love, how would you define an ideal love in brain chemistry terms?

Consider this definition: **An ideal love maintains the passionate excitement of dopamine balanced with an increasing security and oxytocin-rich intimacy over a couple's lifetime.** Sounds great, right? This is the end goal at the top of the spiral staircase. The billion-dollar question is...HOW?

Reflect

Take some time to talk about your thoughts on the brain science of love, and set some goals for your relationship based on the information in this section.

Self-Regulation

Making Dopamine an Asset

How do we maintain a lifetime of oxytocin-rich relationship, infused with the passion of dopamine? Let's take a look at why self-regulation is so important to a thriving love. Then, we'll follow the steps up the spiral staircase to fill in the information gaps that are blocking our way.

The brain doesn't need help producing dopamine in a loving relationship unless *dopamine adaptation* has already set in. Sexual treadmills are easy to hop on and crank up the speed. The trick to maintaining the passionate feeling of love is to prevent adaptation. We can do this by putting into place a pattern of relating that Dr. Todd Bowman calls *feasting and fasting*. Dr. Bowman is a psychologist who specializes in recovery from sexual addiction. We can effectively reset the dopamine receptors in the brain by abstaining from orgasm for ten days in a row out of every 30 days. If a couple follows this *feasting and fasting* pattern of relating physically, they will never lose sexual interest in each other or the exhilarating feeling that goes along with the anticipation of being together. This pattern of relating also builds willpower in general (both individually and as a couple), so it has tremendous benefits across the board in life.

Dopamine is easy to come by, but oxytocin requires more intentionality for the brain to produce it. Each topic we cover in the following pages will help to put the brain in an oxytocin-friendly state. In other words, the steps in the spiral staircase will help our brains to produce more and more oxytocin. Oxytocin helps calm the brain during the dopamine crashes as well as during the ten-day reset. The balancing effect of these two chemicals can only occur if you are in an

oxytocin-rich relationship without the treadmill running. In other words, sexual self-regulation in your marriage promotes a brain that readily produces oxytocin and keeps dopamine in check.

Next, let's start climbing! Now that your thriving relationship is defined, we turn to the steps in our spiral staircase. These are geared toward helping you infuse your marriage with a steady flow of oxytocin as you goal-set and grow together!

Discussion Questions

What are some common cravings that preoccupy people's minds, resulting in poor judgment and skewed perspective?

What percentage of couples do you think have a dopamine-driven relationship, and why?



The Treadmill

It is very difficult to keep the dopamine in check when sex is introduced into a relationship before a permanent commitment is in place. If you are currently sexually active, consider the following warning signs:

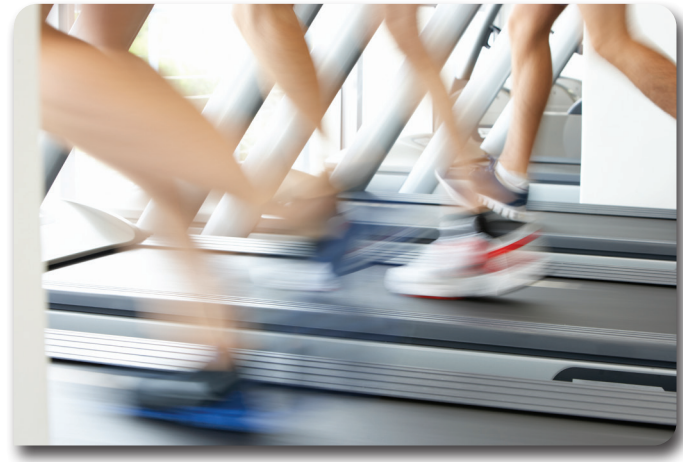
- You get irritable, annoyed, or depressed when you have to abstain from orgasm.
- You turn to pornography on a regular basis for a “release.”
- You use sex to feel close to your partner or to reassure you that he/she still loves you.
- Your dopamine receptors have adapted, and you are experiencing low sexual interest.

Can you come up with other potential manifestations of a dopamine-driven relationship? The feel of dopamine is quick exhilaration followed by a funk of dissatisfaction. If you identify with one or more of them, dopamine may be more dominant than oxytocin in your relationship.

Other potentially dopamine-driven activities to be aware of include:

- High adrenaline video games
- Gambling
- Fantasy sports
- Compulsive shopping (shoes, clothes)
- Drinking
- Comfort eating

Don't misunderstand. Neither enjoying yourself nor the release of dopamine are inherently bad! Dopamine only becomes a problem when we prioritize seeking dopamine over the good of our relationships and long-term goals.



Do you feel like any of these activities are out of balance in your life?

**Are they driving a hedonic treadmill?
If yes, how will you crank down the speed of the treadmill?**

Use the Love Goal worksheets on the following pages to guide your discussion.

LOVE Goal Worksheet

Making sure DOPAMINE is in balance

Goal

We will keep dopamine in balance by increasing sexual self-regulation.

Perspective

Why is this important to me for our marriage?

Would I change this goal if I wasn't afraid of _____? If, yes, then how?

Personality

Phrase your goal so that it is an *approach, intrinsic,* and *high* goal:

Is it specific?

What will you work on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly to accomplish your goal?

Rewards and Penalties

What is at least one reward and one penalty that will help keep us on track?

Conflicting/Leveraged

Is this goal conflicting with any other goals on our Life List?

Which goal is more important right now?

What are some epsilon-cost choices that block us from achieving this goal?

Mental Contrasting

Why do you want to achieve this goal?



Make a list of five things that could get in your way:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Form implementation intentions for the five obstacles you listed above (If/then statements):

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Implementation Intentions

How, when and where is this goal going to happen?

How do you phrase your goal now?

LOVE Goal Worksheet

Ramping Up the OXYTOCIN

Goal

We will intentionally create an oxytocin-rich relationship.

Perspective

Why is this important to me for our marriage?

Would I change this goal if I wasn't afraid of _____? If, yes, then how?

Personality

Phrase your goal so that it is an *approach, intrinsic,* and *high* goal:

Is it specific?

What will you work on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly to accomplish your goal?

Rewards and Penalties

What is at least one reward and one penalty that will help keep us on track?

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1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Implementation Intentions

How, when and where is this goal going to happen?

How do you phrase your goal now?



Chapter 3

We've Got the POWER!

**Willpower is essential to achieving your goals
and foundational to a THRIVING marriage.**



The Center Pillar: Willpower

How important is it?

Most couples believe communication is the most fundamental component of a thriving relationship. Communication is essential; however, there is another skill and interior power we need that is more fundamental. This power is what psychologists call self-regulation and what we tend to refer to as willpower.

In fact, self-regulation is the number one strength we need to be successful across the board in life.

Brain scientists Todd Heatherton and Dylan Wagner address the importance of willpower/self-regulation in their article, “Cognitive neuroscience of self-regulation failure” when they observe that:

The ability to control behavior enables humans to live cooperatively, achieve important goals and maintain health throughout their life span. Self-regulation enables people to make plans, choose from alternatives, control impulses, inhibit

unwanted thoughts and regulate social behavior. Although humans have an impressive capacity for self-regulation, failures are common and people lose control of their behavior in a wide variety of circumstances. Such failures are an important cause of several contemporary societal problems-obesity, addiction, poor financial decisions, sexual infidelity and so on. Indeed, it has been estimated that 40% of deaths are caused by poor self-regulation. Conversely, those who are better able to self-regulate demonstrate improved relationships, increased job success and better mental health and are less at risk of developing alcohol abuse problems or engaging in risky sexual behavior (Heatherton, Wagner 2011).

According to researchers, success in school, in life, in a profession, and in relationships is directly related to how much willpower a person possesses. The more willpower, the more success in life. This makes sense when you think about your own experience and perceptions of willpower.

Consider the following questions:

How would you define self-regulation or willpower?

Self-regulation “failures” occur often in daily life. What are some problems that arise in daily life and in your relationship due to willpower failure?

Have you ever said :

DARN IT! I wish I would not have . . .

DARN IT! I wish I would have . . .



These darn-its represent self-regulation failures. Such failures not only cause personal regret but also cause most of the conflicts in our relationships. For instance, think of relationship conflicts revolving around money. “Oh, sorry, Honey, I saw this on Amazon and it looked really awesome. I just couldn’t help myself, so I went outside the budget plan.” Most relationship conflicts can be traced back to one or both person’s failure to self-regulate behavior.

Since this is such a fundamentally important skill, we need to learn how to maximize it. The first step in harnessing our willpower potential is to understand a little bit about the brain and its reward system.

How Willpower Works

The brain contains a complex network of neurons that are constantly assessing the value and benefit of opportunities in a person’s environment throughout the day. This network of neurons contains the chemical messenger *dopamine*. Dopamine is the “feel good” chemical in our brain. When the brain detects an opportunity to make a person’s life better, dopamine is released by the reward system neurons and motivates us to go after it.

Here is the progression of events when the reward system makes an evaluation: When an opportunity presents itself, the reward center activates. The reward center then fires up neurons going to two different regions of the brain—the *limbic system* and the *pre-frontal cortex*, also known as the *upstairs* and *downstairs brain*. Scientists explain these parts of the brain by using a simple model with your hand. Hold your hand up with the palm facing forward and the thumb tucked into your palm. From the thumb down to the wrist is considered the *downstairs brain*, which is made up of the limbic system, the cerebellum, and the brainstem. If you fold the fingers over the thumb, from



the knuckles to the fingertips is the *upstairs brain*, or cerebral cortex.

The downstairs brain is the region of the brain in which the appetites for *food, money, sex, and power* arise. It is also where big emotions begin. The upstairs brain is in charge of big-picture and long-term planning, processing memories, social awareness of how our actions impact other people, empathy, problem solving, exploring different alternatives, processing emotion, and controlling the impulses of the downstairs brain.

These two regions of the brain then compete, or race to the finish, to try to make the call as to whether or not to pursue the immediate reward or avoid discomfort in the here and now. The downstairs brain is extremely quick to decide—because all it has to do is say yes or no. This will result in me either avoiding discomfort or feeling really good. Done. The upstairs brain is much slower, as it draws from memory of past experiences to predict the future, puts the opportunity for reward into the context of bigger picture goals, assesses if it will contradict long term goals, comes up with possible alternatives, takes into account how it impacts other people, and comes up with an advantages and disadvantages list.



Exercising willpower means asking the *upstairs brain*: Will this help me go towards or away from my bigger picture goals? When we fail to check in with the *upstairs brain* before we act, brain scientists call this “flipping the lid.” We can also flip the lid when it comes to how we deal with our emotions. Becoming overwhelmed, discouraged, really angry, or depressed can all involve shutting down the *upstairs brain* and allowing the *downstairs brain* to take control. The discomfort of these emotions can drive us to express them inappropriately for temporary relief.

When we use willpower and check in with the *upstairs brain* before acting, the brain is forming a connection between the *upstairs brain* and *downstairs brain*. Every time we form a connection between different parts of the brain, the feeling we get is “I feel good!” The more connections we make between the *upstairs and downstairs brain*, the easier it is to do what we need to do to achieve our goals.



Four Important Willpower Concepts

The common understanding of willpower is, “You either have it, or you don’t.” You are either weak or strong in a given moment. But it’s just not that simple, and this perspective on willpower holds us back. It makes a person feel helpless to effect change and gain control of their life, unable to get rid of the Dang-Its!

Willpower researchers have found these four concepts are important to understand:

1. Willpower works as if we all have a willpower fuel tank sitting in our heads. We wake up with a full tank and have a certain, limited amount of fuel to use throughout the day. When the willpower fuel is gone, so is our willpower.
2. Willpower fuel can be replenished when it’s running low! We need to know how to refuel.
3. We can learn to conserve the willpower fuel we use during the day to save it for unexpected challenges.
4. Even though we each have a certain sized tank, we are not doomed to the size of tank we have currently. The tank size can be built and increased.

Draining the Tank

Because willpower fuel is a limited resource, we need to be mindful of how quickly we burn through it. Whenever you exert willpower by saying “no” to a favorite snack food, surfing a favorite website, keeping your mouth shut when you don’t want to, and so on, this depletes glucose stores in the *upstairs brain*. Because willpower uses up the glucose, each person has a certain amount of willpower/self-regulation to



access. Let’s imagine as though you have a certain size willpower fuel tank. I may have a 10-gallon tank, and you may have a 50-gallon tank. The point is that each person has a limited amount each day.

Anything that takes effort burns the fuel and depletes the tank. We do not have a separate tank for controlling emotion, making decisions, focusing our attention, doing things we do not feel like doing in the moment, and suppressing cravings that do not get us to our long-term goals. So, the first strategy in conserving our fuel tanks is to be effective by being selective.

In other words, we do not try to do everything at once! If we can identify more than one consistent “darn-it” on which we are stuck, we pick one at a time to master. Let’s say you have decided that you want to make healthier food choices together, which requires majorly changing your typical “eat out every other day” pattern. Behavioral change requires a lot of fuel in the willpower tank. So in the first couple months, focus only on this goal. Do not also try to exercise



regularly (if you don't already), conquer a major house project, start a new career path, or make other major life changes if you can help it.

Focusing our attention on the one most important task at hand will definitely bump up our gas mileage. There are a few more specific strategies that help conserve our fuel for when it is really needed. Let's cover these next.

Refuel Before You Hit Empty

Our brains burn glucose whenever we use our willpower to focus our attention, resist indulging in whatever we feel like in the moment, or decide it is not a good time to reveal our feelings to the world.

Because we have a limited supply of glucose in the brain, we also have a limited amount of willpower. The amount of glucose we feed our brains and the rate that we burn it determines our willpower fuel tank size.

When our willpower fuel tank is on empty, we are in a state that psychologists call *ego depletion* or *decision fatigue*. This is what happens to engaged couples, for instance, after filling out their wedding registry. Choices get really interesting at the end of a day of asking each other, "These dishes or those dishes for formal entertaining? Do we need an avocado slicer? How many double old fashioned glasses should we ask for?" By the time the gifts are opened, they are

scratching their heads and mumbling, "Why exactly did we put this on the list?"

Signs of depletion include heightened senses and emotions. When you are happy, you are slap-happy or ecstatic! When you are sad or discouraged, you want to tank everything and not go on. Things that are generally minor annoyances suddenly make you want to jump out of your skin. It is important to recognize when you are in a state of depletion. Awareness is the first step toward fixing it! It is also important to keep this in mind in your relationship. You may NOT want to sit down to discuss the budget, ask your partner to make any big decisions, or try to resolve a conflict when you are depleted!



When the willpower fuel tank is empty, we can refuel the tank in three ways:

- eat
- sleep
- boost happiness

Try to make good choices when you stock the pantry and refrigerator with go-to snacks. Nothing refuels the willpower fuel tank better than a nap or a good

night's sleep. Make the effort to take care of this aspect of life.

Positive emotions like joy, laughter, gratitude, looking forward to something fun (hope), pride in excelling at a sport or hobby, enjoying a good book, or being kind to a friend can all help refuel the willpower tank.

When will you rest to refuel?

What are some grab-n-go, high-protein, moderate carb foods to have on-hand?

What gives your positive emotion a boost?

Conserving Fuel: Primes

There are a few specific strategies that help conserve your willpower fuel for when it is really needed. *Primes* are *non-conscious triggers in our environment that make it easier or harder to achieve a goal*. Let's talk about how to prime your home and office to set yourself up for success.

Organized Work / Home Space

An orderly environment has been shown to help people resist temptations, persevere towards a goal, AND use *less* willpower doing it. In one experiment, researchers put one group of aspiring healthy eaters (meaning they were trying to make healthier eating choices) in an organized work space and another group in an office that was a gigantic mess. A bowl of candy and a bowl of carrots were placed in each person's immediate work space. The people in the organized room chose the carrots at a very high rate. The other group struggled more overall. The subjects in the chaotic work environment either gave in and ate the candy or ate the carrots. All the test subjects took a willpower stamina test afterwards. The organized room group not only succeeded more often in sticking with their goal of choosing healthier options, but they also used less willpower to do it. This experiment has been repeated in various ways with similar results (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011) (Rahinel, Reddin & Vohs, 2011).

Inspirational Quotes

Use these by putting them in your phone as alarms or print some to display on your desk. You can even tape

some to the ceiling or your alarm clock, so you see them as you wake up.

Cell Phone Settings

Consider using an inspirational ring tone, inspirational text tone, or an inspirational background. Creating a list entitled "why I want to make this goal happen" in your Notes app (or displaying at home if you want to see them all the time) can be helpful to keep you going.

Music Playlists

These can be powerful motivational tools—use them! Make several lists for various scenarios, such as:



- I'm tired
- I need to keep going
- I don't want to get started
- I need to calm down
- It will be great when this is over

An awareness of primes can help make the subconscious work in our favor when it comes to accomplishing our goals. AND use less willpower fuel in the process.

Action Step

Take a few moments to come up with a prime list for the top three goals on your Life List:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)



Social Contagion

Other people's moods, motivations, and states of mind are contagious and can make it easier or harder to achieve goals. We have something called mirror neurons in our brains. Mirror neurons literally make you feel what other people are feeling. Brain scans have demonstrated this mirroring of other people's experiences. If you focus on a person, your brain literally copies his or her state of mind. We have all sensed how other people impact us. Do you know someone who, the moment you see them, you feel elevated, motivated and in an energized state of mind? Scientists call these people *cheerleaders*.

Do you also know people who, the minute you lay eyes on them, they suck the life out of you? Scientists refer to these willpower-draining people as *black holes*.

You need to find your *cheerleaders* and avoid *black holes*—even pictures of them. You can identify *cheerleaders* by keeping tabs on the number of positive comments compared to negative comments that come out of a person's mouth. If a person has approximately a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative statements (called a positivity ratio) and you feel recharged or less stressed after being with them, you have identified a *cheerleader* in your life. If you find someone who spouts more negative sentiments compared to positives or who has a positivity ratio of more than 11:1 or so—which is simply insincere and nauseating—you are in the presence of a *black hole* (Fredrickson, 2009). These people will suck you dry and need to be avoided as much as possible when you need all your willpower for an emergency or the major task at hand. If one of your co-workers is a *black hole*, avoid the break room until your big project is finished. If your aunt or a family friend is a *black hole*, keep their picture in a drawer and pull it out when they come over. Otherwise, minimize mementos of them in your

environment. The opposite goes for *cheerleaders* in your life. Schedule some calls with your grandma if she is a source of inspiration to you and keep a picture of her with you to look at when you need a boost.

During eras of high stress, you need to surround yourself with positives and block out the negatives, or at least contain them somehow.

Your Cheerleader List

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



Make a mental note of your black holes.

Conserving Fuel: Slowing the Downstairs Brain

Delayed vs Denied Gratification

Researchers have found that in dealing with epsilon-cost choices, you will use less willpower fuel if you tell yourself, “Later!” rather than “No!” This is true even if you really have no intention of ever indulging the impulse. The *downstairs brain* does not react well to “No!” We see a prime example of this in two-year-olds whose *upstairs brains* are not fully developed. And let’s be honest, the *downstairs brain* will pitch a fit in response to “No!” even in an adult. But we have a more fully developed *upstairs brain* that can inhibit the tantrum. If we say “later”, it will take less willpower because the *downstairs brain* does not react as violently.

What’s on your “I’ll have that later” list?

Distractions

Distracting yourself in the moment is another way to deal with the downstairs brain when it starts screaming for something or when big emotions arise within it. A distraction helps the downstairs brain calm down, so it is easier to reason with. This strategy, called *reappraisal*, gives you the chance to remind yourself why you are trying not to give in to that impulse or thought pattern or emotion and letting the *upstairs brain* catch up. Examples might include playing a favorite song, watching an inspirational video, doing a crossword puzzle or engaging in physical activities like running or cleaning.

Your distraction list:

Conserving Fuel: Keep the Upstairs Brain Ready and Waiting

Another way to *prime* the brain to deal with temptations, prevent the “Dag nab-its!” and use less willpower in the process involves an exercise called *mental contrasting* followed by *forming implementation intentions*. We are going to start the process right now, and I will tell you why it is so effective as we work through it.

Choose one of your top goals that you seem the least able to achieve. Daydream a little about why it will be great if you achieve your goal.

How will you feel after you achieve your goal?

What are five internal or external factors that could derail you from your goal?

Identify some epsilon-cost choices blocking you from accomplishing your goal:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)



What you just did is something psychologists call **mental contrasting**. Think of how you will feel and how great it will be to achieve your goal. Contrast that with what will or could get in the way of you being successful, and you have identified the major pitfalls you need to plan around. The point of identifying these possible stumbling blocks is to then actively plan on how you will deal with them. This part is called *forming implementation intentions*.

Implementation intentions help with epsilon-cost choices that keep us from moving from good to great!

Implementation Intentions

Look at your list of roadblocks and form an “**IF _____ happens, THEN I will _____**” statement. IF/THEN statements train your brain ahead of time, preprogramming your response to whatever cue will derail you from your goal. These types of planning statements lay down the neural pathways of your productive response before the moment of temptation strikes and make the upstairs brain ready and waiting. When you run the scenario ahead of time, the upstairs brain has less to process and can react faster in the moment.

Form implementation intentions for each obstacle you can predict standing in the way of achieving your top long-term goal:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Why Are Rewards So Helpful?

The brain is always looking for its next opportunity to make our lives better. When we have a plethora of possible rewards from the brain’s perspective, it is easier to say no to immediate gratification in the moment. But when the brain feels a deficit of opportunities to feel good or avoid pain, the intensity with which it goes after “in-the-moment” rewards is increased and more difficult to resist. Taking time out to enjoy life, friendships, savoring wins, giving yourself rewards for goals accomplished, spending time with family and pursuing hobbies that bring you joy are important.

When the promise of rewards are within reach, the intensity of the downstairs brain’s drive for dopamine is decreased. This makes sticking to our long-term, bigger picture goals easier in the face of temptations for immediate gratification.

What are some of the rewards you currently have in place for different goals on your life list?

What are some hobbies you enjoy that enrich your life satisfaction?

Do you take the time out to pursue them?

Increase The Size of The Tank

According to psychologists, a person can never have too much willpower, and increasing the size of your tank can only help you be more successful across the board in life! So how do you build the self-regulation fuel tank? How do you go from a 25-gallon tank to a 50-gallon tank so you have more stamina and avoid depletion in the later hours of the day? You simply have to choose one little thing or pervasive habit that takes willpower, and do it, consistently!

Researchers tested how to build the tank by asking college students to try and sit up in class for two weeks. They measured willpower capacity before and after the two weeks. The students who made the effort to have better posture increased their willpower and became less depleted compared to the slouching control group (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011).

This is an ongoing process because you can never have enough willpower/self-regulation. *Success is directly proportional to how well you can self-regulate.* But I do not like to choose something arbitrary like sitting up straight. It is better to choose something that will also act as a prime to help you conserve willpower (or will further other goals) as you are trying to build it! Keeping your workspace organized is an example of this “killing two birds with one stone” approach to willpower-building.

Other ideas include:

- When you want to say something negative, say two positive things first. This is a form of mindful speech and will increase your positivity ratio.
- Get up on time when your alarm goes off and set an alarm to do certain things at specific times of the day.
- Schedule meals and eat them. This will keep your brain fueled.
- Go to bed at a certain time, no matter what!
- Be five minutes early for meetings (or on time).

Come up with a few ideas of your own:

1)

2)

3)





Consider even more options for positive changes. These will build the size of your self-regulation fuel tank and help you expend less fuel throughout your day-to-day routine. Remember to choose just one at a time or make up ONE of your own. These are categorized into the goal-setting groups we used for your Life List:

Health

Setting an exercise plan can be very helpful. Self-regulation occurs when the upstairs brain is on and waiting for the impulse, urge, or craving to arise. Exercise helps keep the upstairs brain engaged.

Using a device to record dietary and fitness goals is an exercise of self-regulation. It not only keeps you on track with fitness goals but also builds your self-regulation tank. When you set dietary goals, it is important to remember that dieting can be a catch-22. You need self-regulation to diet, but you need food to keep your self-regulatory fuel tank full. This is why smaller but regular meals work best. And a cheat day has been shown to help. This is probably because it offers the downstairs brain the option of delayed gratification with the promise of reward rather than denied indulgences.

Choose a time to work out, such as 30 minutes every other day with a heart rate at 80% capacity. Set a time or calorie-burn goal. Do not quit before this goal is met, and do not exceed this goal. Take a selfie on the treadmill, at the gym, or in your running clothes outside, and post it to your accountability group... mission accomplished!

Home/Office Space

Choose something to get organized. Consider something like, “Never go to bed until the kitchen is clean (or until your desk is clutter-free).” Resist the urge to



put off organizing files or correspondence until later. Here’s a very simple organizational goal to consider. Don’t allow yourself to put something on the desk with the thought, “I will put this away or get to it later.” This is a small way to resist a persistent inclination. Every time you succeed, up goes your willpower!

Finances

Get a budget app on your phone or create a document in a preferred program on your computer or tablet. Set a budget and track your spending.

Learning

Do not procrastinate studying or work projects. Consider setting a couple times per day to read a book on a topic you are interested in but is not assigned to you by a boss or teacher. Read for only 5-10 minutes, and then put the book down at the set time. Do not read longer than you have planned, and do not skip it, even when you want to.

Friendship

Look at and connect with each person you come in contact with throughout the day. Take the time for a personal opening to each text—like, “Hi! I hope you are having a great day!” Then, type your message. If you see someone in person, make eye contact and greet them in a way that says, “I care about you.”

Learn to listen better in conversations. Resist the urge to interrupt during a conversation. This is called mindful speech.

Family

Take time each day to reach out to a different member of your family, shoot them a text, email, or even write them a short note to drop in the mail. Perhaps pick one family member for each day of the week. Set a schedule and stick to it, making sure you are on time. Many of us have a natural inclination to procrastinate in leaving for class or an appointment or dinner for a few moments longer. Resisting this urge can build willpower!

Spiritual goals

If you are a spiritual person, pick a few spiritual exercises to perform each day. Treat this plan as if you have an appointment with a teacher or doctor and keep it! Prayer, meditation (also known as focused attention) and other forms of spiritual exercises have been shown to cause a dramatic increase in self-regulation. Pick a change to make from the previous list or choose one of your own. Let me stress to only choose one thing to work on at a time. Write down why you are choosing this change. Figure out how you are going to monitor your successes and failures, how you will reward yourself for sticking to it, and how you will hold yourself accountable.

One Change:

Why am I working on this change?

How will I monitor success and failures?



Reward:

How will I hold myself accountable?

Once the changes you are trying to make become second nature, you should have an increased amount of self-regulation. Don't stop there! Building your tank is a life-long project! The good news is that well-being is a product of this growing process. The more self-regulation you have, the better you feel. The better you feel, the more you will want to increase your self-regulation. If we can learn to make the most of the willpower fuel we have throughout the day, accomplishments increase, regrets decrease, and relationships improve.

Keep a running list of changes you want to make and to-dos to actualize these modifications. Setting goals and achieving them can be difficult; however, implementing the goal-setting strategies from chapter one, combined with these willpower tools, can dramatically increase your success! Although time-consuming, it will soon become second nature. Taking the time, energy, and thought to ensure success is better than continually being frustrated by failures.

The Brain's Reward System

The Gas and the Brakes

In the race between the upstairs and downstairs brain, we can prime the upstairs, keeping it fueled and in ready and waiting mode. We can also use strategies such as delay and distract to slow the impulsive downstairs brain, giving the upstairs time to catch up to it. These willpower tricks work in the moment, but we can also implement lifestyle changes that make the downstairs brain slower in general and less desperate for an immediate gratification.

To slow the downstairs brain's reaction time, we need more information about how the reward system works. Then we can use this information to plan and design our daily routine to naturally slow the downstairs and enable us to stay on track with big picture goals using less effort.

The reward system is powered by *dopamine*. The presence of dopamine in the upstairs brain starts the complex process of calculating advantages and disadvantages of the perceived reward. Dopamine in the downstairs brain powers up two types of receptors. One type of receptor (D1 receptors) acts like a gas pedal or accelerator that pushes you toward the gratification of an impulse. These accelerator receptors drive us to GO FOR IT NOW! The other type of receptor (D2 receptors) acts as a brake that slows the downstairs brain to allow us to stop and consider the long-term consequences of the immediate gratification. The balance between the brakes and the accelerator within the downstairs brain is very important to impulse control and our ability to persevere towards long-term goals, rewards and accomplishments.



When we have weak brakes and a strong accelerator in the downstairs brain, it is very difficult to control our impulses, regulate emotion, and manage stress in a productive way. This balance between the number of brake receptors and accelerator receptors is impacted by both our genetics and the choices we make in daily living.

Strengthen the Brakes

We can impact the balance between the brakes and the accelerator in the downstairs brain to tip the scale towards less *impulsivity* and more *accomplishment*.

Genetically inheriting weak brakes is a factor that we cannot change. But even if you naturally have weak brakes, you can still increase the number of brake receptors (and therefore increase the strength) you have by filling your life with healthy rewards as well as being especially careful to avoid factors that weaken the brakes. It is also important for a person with naturally lower levels of brake receptors (thank you, parents) to simply avoid situations that promote overindulgence or self-destructive immediate gratification, rather than try to resist a temptation or “be strong” in a tempting situation. ***The need to avoid tempting situations is not a sign of weakness; it rather demonstrates a keen self-awareness of how your own brain works.***

The brakes in the downstairs brain are strengthened when we have regular opportunities to enjoy life, feel accomplished and valuable, and can also alleviate discomfort effectively when adversity arises. From the brain's perspective, the ability to feel good and avoid pain are all opportunities for reward. Every time the brain experiences this healthy sense of reward, the

number of brake receptors increase and the brakes in the downstairs brain are strengthened.

If the brain does not detect many opportunities for natural rewards in daily living (due to lack of accomplishment, lack of value and enjoyable activities, feeling of helplessness in adversity), then the brakes are weakened through the loss of D2 receptors. When this growing imbalance occurs between the brakes and accelerator in the *downstairs brain*, we become more and more prone to “flipping the lid” and the “Dang its!” in daily life.

Distress Weakens the Brakes

How we deal with distress can have a profound impact on the satisfaction we experience in daily life and our ability to self-regulate. Stress management is a common term used in well-being, but most people think “stress” is caused by external factors mostly outside of a person’s control. The brain’s definition of “stress” is much broader and includes boredom, anger/irritation, anxiety/feeling overwhelmed, discouragement, self-doubt/feeling worthless or inadequate, feeling rejected, sadness. These distressed states of mind make the brain desperate to feel better, putting the reward detectors in a hypervigilant mode.



This means the downstairs brain will be very quick to grab the first reward that presents itself.

Scan the list of distressed states of mind and list both healthy and unhealthy ways you use to alleviate the distress.

Bored:

Worried/anxious:

Sad:

Rejected:

Self-doubt/inadequate:

Angry/irritated/frustrated:

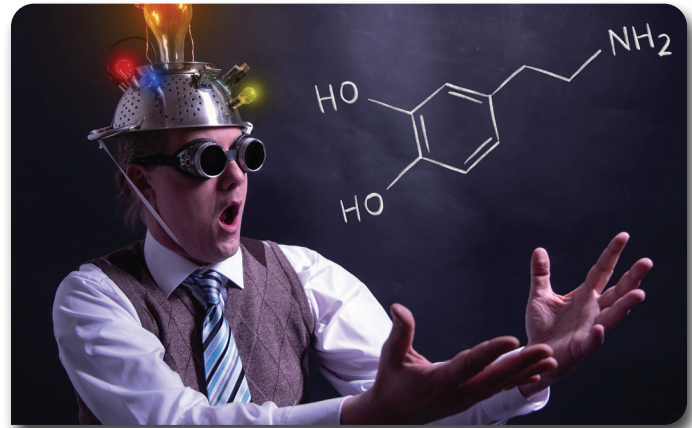
Exercise or movement, boosting your mood by working on a hobby, breathing, praying, reading something funny or fascinating, connecting with a person who is empathetic, pushing forward on a goal on your life list, looking forward to something fun, diving into a project that interests you, or taking a break to rest are all healthy ways to alleviate a distressed state of mind. Unfortunately, we don’t always make a healthy choice—especially in today’s world because of easy access to unhealthy rewards that scientists call *supernormal stimuli*.

Supernormal Stimuli

Nikolaas Tinbergen, a Nobel Prize winning ethologist, is the father of the term *supernormal stimuli*. His experiments included:

- constructing plaster eggs to see which a bird preferred to sit on, finding that they would select those that were larger, had more defined markings, or more saturated color—a dayglo-bright one with black polka dots would be selected over the bird’s own pale, dappled eggs.
- constructing cardboard dummy butterflies with more defined markings that male butterflies would try to mate with in preference to real females.
- performing many other similar experiments, all with similar results. In a very quick span of time, Tinbergen was able to influence the behavior of these animals with a new “super” stimulus that they found themselves attracted to, and which they preferred over the real thing. Instinct took over, and now the animals’ behaviors were a detriment to their livelihood because they simply couldn’t say no to the fake stimulus.

With *supernormal stimuli* there is a mismatch between purpose and the reward circuitry. The reward center is meant to release small amounts of dopamine to motivate us into actions that promote survival. This system is designed to release more dopamine when a necessary activity is risky or difficult. Larger amounts of dopamine help us overcome fear or persevere through tough work in the moment to accomplish the goal. Our ancient ancestors needed this extra incentive to hunt for food or build their own shelters when survival involved both danger and extreme effort. *Supernormal stimuli* hijack these circuits and deliver much larger levels of dopamine for little to no risk or



work. Several problems result from this mismatch in the reward centers:

1. The brain is trained to expect very large amounts of dopamine for very little effort.
2. Natural rewards we encounter in everyday life do not produce enough dopamine to satisfy a brain used to supernormal levels, leaving us dissatisfied with everyday living.
3. Supernormal levels of dopamine weaken the brakes in the downstairs brain so that we are more impulsive and less regulated.

The Dopamine Trap and Life Satisfaction

Because of this mismatch between purpose and circuitry, animals and people neglect or no longer enjoy activities that promote survival and authentic well-being. *Supernormal stimuli* are self-destructive.

Examples of *supernormal stimuli* include:

- Junk food
- Pornography
- internet activity in various forms
- Binge-watching TV
- Gaming

- Gambling
- Social media
- Vaping/Smoking
- Recreational drugs/alcohol

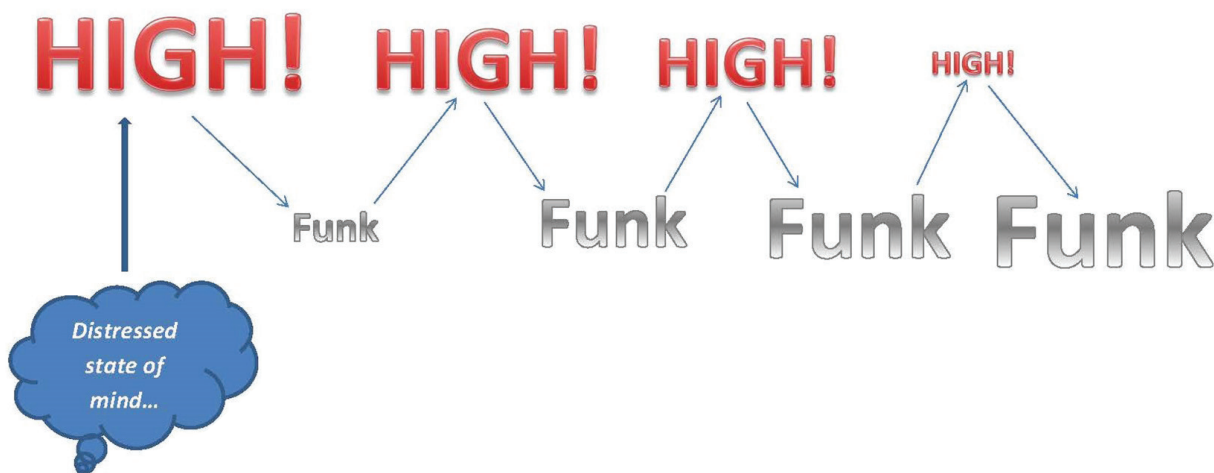
Supernormal stimuli are particularly detrimental to well-being when we use them to *alleviate distress*. As we indulge in a supernormal stimulus to alleviate distress, we get a brief high with significant relief from the distress. Once the brief peak of dopamine makes us feel better and the pleasant experience is over, dopamine levels plummet and the brain returns to its agitated state plus a little more. Neuropsychologist Dr. Todd Bowman calls this a *funk*. If we habitually use supernormal stimuli to try to rid the brain of its distress, we trip into a “dopamine trap” that spirals downward because the high gets progressively smaller and the funk gets progressively larger (**see diagram below**).

Over time, supernormal levels of dopamine lead to *acquired dopamine deficiency*. In this state, *the high is so small and the distressed state of mind is so large that the person can no longer feel enjoyment or pleasure, has little motivation to do anything or to connect with anyone, and can settle into depression, anxiety and hopelessness*. Regularly indulging in supernormal

stimuli during free time can cause a negative attitude and dissatisfaction at work, at home and in our relationships.

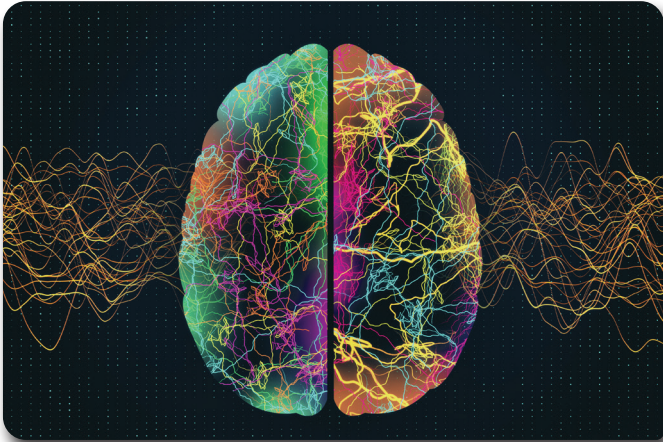
We frequently don't associate dissatisfaction and other symptoms of the *funk* to the use of supernormal stimuli. But the connection becomes clear when you become aware of the progressive impact on well-being. Even if you are not regularly or frequently using supernormal stimuli to calm your distress, awareness of the impact of these sources of dopamine is essential. It will help you remember to reach out and connect with others, engage in something productive, and therefore help you spend less time in distress mode when it happens.

Recall a time when you overindulged in a supernormal stimulus. For example, you may have binge-watched Netflix, signed on to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat and suddenly found that hours had passed, ate a ton of junk food, or spent several hours gaming (or _____). Scan the list of symptoms on the following page to increase awareness of the effects of supernormal stimuli on your well-being.





Supernormal Stimuli Effects



Psychological Symptoms

- Lowered interest in goal achievement or previously enjoyed activities
- “Everything is BORING”
- Feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety or sadness when not allowed access to the SS
- Thinking about the next SS session when needing to focus on work or learning
- Dreaming about the SS
- Experiencing calmness, peacefulness, or euphoria while engaging in the SS (especially if these emotions are not experienced otherwise)
- Downplaying the impact of the excessive habits (“It’s not as bad as alcohol or _____”)
- Justifying excessive use (“Others play or are on a screen more than I am”)
- Excessive frustration or anxiety when “the server is down”
- Distorted perception of time (e.g., suddenly realizing that several hours have passed in what seemed like just one hour)
- Difficulty abstaining from the SS for more than a few days

- Experiencing a loss of personal control while playing/engaging in the SS
- Feelings of guilt or regret after spending much more time than intended

Physical Symptoms

- Sleep difficulties or significant change in sleep patterns
- Decreased personal hygiene (not caring about personal hygiene)
- Poor or irregular eating habits (e.g., waiting until extremely hungry before eating)
- Headaches
- Dry or red eyes
- Sore fingers, neck, or back
- Poor physical health or weight gain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome



Behavioral Symptoms

- Decreased work performance
- Less time spent on hobbies or learning
- Aggression/irritability towards those who prevent or attempt to limit access to the SS
- Frequently playing the game or engaging in SS while neglecting important responsibilities (using the SS to procrastinate work)
- Spending more and more time with the SS
- Playing/accessing the SS at the first available opportunity (e.g., as soon as getting home from work or school)
- Staying up late into the night to play or engage in the SS
- Eating meals while playing/accessing the SS or skipping meals entirely
- When not playing/accessing the SS, discussing it with friends or online

- Large amounts of money spent on new forms of SS

Relational Symptoms

- Lying to others about how much time is spent with the SS
- Declining social invitations so that engaging in SS can continue
- Less interest in spending time with family and friends
- Increased concern expressed by others at the amount of SS time
- A loss of real world friends, but an increase in virtual world friends
- Blaming others (“I would probably play/social media/Netflix less if you wouldn’t nag so much”)
- Marital/relationship difficulties resulting from excessive play/TV watching/porn/social media





Dealing With Distress

The way we deal with distressed states of mind can have a dramatic impact on our well-being. We need to avoid “flipping the lid” in response to distress, and instead use that energy to propel us towards connection with other people or pushing our goals forward. If you use a supernormal stimulus to deal with distress on a regular basis, it is important to your well-being to replace this with a new and healthy activity.



Changing how you deal with distress is a challenge. When you identify the change you want to make, you can use the strategies we have talked about to help put it into effect. *Prime* your environment, use your *cheerleaders*, *boost positive emotion* and *form implementation intentions* to plan your way to success.

A Two-Step Approach

When the *downstairs brain* begins to drive you towards alleviating your distress in an unhealthy way, remember to use the following strategies to calm the brain in the moment.

Step one of dealing with distress is to calm the brain. You can calm the brain in three ways:

- **Breathe.** Put one hand over your heart and one on your gut, imagine a calm, quiet place that makes you happy, and take a few deep breaths. Focus your attention on the air going into and out of your lungs. When your imagination or thoughts start to wander, bring your attention back to the air going into and out of your lungs. Research suggests that doing this exercise for 8 minutes per day would be ideal.
- **Connect** with a person who is genuinely empathetic.
- **Get moving.** This can be as simple as walking or changing body position. But if you can get your heart rate above the rate caused by the distress (through higher intensity cardio or movement), the added momentum as your heart slows will bring your heart and your brain back to baseline.



Step two of dealing with distress is to choose a healthy, rewarding activity or stimulus to replace the supernormal one. Refer back to your Life List goals to brainstorm and come up with healthy reward ideas.

Please note: If you feel stuck or too overwhelmed by distress, it is a good idea to reach out to a therapist or counselor trained in cognitive behavioral therapy or mindfulness-based practices to help train your brain to use a productive response and alleviate the distress.

The Power of True Rewards

Let's look at how you can enrich your life with natural and healthy rewards to strengthen the brakes and, if needed, dial down supernormal stimuli. Think about opportunities to improve your physical health, mental well-being, and your professional and personal relationships. Look through the categories of your Life List, and answer the following questions:

- How could you create opportunities for reward to enrich life and kick back on distress?
- In what areas do you experience distress?
- How do you handle distress in that aspect of your life?
- How can you use one of your character strengths to alleviate or decrease this distress?



Ideas and Resources to Explore

Self-Improvement and Health

- Download an app to improve mindfulness or well-being (*Calm* and *Happify* are two).
- Build the willpower fuel tank by choosing one small change to do consistently throughout the day.
- Start a new exercise routine.
- Explore new healthy foods or research new recipes.

Profession

- Make boring, monotonous tasks a race against the clock.
- Use music to offset boredom (but use new music).
- Plan a way to celebrate small accomplishments in project work.
- Find a way to add a small change to your daily routine (novelty is a reward).
- Reframe aspects of your job that cause distressed states of mind as an opportunity to use a signature strength.
- Make a list of the best parts of your day and focus on and express gratitude for these moments.

Learning/Education

- Learn something new for your hobby, job, physical health, or mental well-being.
- Learn something new with a friend or family member.
- Learn something new (take a class) to expand your circle of friends.



Finances

- Research different systems to learn a new way to set and track a budget (discussed in chapter 13).
- Give yourself a “bonus” if you stick to your goals so you have a reward to look forward to in the future.

Hobbies/Recreation

- Do an online search for a list of hobbies to try out.
- Revisit a hobby you used to enjoy and start it again.
- Plan a trip.
- Schedule in your hobby to ensure you spend time each week doing something you enjoy.

Volunteer/Charity

- Volunteer for your favorite charity.
- Find new and novel opportunities to give at www.volunteermatch.org.

Love/Family

- Plan a simple, fun family event or date.
- Schedule a date to a special place as a reward for achieving a bigger goal.
- Learn a new card game/board game together.
- Use reflective listening in your conversations.
- Start a “happy hour” to discuss how you were each “at your best” during the day.
- Start a new hobby or exercise together.
- Make sure to celebrate your “wins” together.

Friends

- Plan dinner with friends.
- Reconnect with old friends.
- Start a dinner club.
- Focus on getting to know a new person at work.
- Learn a new hobby or sport with friends or to meet new people.
- Volunteer with friends or to meet new people.

Home

- Rearrange a room.
- Organize a drawer or shelf and work your way around the room.
- Paint a room.
- Research new ways to do housework more efficiently and effectively.
- Use lamp lighting or buy a new lamp.
- Listen to music from the decade you were in high school/college while organizing or cleaning.

Spirituality

- Read a spiritual book.
- Take time for spiritual practices daily.
- *Hallow* or *Amen* are good apps to help develop spiritual habits.



Final Thoughts on Supernormal Stimuli

Once you have a solid understanding of the impact a specific *supernormal stimulus* can have on your life, relationships, and well-being in general, the next step is to monitor how it is personally impacting you. This means monitoring specifically for symptoms of the funk after use. Once you are able to recognize the negative symptoms caused by the *supernormal stimulus*, the brain can dial down the dopamine release resulting from that impulse. The final step is to begin replacing the stimulus with a new, productive habit.

Changing a Habit

We all have self-destructive or counterproductive habits that are entrenched in our daily routines. Which mental habits, physical habits, and relational habits would you like to change?

Habits do not involve the need for much willpower because these learned behaviors have become automatic. Any new way of thinking about or framing an activity can be a habit. Putting in place simple, automatic rules in order to limit the options or opportunities to indulge in self-destructive habits is itself a good habit to form.

Let me give you some examples:

- If you are trying to start a vegetarian diet, train your brain to notice and approach fresh fruits and vegetables at a party, dinner table, grocery store and restaurant menu. Avoid meats sections of menus, grocery stores, etc.
- If you are trying to cut back on junk food, only eat one serving. Do not eat and watch TV.



- If you are trying to reduce nighttime drinking, do not have a drink by yourself or on weeknights. Alternate a drink, a soda, and a water when out with friends.
- If you are trying to maintain order... if you get something out, put it away the same day. For daily routines, never say “I’ll get to it later” (such as toothbrush, shaving cream, pocket change, etc., that easily lead to clutter on counters and table tops).
- If you are trying to cut back on TV, only watch TV with other people. Never watch TV when stressed, sad, or feeling rejected.

When trying to address a particular counterproductive habit, ask yourself:

- When you flip into this counterproductive habit, what precedes it?
- What are the social, emotional (distressed states of mind), or environmental cues?
- What new habit do you want to use to replace the old, entrenched habit?

- What motivates you to go after this change?
- What do you see as the advantages of replacing this habit with the new habit?
- When, where, and how will you begin?
- Do you need to purchase, schedule, or put anything in place to set the stage for your new habit?
- What are social (black holes), emotional (distressed states of mind), situational (stressors), or environmental (organized/disorganized space) cues that trip you into your old habit?
- How can you prime your environment to keep your new habit in the forefront of your mind?
- What problems can you predict that will derail you?
- How will you hurdle these obstacles (implementation intentions)?
- How will you reward yourself for making this change?



Consider giving yourself a gift at a certain time in the future. Buy yourself a gift card to be used at the end of this time frame if you are successful at working on forming a new habit. If you give up, plan to give the gift card to a friend or family member instead.

If At First You Don't Succeed

Use any failure in sticking to your new habit as a learning experience, and plan around the same situation in the future. Don't give up and say, "I failed, why bother now?" If you are trying to dial down a supernormal stimulus and give in, make sure you recognize when funk symptoms occur and consciously attribute these symptoms to *supernormal stimulus* use. By connecting negative symptoms to the stimulus, you are training your brain to value that stimulus less. The "failure" then becomes a positive learning experience.

Discouragement and negative thoughts will happen. When you find them standing in the way of persevering towards the change you want to make, **use these questions to argue with yourself.** They will help turn your perspective around.

- What is the evidence that my negative thought, assumption, or conclusion is true?
- Is my thinking narrow? Are there other aspects of the situation that I am ignoring?
- Is my thinking distorted? Am I only focusing on the dark side of things? Am I assuming there is nothing I can do to succeed?
- What action can I take?
- Is what I am thinking productive? Can I take action to change the situation or how I respond to it?



The path to the thriving, awesome, rockin', successful marriage you desire starts with goal-setting and developing the willpower to make those goals happen! The process alone of building your willpower tank and striving to achieve goals as a couple contributes to the “we feel good” of a thriving relationship.

It is important not to overlook the final step in effective goal-setting and willpower building: take the time to stop, reflect on, and celebrate your success at regular intervals. Do not forget to savor your wins!

Discussion Questions

Take some time to discuss these questions with each other. You may wish to jot down some notes in the space provided.

- Why do you think willpower is the foundation of a thriving relationship?
- How do you think willpower fosters good communication?
- How will you work on increasing your willpower?
- Can you target one of your hedonic treadmills with a small change?
- Choose one way to build the willpower tank.
- Food and sleep can refuel willpower. Make a list of ways to help each other when you are running on empty.
- When you recognize that your spouse is running low on willpower, what can you do for him/her?
- What are his/her favorite snacks, and how will you gently suggest you table any serious discussions or decisions until after he/she is refueled?
- What are some rewards and penalties you can put in place for extra motivation?

- How will you savor your wins?
- What supernormal stimuli use do you need to dial down?
- What natural rewards could you build into your day together?
- When can you sit down and have a meaningful conversation every day?
- Are there hobbies you'd like to pursue together?
- How can you grow spiritually together?
- What home projects can you work on together?
- How can you incorporate exercise, movement, or a work-out together?
- Are there charities or volunteer work you'd like to do together?
- Is there a certain topic of interest or area within your profession you'd like to pursue learning more about?
- Are there friends or family members you'd like to plan in more time with?

Add to these lists and modify as you grow in your relationship—especially during the first year as you set the tone for the rest of your married life.

If you want building willpower to be a top five goal, use the goal-setting worksheet on page _____ to develop your plan for increasing your willpower.

Note: Because your success in every area of life is increased by willpower and researchers have shown that you can never have enough of it, consider always having one willpower-building goal on the books.

Discussion Notes:



A PRIME FOR YOUR HOME

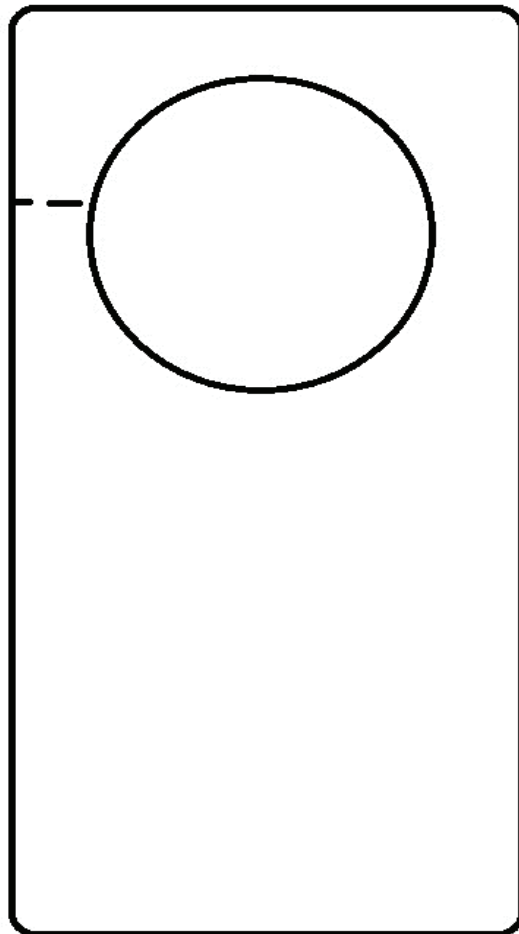
Door Hanger

1) FIND THE DOOR HANGER INCLUDED WITH YOUR MATERIALS.

ON SIDE ONE WRITE A PHRASE OR DRAW A SYMBOL TO REMIND YOU OF A GOAL YOU WILL PURSUE OUTSIDE OF YOUR HOME.

2) ON SIDE TWO WRITE A PHRASE OR DRAW A SYMBOL TO REMIND YOU OF YOUR LOVE GOAL.

THIS CAN BE HUNG ON THE DOOR YOU USE TO GO INTO AND OUT OF YOUR HOME.



The background of the page is a scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills under a bright, cloudy sky. A sunburst effect is visible on the right side, with rays of light extending across the sky. A dirt road winds through the hills, leading towards a distant horizon. The overall atmosphere is bright and hopeful.

Chapter 4

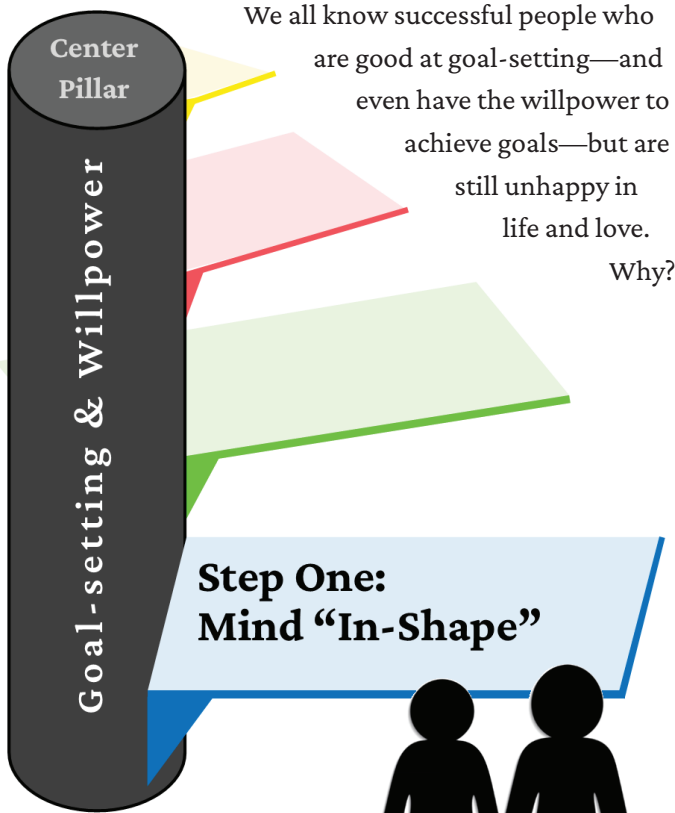
Harness Your Inner Super Powers

Climbing the spiral staircase to your thriving relationship begins by discovering the powers of your mind.



Climbing the Spiral Staircase: Mental Strength

We have talked about how to get on the same page as a couple with your goals, and how to make those goals happen with willpower. These conversations and skills are fundamental to a thriving marriage. As you can see in the following image, they make up the central pillar to our Spiral Staircase.



Because all goals are not created equal when it comes to thriving! We can set goals and achieve them over and over again if we have learned to build and harness our willpower, but if the goals we choose do not

actually lead to thriving, then what have we accomplished?

The problem is that many people either focus on goals that do not lead to happiness or are not aware of goals that need to be set in order to thrive. **The Four Steps of the Spiral Staircase** are meant to fill in this gap. **Step One** is harnessing the superpowers of our own mind, or getting our minds “in shape”.

What is Mental Strength?

A large percentage of what happens externally throughout our day-to-day lives happens outside of our control. What we do have control over is how we respond and where we choose to focus our attention—meaning we have control over our subjective, *interior* experience and our actions. Our subjective experience is made up of sensations and images that pop into our heads, as well as feelings and thoughts that swirl about in the mind. The mind guides our subjective experience of all the circumstances, people and happenings that make up each day. It takes mental strength to guide our own experience rather than be at the mercy of our *external* circumstances.

We are all producing our own movie, or a story of life inside our heads.

Operating from a position of mental strength can be likened to the director’s role. We want to be behind the camera, guiding the narrative and driving the direction, tone and outcome of our story. When we don’t like a scene, we



can shift the focus, and do a retake. The point is, we are in the director's chair—not simply an actor on the screen. In order to operate from this position of power, we need to have the big picture in mind (where is this story going), which we have begun to establish by working on the Life List. We also need a baseline amount of self-regulation. The perspective that our Life List gives and the power of self-regulation can now be applied to developing the mental strength we need to get the most out of life—here and now, as well as into the future.

Defining Mental Strength

Everyone knows physical fitness is important and that eating right and exercising are two ways to make that happen. We may not do what needs to be done, but most people have an idea of what needs to happen to get in shape.

What is far less known is that it is equally important to have a strong mind and brain in tip-top shape. Our minds are our central control! Unlike the physical fitness realm, few people know what is needed to have and maintain a powerful mind. Even fewer people have a daily mental strengthening program in place.

A strong mind:

- is resilient in the face of adversity
- can be objective
- has the ability to set high, meaningful goals and consistently move towards them
- is not paralyzed by fear or anxiety
- can use emotions productively
- is able to tune in to other people
- sees the big picture of life



This state of mental strength is composed of five main powers. Let's explore each one.

1. Insight- the ability to know and understand our own thoughts, feelings and needs.

Have you ever said to a loved one, "I need something from you . . . but I don't know what it is?!" or, "You are driving me crazy . . . but I don't know why!" Or have you ever been in a bad mood, waking up on the wrong side of the bed . . . but can't figure out why you are so glum? When we express these sentiments, we lack insight. Insight is the power to know what we need and why, what we are feeling and why. When we know what we need or why we are feeling the way we are, it is easier to resolve the problem. Things that are out of our awareness or understanding are outside of our control.

2. Emotional regulation/fear modulation- the ability to deal with our emotions and fears in a productive manner.

Have you ever gotten stuck on a certain feeling—frustrated and not able to move past it, or anxious to the point where it is all you can focus on? Have you ever let fear hold you back from pursuing your dreams? Emotions can be a liability when they hijack our lives or limit our aspirations. On the other hand, they can



be a true asset if we use them productively. Emotional regulation helps us use emotion as a motivating force towards action. Fear modulation helps us to proceed with necessary caution and realism without being too limited by anxiety.

3. Response flexibility- the ability to be flexible in how we react in the moment.

Have you ever dealt with a person who falls to pieces in front of you when events don't go according to plan? Or have you ever gotten stuck into a mindset and were not able to switch gears when needed? This demonstrates a lack of response flexibility. The ability to "roll with it" when adversity or obstacles pop up is a very valuable skill—because when does anything in life go according to plan? We start each day with a hypothesis, and then the day is an experiment that may or may not actually turn out the way we think.

4. Empathy- the ability to read other people and situations, which facilitates attuned communication.

Do you know people who have a really difficult time reading between the lines of social cues or subtle hints? Or people who are missing an empathy chip? Connecting with other people is an important part of well-being, and a healthy mind is dependent on the close, trusting relationships we forge when we are empathetic.

5. Moral awareness- the ability to see how our actions impact the world around us.

Have you ever encountered a person who doesn't have a clue about how their actions are impacting other people around them? He goes through life like a bull in a china closet, leaving a wake of frustration and annoyance behind him. When we have moral awareness, we are keenly attuned to how our actions impact others and the world around us. Moral awareness is typically the last power to fully develop within a strong mind.



A Powerful Mind

Integration Equals Well-Being

When we possess all the powers of the mind, we have the ability to guide our own subjective experience—like the director of a movie. A director observes the scene, analyzes the contribution of the different actors (sensations, images, feelings and thoughts) and decides what to focus on, how to respond, and how it pushes the plot of the movie forward in the direction he/she wants it to go.

Our minds are made up of multiple different specialized parts with different functions that produce the scenes we play in our minds. A powerful mind is one that has all the functions of the brain fully developed, in balance, and able to coordinate and work together.

Working well together involves being in sync, which means making an independent contribution that is also coordinated with the other parts and functions. It could be likened to different teams within a large company working on the same product. Each team serves a different purpose to push the project forward. Each team needs to independently function well, but it also needs to connect with the other teams on the project to produce a quality end product.

Scientists use the term *integration* to describe what happens when we power up two parts of the brain and coordinate and sync them. Every time a new link or connection is formed between two parts of the mind and brain, we go from a lower level of integration to a higher level of integration.

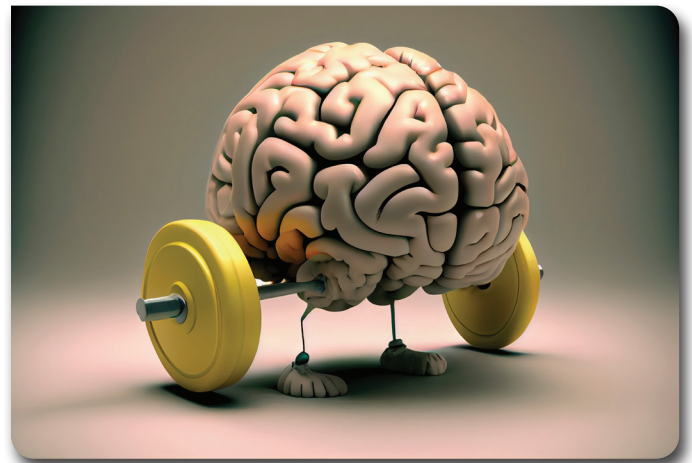
Going from a lower level of integration to a higher level of integration is the essence of wellbeing. Every moment gives us the opportunity to increase integration in our minds and brains, so each moment is an

opportunity to boost wellbeing. In order to understand how to do this, we first need to take a look at the brain and the different parts and functions we have the opportunity to integrate.

Let's start with a few questions to see what you know and how you think about the brain:

When I say “brain,” what images pop into your head?

What are the different functions of the brain? What affects the brain?



We often think of the brain as a single entity—one organ that does a lot of stuff for us. But this idea of the brain is not quite accurate. The brain is made up of many different parts with very distinct functions, coordinating with each other to make the whole thing function properly.



Upstairs and Downstairs

We have already talked about how the brain can be divided into an *upstairs* and *downstairs* in chapter 3, but here is a brief recap. The upstairs brain, called the *cerebral cortex*, is where learning, planning, thinking, empathy and altruistic concern for others occurs. We have discussed that we need the *upstairs brain* to be large and in charge in order to set goals and have the willpower to achieve them.

The downstairs brain, made up of the *limbic system*, *cerebellum*, and *brainstem*, is where impulses, urges, cravings, and big emotions arise. This part of the brain is also the connection between the rest of the body and the brain. The body will often react and register emotion or thoughts before these mental activities hit consciousness.

Strengthening the connection between the upstairs brain and our bodies can give us greater insight into ourselves, such what we are feeling, what we want and why we need it. You can see how integrated your upstairs brain is with your body by trying to detect your own heart rate without directly taking your pulse. Set a timer for 15 seconds. Close your eyes and try to sense your heartrate and count your pulse. Multiply your count by four and compare this number to what your heart rate monitor is reading. If you can accurately sense your own heart rate, you have a high level of integration between the *upstairs* and *downstairs brain* and the rest of your body. If you are unable to sense your own heart rate, then jot this down as important to work on (we will discuss how shortly).

We need a balance and a strong connection between the upstairs and downstairs brain in order to understand and enjoy the present without being self-destructive to our long-term future.



Past and Present

The brain stores everything that happens, and it is a huge anticipation machine. It has several different memory centers. The main one is called the *hippocampus*. There are two types of memories: *implicit* and *explicit*.

Explicit memory is what we think of as “memory” *remembering ourselves in the past*. *Implicit memories are triggered when something causes the brain to recall a past event or experience without entering our conscious thought*. Implicit memories happen outside of our awareness and can affect our gut feel or mood in the present without us realizing it. This can be a good gut feel that makes us go full steam ahead as our mind anticipates the good outcome that happened last time. Or it can be a bad gut feel as the brain anticipates a negative outcome. The key here is that we have this gut feeling, and we do not realize that it comes from the brain remembering the past and trying to predict the future.

We need to integrate memories of the past with the present. We need to increase our awareness when implicit memory is causing us to feel a certain way in the here and now. We have more control over our

response in the moment when fully aware of the factors influencing our reactions and state of mind. What happens outside of our awareness is not within our control. The past is always affecting how we respond in the present. Bringing implicit memory into consciousness builds mental strength through the development of all five powers of the mind (Seligman et al., 2016).

React Mode and Connect Mode

The final complementary parts of the brain we need to integrate are the two modes of the central nervous system (CNS). The CNS can elicit two bodily states: *react* mode and *connect* mode. We need to be able to transition from one mode to the other effectively and with efficiency. We do this by integrating and balancing the two modes, commonly referred to as:

1. Fight, flight, or freeze mode (*react* mode)
2. Calm and connect mode (*connect* mode)

In scientific terminology, these two arms of the nervous system are called the sympathetic (fight, flight, or freeze/accelerator, aka SNS) and the parasympathetic (calm and connect/brakes, aka PNS) nervous systems.

When you watch a thriller movie, how does your body respond to an intense scene? Your heart races, your pupils dilate, you might breathe a little faster, your muscles tense up, and your gut is in knots! What is happening? The fight, flight, or freeze mode of your nervous system has been turned on. The purpose of the SNS is to get you ready to react quickly to a potential threat. We live in a constantly revved up, *reaction*

mode culture—social media, gaming, phones/devices, waiting on the next alert or text to come in, continuous novelty via the internet—a generally, high-stressed, fast-paced life. These constantly activate the sympathetic nervous system. Our bodies cannot sustain a constant fight-or-flight mode. We need a balance, which means we must know how to shift into calm-and-connect mode. Now, think about sitting on the beach, watching a beautiful sunset. How do you feel? Your muscles are relaxed, breathing and heart rate are slowed, pupils are small, the gut is calm, and your head is clear. This happens when we activate calm-and-connect mode (McCorry, 2007).

It is helpful to be aware of how each mode feels. You can experimentally trigger the fight, flight, or freeze mode by asking someone to harshly say “No!” to you very emphatically seven times.

Next, you can activate the calm and connect mode by asking the same person to say “Yes” in a calm and pleasant tone of voice seven times. This is the power of yes! Another way to activate the calm-and-connect mode is diaphragmatic breathing—also called belly breathing. To balance

out the two arms of the autonomic nervous system, put one hand over your heart and one over your gut. Take deep, slow breaths. Try to minimize the rise and fall of your chest and increase the rise and fall of your gut/belly. The chest rises and falls in shallow breathing. When we take a deep breath, the belly extends as the diaphragm contracts, expanding the chest cavity and constricting the abdominal cavity. When the diaphragm contracts, a major nerve of calm-and-connect mode (the vagus nerve) is activated. Vagus nerve activation turns on our calm-and-connect mode (Gerritsen & Band, 2018). Breathe until





you feel this balance happen. It may take several weeks of practice to experience the shift quickly.

We need to be able to activate and balance both states of the body in day-to-day life. The fight, flight, or freeze mode can help us express our needs and feelings in a direct and sincere way and focus on the task at hand. The calm-and-connect mode allows us to focus on another person. In this state, we can also be open to what another person is communicating to us. The connection to others we need for well-being can only happen in calm-and-connect mode, so learning to activate it is an essential skill in this revved up, stressed out, reactive world.

Integration within the autonomic nervous system promotes the development of emotional regulation, fear modulation, empathy, and moral awareness.



Action Step

Set an alarm on your phone to remind you to belly breath X number of times a day.

Perhaps transition from work to home with a five-minute breathing session. This could be a goal under “general self-improvement” on your Life List. An app such as Breathing Zone or Calm can be helpful to get you started on this exercise.

Putting it All Together

Taken together, all the parts and pieces of the mind and brain create the sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts that make up our subjective experience of moment-to-moment life. When we have a strong, integrated mind, we can guide and shape these different aspects of experience. Shaping subjective experience puts us in the director's chair, thus, we gain control over what is controllable.

Here's an example of the "feel good" of integration. Have you ever set a goal to eat healthier? Let's say you make this new resolution right before you go out to lunch with a friend. Even though you reeeeeeeally want a cheeseburger and fries, you stick to your goal, ordering a sandwich and salad off the light and fit menu. How do you feel leaving the restaurant? You feel GOOD about yourself! That is the feeling of integration.

Discuss the questions:

- Why are these powers of the mind important to a thriving life?
- Why are these powers important to a thriving marriage?
- What problems occur when each power is not developed?
- How do you think you develop each power?



Using our Superpowers

A Workout for Your Mind

So how do we fully utilize our mind’s superpowers?

In order to continually integrate our minds and develop the mental strength needed for well-being, we can start by practicing two simple exercises. Notice that I said simple, not easy. You can view these two exercises as if they are a resistance training circuit at the gym—but instead you are simply making the rounds within your mind. The purpose of these exercises is to practice experiencing distraction and then bringing our focus back to where we want it. The distraction serves a purpose, to help us re-focus, like doing a bicep curl in the gym with our minds. Getting rid of distractions is impossible—literally—and without distractions, these exercises would not be a helpful way to strengthen the mind’s ability to focus.

Awareness of Breath

One way to begin to practice awareness of breath is to do 10 deep breaths a day several times a day, so that you can notice the distraction occurring for a brief amount of time (for ten breaths) and bring the mind back to focus. Eight minutes a day is ideal to help increase focus and attention, according to current research. It may help you to relax as well, but this is not a relaxation technique. It is a mental strengthening exercise, so you may even feel tired after this practice. When you get distracted, it’s like the next take on a scene in your movie (as the producer of your own mind). Remember that having distractions is part of the process and how the strengthening occurs. So



think of each distraction as refining the scene in your mind and your ability to guide it with each new take.

Awareness of breath exercise:

Step 1: Place one hand over your heart and one on your gut. Imagine a calm, quiet place that makes you happy. Take a few deep breaths.

Step 2: Focus your attention on the air going into and out of your lungs.

Step 3: When images, feelings or thoughts start to pop into your head and your mind inevitably wanders, notice the distraction, tip your hat to it and say, “Thank you, mind.” Label the distraction as thinking, imagining, or feeling, then accept it (don’t try to get rid of it) and simply bring your attention back to the air going into and out of your lungs. Next, take two!

Why is Awareness of Breath Essential to Well-Being?

It is amazing how such a simple exercise can have so many benefits. Here are just a few:

- Increases self-regulation by increasing the willpower fuel tank and by increasing the brakes mode within the downstairs brain. Both decrease impulsivity and increase our ability to stick to big picture goals in the small decisions of daily life (Jimenez, Niles & Park, 2010; Teper, Segal & Inzlicht, 2013; Trafton et al., 2016).
- Stabilizes the mind and increases emotional regulation (Jimenez et al., 2010; Teper et al., 2013).

- Increases focus and attention, making us less distractible and, therefore, more productive and efficient (Moore et al., 2012; Norris et al., 2018).
- Boosts our ability to listen and tune in to other people—this enhances relationships (Niemiec, 2014, 2018).

The greatest power within our heads is the ability to direct our focus in a productive direction. When we strengthen our ability to focus our attention where we choose, it puts us firmly in the director’s chair of the mind. From this chair, we can direct how we experience life—it gives us maximum impact on what we can control.

When, where and how will you begin to incorporate this important exercise into your daily routine?

Additional Focused Attention Exercises

Focused attention exercises form the foundation of a healthy, integrated, and strong mind. Some people like to do awareness of breath as their focused attention exercise. Breathing is a very good way to strengthen your attention, but it isn’t the only option. There are several other focused attention exercises you can try.

Walking

Walking is something you can do on autopilot, without thinking, and, therefore, can be a good focused attention exercise. This is especially good if sitting quietly is not your thing. When walking, simply focus on your feet hitting the ground. When your mind wanders, simply acknowledge where it wandered and bring your focus back to your feet hitting the ground.

Anything you can do on autopilot can be turned into a focused attention exercise.



Are there daily tasks that could take on new value for you because you can turn them into a focused attention, strengthening exercise?

A Workout for Your Mind: SIFT

The second mental strengthening exercise, called SIFTing, builds upon this ability to focus, and then applies it to systematically powering up and integrating all aspects of the mind and brain. SIFTing was developed by Dr. Siegel (2018, 2010). You can download an audio recording of Siegel talking through this guided exercise at www.drdansiegel.com/resources/wheel_of_awareness/.

Let’s try this exercise, and then discuss how and why it works. Evoke a state of mind by playing a familiar song. Holiday music tends to bring about multiple memories and images, both positive and negative—so it works well for SIFTing practice. Listen to a song of



your choice, and then go through the following steps. I typically play “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” or “Auld Lang Syne.”



Step 1: Go to “Your Hub”

Siegel (2018, 2010) describes the mind as if it is a wheel. The mind has a hub, spokes, and a rim. The hub is a place of calm in which you are in control of where you are pointing or focusing your attention. It is like sitting behind a video camera, controlling when the lens is focusing and what is recorded.

Psychologists call this the observer mind. The spoke of the wheel is the line of focus of your attention. Around the rim of the wheel are the different aspects of your subjective experience—sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts—all things we can choose to focus on.

To go to your hub, start with three slow, deep breaths to focus and calm the mind. If you are in a distressed state and find yourself unable to achieve this at first, you may find that some exercises, called *defusion techniques*, will be helpful. Distressed thoughts can easily consume our attention, causing an inability to focus on anything else. Defusion techniques work by shifting attention away from your distressed thoughts to the *process of thinking*, creating a more balanced perspective.

Try this 3-step process as one example. Say to yourself:

1. “I am soooooo angry!”
2. “I am feeling soooo angry!”
3. “I am noticing that I am feeling so angry!”

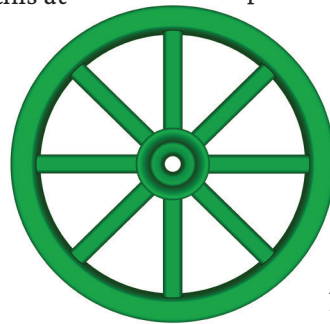
This exercise helps separate you from your thought, creating space to let the feelings attached to that thought subside. Some other examples of defusing techniques can include:

- Slow it down- say what you are thinking verrrrry sloooowwwly to give your mind time to process and choose another thought.

- Cartoon or accent- say your thought in a funny voice, like Mickey Mouse, or accent.
- Put your thought to music.
- Tell your mind “thanks, mind!” for sending that thought, and then let it go.

Step 2: SIFT your mind

From the hub of the wheel, you can systematically focus your attention on the four parts of a state of mind: **sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts**. SIFTing is as simple as asking and answering the question, “What am I sensing, imagining, feeling, thinking?” Asking and answering the question draws your attention and helps you focus on that particular part of your state of mind.



The following is a breakdown of the acronym SIFT.

Senses: Once you “go to your hub” and gain control over your focus and attention, you can turn your attention to what you are sensing in the moment. Focus your attention on each of your five senses. Then point your mind towards your head, your gut, your muscles, and your heart beating. You can also do a body scan starting from the top of your head down to the tip of your toes, asking yourself, “What am I sensing in my head?” “What am I sensing in my neck, shoulders, chest, gut, etc.?” This part of the exercise is especially important if you had a difficult time detecting your own heart rate and will help integrate the upstairs/downstairs, including the whole body. This body-brain connection helps to control urges and increases emotional regulation. The body scan is helpful, but can be very uncomfortable, especially if you have endured a traumatic experience in the past. Implicit memory of the trauma can cause significant

distress. Don't force it. In this case, seeking out a therapist trained in mindfulness exercises can be very beneficial.

Images: After focusing on what you are sensing, turn your attention to your imagination. What images or pictures are popping into your head? Describe them to yourself. Implicit memory frequently takes the form of pictures in our heads—so focusing on images helps us integrate the past with the present. By bringing into awareness the memories contributing to the present state of mind, we gain greater control over how we are responding to the present moment.

Feelings: What feelings are you having? Anger, surprise, joy, sadness, fear, and shame (self-doubt) are the six main categories of emotions we experience (Johnson, 2019). You may not be able to label what you are feeling in the moment, but you can still recognize and acknowledge it.

When we bring feelings into focus, it strengthens the connection and integration between the right and left brain. For right-brained people, labeling the emotion links it to the left brain and has a stabilizing force on strong feelings that may tend to hijack the whole brain. For left-brained people, it helps to open up to the right brain and allow a connection to the logic centers of the brain. This can increase the feelings of satisfaction and connection in daily life.

Thoughts: Finally, focus on your thoughts. Thoughts take the form of words, phrases, and ideas you tell yourself. What thoughts are coming to mind?

This may feel weird when you begin practicing it. That is normal! But if you are

persistent, you will begin to appreciate this exercise. It will help to ground you and help you to feel more in control.

Practice Makes Automatic

Sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts make up our state of mind at any given moment. If we want to revisit the movie director analogy—a state of mind is like a scene in the movie, and these are the four actors in the scene. Mental strength gives us the power to direct these four actors rather than having them run away with the show.



Some states of mind are helpful. Some states of mind are unhelpful and counterproductive to the story we are trying to create. If a state of mind is helpful, then we want to focus on it and use it! This is much like a director of a film zooming in on a particular part or actor in a scene. If a state of mind is not

helpful, like some of the distressed states of mind we have discussed, we can shift the focus of the camera. We can make this shift by first connecting with the sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts that make up the state of mind. By bringing each into high definition in our minds, accepting what we discover, and then changing the focus of our attention, we can pan out the camera and even switch scenes to continue to push the plot forward in a meaningful way.

The end purpose of the SIFTing exercise is to learn to observe, rather than get swept up into the sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts of the moment. From this mental observational perspective, we have the power to determine what states of mind are helpful





or unhelpful and enable ourselves to then focus on a productive response and action.

We all have states of mind that loop, that we get stuck in, and then find ourselves dragged into a downward spiral. Recall the last time you were overwhelmed with worry, so angry you could barely see, a time when you just lost it, or became so frustrated to be frustrated—you became even more frustrated! We all get swept away by unhelpful states of mind sometimes, regretting it later. SIFTing is a way of practicing how to productively and proactively deal with unhelpful states of mind in advance, or a good technique to deploy as a productive reaction to the present moment.

Shifting by SIFTing

Once you are familiar with the basic SIFTing process, you can enhance your response flexibility and emotional regulation by using this exercise to shift your unhelpful state of mind to a productive one. We call this *SIFT it to shift it!* Practice this strategy using the following steps:

1. Put yourself in an elevated, positive, and helpful state of mind. If you are having trouble doing this, play an inspirational song.
2. SIFT this productive and elevated state of mind. How do you feel in your gut, your heart, what tone do your muscles have, are you breathing fast or slow, is your head light or

heavy, pounding or free? Go through images, feelings, and thoughts.

3. Now recall or put yourself in a distressed state of mind. Anxious, overwhelmed, or bored are common states of mind experienced by everyone. Choose one. Shift yourself into this distressed state of mind and fuse with it—meaning really believe it. Say to yourself, “I am so_____!” Repeat the SIFTing process, but anytime you begin to get swept away by one of the four parts of your state of mind (sensations, images, feelings, thoughts), use a defusing technique to go back to your hub.

4. Now use one aspect of your state of mind to begin to shift from the unproductive, distressed state of mind back to your productive, elevated state of mind. Try deliberately shifting from one sense to another and see what happens. One idea would be to shift from quick, shallow breaths in an overwhelmed mode to deep, longer breaths in a determined state of mind. Then try the rest of the SIFT process—shift using images, then feelings and finally thoughts. What works best for you?

If you find yourself in an unhelpful, distressed state of mind, spin the wheel by focusing on a different category (senses, images, feelings, thoughts) and try to shift it. The curiosity in the spin of the wheel can help to defuse the state of mind and make you more open to a shift. As you practice this shift, it will come more easily and automatically.



Ramp up Your Communication Skills

You need good communication to have a thriving relationship. Everyone knows communication matters, especially in relationships, because there are two people involved. The information gap lies in what it actually is, why it is so essential, and how we do it effectively. So, let's do a little more thinking...

- ❑ How would you define good communication?
- ❑ What do you need in order to have good communication?
- ❑ What is miscommunication, and why does it happen?

Focused Attention

Developing communication skills is more than just learning to talk to other people and listening when someone is talking to you. Good communication requires a mind that can focus and is balanced. We need balance in order to know our own minds and be a good sender of information. We have to be able to answer the questions:

- What am I feeling, and why?
- What do I need, and why?
- Why am I reacting the way I am to this situation?

The ability to focus our attention on what another person is trying to communicate is essential to being a good receiver of information. When we focus on a person sending us information, mirror neurons literally make our brains a carbon copy of the other

person's brain. When we tune into another person, we can use our mirror neurons to figure them out!

Miscommunication can happen if there are problems in the sender or the receiver. There are two different



forms of miscommunication which result in imbalance. Energy and information can either be repressed in by the sender or blocked by the receiver. This is called rigidity. We usually describe rigidity as shutting down or zoning out. We can also fail to organize the energy and information so that it explodes out and cannot flow in a productive way. This second type of miscommunication is called chaos. When the flow of energy and information is chaotic, we tend to yell or even totally lose it! With good communication, the flow of energy and information is balanced, organized, and productive in both directions.

Since mental strength is the foundation for good communication, we will finish this section by discussing an important oxytocin-rich communication technique called reflective listening.



The Basics of Reflective Listening

There are four types of expressions you can use to reflectively listen, and you can remember each one with the acronym, OARS (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Rosengren, 2018).

O stands for open-ended questions.

A stands for affirmations.

R stands for reflections.

S stands for summaries.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are fairly self-explanatory. For instance, rather than ask, “Did you have a good day?” use “How was your day?” or “What happened today?” Asking people for more than a one-word or yes/no response invites them into a more substantial conversation that leads to connection.

Open-ended questions have the following characteristics:

- Require a person to stop and reflect.
- Ask for an idea or opinion, “What do you think about . . . ?”
- Uses words or phrases like “describe, why, how, explain, tell me about . . . ?”
- Uses clarifying questions like, “What else?” as opposed to “Anything else?”
- Incorporates hypothetical situations by saying, “What do you think would happen if . . . ?”

Affirmations

The purpose of genuine affirmations is to induce confidence and boost mood in others (condescending

affirmations are not helpful). If you can elevate mood, then coworkers, friends, or family will be in a better state of mind to explore ideas and, if discussing a problem, creatively find a solution. Affirmations that involve signature strengths can be especially effective.

Instead of saying, “You did a really good job today!” you could say “You showed incredible creativity and perspective in how you solved that problem.” Affirmations make a person feel valued and safe.



Reflections

Reflections are the trickiest and most underused technique in regular conversation and conflict resolution. When we see another person in distress—mad, sad, anxious—we immediately want to fix the problem for them! Psychologists call this our righting reflex (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Rosengren, 2018). We want to make things right because we care about the person, especially if they are a close friend or family member. We also want to alleviate our own distress, which is caused by mirror neurons as we mimic the other person’s distressed state of mind. Often what a person in distress needs is simply to feel understood. When you resist the righting reflex, and instead sit in distress with them, you will get a much better response—especially if the negative emotion is aimed at you!

A simple reflection is just a rephrasing of what a person said. “You are really upset.” If your coworker, friend, or family member is upset, this is the type of reflection to start with because it has a stabilizing and calming effect on the brain as the person feels heard and understood. If you want to genuinely connect in

an oxytocin-rich way, refrain from jumping in and problem solving right away. Step back and use some reflections first. Think of this as a way of being supportive and there for the other person.

An Example:

Friend: I am so ticked off at my manager! She gave me more work than I can handle today, on top of what I am already doing!

Simple reflection: Sounds like you had a really stressful day and are feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work you need to accomplish.

You may need to use simple reflections several times before you can sense the person's distress decreasing. Don't be surprised if a simple reflection initially results in escalation of the distress. Remain in your hub and persist in the reflections—the simpler, the better at this stage of the interaction.

After a person begins to calm, you can take your



reflections below the surface and guess what may be underneath the person's statement. Many reflections could take the form of questions—but, instead, we make them statements. More so than questions, statements help a person explore their thoughts and gain greater insight into themselves. Try it. Notice how it feels to be asked a question versus someone simply stating an interpretation of what you said and

why. Statements allow the brain to continue its train of thought, whereas a question makes a person stop, think, and produce an answer. Questions versus statements produce a subtle, but significant, difference in energy flow within the brain.

Different Types of Reflections

Rosengren (2018) describes these categories of reflections, helping you go deeper than a simple reflection:

Below the surface- This is a guess at what is underneath the words being spoken and helps your friend look at things in a different light or angle. "You're thinking maybe your boss doesn't appreciate the extra time you've already been putting in."

Feeling reflection- This type of reflection highlights the emotion that is expressed or implied. "Wow! It sounds like work is causing you to feel overwhelmed and stressed!"

Amplified- Overstating one aspect of what your friend said—emphasizing a feeling or an absolute position they took (this will typically meet with a dialing down on the intensity of what is expressed). "You have so much to do, you couldn't even begin to complete it in 72 hours, let alone an 8-hour workday. There is absolutely no way you can get all of this done."

Double-sided- This type reflects conflicting feelings or ideas in your friend's head. "On the one hand, your job is causing you a ton of stress. But on the other hand, you have really enjoyed the work for the most part and like a challenge."

Continuing the paragraph- Take what your friend says and finish the paragraph. "Your manager is really difficult to work with; she rarely affirms even though



she expects you to perform at high speed. It sometimes leaves you thinking you may want to look for a new job.”

Metaphor- Use a visual image or analogy to reflect what the person is experiencing. “You feel like you are bailing out a sinking ship and falling behind even though you are working at maximum capacity.”

Roadblocks to Receptive Mode

Reflections decrease distress and help you tune into another person’s experience. The righting reflex does the opposite, putting a person in defensive mode, escalating distress, and eliminating the possibility for connection.

According to psychologist Thomas Gordon (cited in Rosengren, 2018), there are several roadblocks to look out for when attempting to create balanced flow and energy within a conversation. These roadblocks are counterproductive to connection and understanding. This is especially true when the particular goal is to defuse distress via reflective listening—rather than compound the problem or end up in an argument.

Roadblocks include:

- ordering, directing or commanding: “You have to do what your manager asks of you.”
- warning or threatening: “If you don’t get along with your manager, you are going to lose your job.”
- giving advice, making suggestions, providing solutions: “Well, what I would do if I were you...”
- persuading with logic, arguing, lecturing: “Time management skills are important. This time management guru always says . . .”

- moralizing, preaching, telling them what they should do out of duty: “You signed up for this job and should fulfill what is expected of you.”
- judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming: “You frequently waste a lot of time on social media—I saw several posts this afternoon.”
- agreeing, approving, or praising (from a superior perspective and with a condescending tone): “You are always right. If you were my employee, I would do everything I could to keep you happy because you are so good at what you do.”
- shaming, ridiculing, labeling: “You’re overly emotional and easily stressed about stuff.”
- interpreting, analyzing: getting out a time management spread sheet.
- reassuring, sympathizing, consoling: “I had a manager once who was completely unrealistic in expectations, too.”
- questioning, probing: “What exactly did your manager say? Why can’t you get that done? Is it really that big of a deal?”
- withdrawing, distracting, humoring, changing the subject.

The intention in each of these roadblocks is to be helpful, but they typically backfire. Instead of receptivity, roadblocks perpetuate the defensive or immobilized mode. Outside of calm and safe space, the person doubles down on the problem or feels the need to defend his or her position.

Problem solving, agreement, constructive criticism, etc., have an appropriate time and place in our conversations and relationships. It is about striking a



balance based on the needs of the moment. Distress requires reflections and defusion until a person is ready to move into problem-solving mode.

The End Game

The goal is to respond with two reflections to every one question, adding occasional, genuine affirmations about strengths and abilities where appropriate. This ratio of two reflections to one question can be more difficult to achieve than you would think.

Once your friend feels understood, ask permission to give input and talk about taking steps to solve the problem. This is not the time to take charge and lay out what they should do. Problem solving should also involve questions and reflections so that you are acting as partners in the process. In this way, oxytocin circulates, perspective and creativity increase, and reasonable solutions can be reached.

Reflective Listening in Action

In order to be an effective listener and gain all the benefits of this interaction style with others, you need to be able to read into what another person says. Rosenberg (2018) uses the analogy of an iceberg. A statement has a surface level meaning to it, like the tip of an iceberg. Going underneath the watermark of this iceberg helps you be open to the person's true meaning as well as more flexible, understanding, and empathetic in a conversation. You can rely on your top strengths to think about the many meanings a person's words can convey. Strengths like perspective, critical thinking, kindness, love, curiosity, creativity, love of learning, and honesty could all be used to foster social intelligence in daily interactions.

Going below the surface of what people say:

Example: "I am an organized person."

A simple reflection to this statement would be: *You are very organized and put together.*

Below the surface examples would include: *You are feeling overwhelmed and behind at work and at home, which is amazing because you are so organized in general* (Emotion reflection).

You are organized, in general, but feel there are some areas you could focus on getting more organized to help with time management (Double sided reflection that would move them to an action).

Practice #1: "I let things bother me more than I should."

Simple reflection:

Below the surface reflections:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Practice #2: Expression of stress by a coworker: "I am so upset...this deadline is so unrealistic!"

Simple reflections to promote calm:

Deeper reflections (emotions, infuse greater meaning, amplify the sentiment, double-sided, metaphor):

Open-ended questions:

Affirmations:

What are some common roadblocks that arise in this situation at work?

Practical Communication Tips

The focus, balance, and good communication that come as a result of developing the powers of the mind create a state of mind that can produce oxytocin. Once your mental fitness program is in place, infuse these other oxytocin-producing techniques into your interactions as well.

1. Make sure you are in calm-and-connect mode when your spouse really needs to have a meaningful conversation. Start with the awareness of breath exercise mentioned earlier until you feel a shift in your brain that puts on the brakes.
2. When talking, sit facing each other. Look left eye to left eye and hold left hand to left hand.
3. Use a calm tone of voice and be aware of your facial expressions. Smile genuinely when you can.
4. If you have a difficult time expressing your feelings and thoughts, try writing them down first.
5. Express forgiveness.
6. Schedule in time for each other because the rest of life will get in the way if you allow it! Try to launch and land your day together

over morning coffee or evening drinks. Plan on at least a monthly date night out (the more often the better), to make sure you are prioritizing your relationship. Put your phones away, and do not invite friends when you have scheduled a date night! Be intentional about infusing your marriage with oxytocin.

Try it

#1 Sit facing each other, phones and any other distractions aside. One person should describe a recent stressful situation you've experienced over the last 2 weeks. The other person should intentionally use the practical tips above as well as the reflective listening strategies. Then, switch roles and discuss how it went.

#2 Re-visit your couple Life List to help you climb this first step of the spiral staircase. Use the information you have learned here to make sure you include goals that address mental strengthening.



Reflect Which oxytocin-enhancing techniques will we put into place immediately? How else can we be more intentional in prioritizing our relationship?

Discussion Questions

- Turn to each other and say in a stern voice, “No!” seven times. How do you feel?
- Now turn to each other in the group and say, “yes!” in a calm and quiet voice. How do you feel?
- Try to get in calm and connect mode by putting one hand over your gut and one hand over your heart while taking three deep breaths. Does this calm your mind?
- How do you think the five powers of the mind (insight, emotional regulation, empathy/social intuition, response flexibility and moral awareness) positively impact a relationship when we possess the power and negatively impact the relationship when it is absent or weak?
- Download the app “Breathing Zone,” and do the breathing exercise for one or two minutes together. Discuss the effect you experienced by this exercise. The effect on the brain and mind is powerful.
- Play a Christmas song and do the SIFTing (wheel) exercise by writing answers to the questions around the wheel picture.
- People are frequently surprised by how much “stuff” is evoked within the mind by a simple song. What did the Christmas song evoke in your mind?
- Do you have an easy or difficult time focusing your attention? Are you easily distracted? Are you distracted by emotions (internal distractions) or by outside forces (external distractions)?
- Do distractions ever get in the way of effective communication? If so, do you think you would benefit personally or professionally by increasing your ability to focus?
- Do you ever overreact and mumble to yourself, “Why did I just do that?” or feel irritated, or sad, or angry, but not understand why? When?
- Have you endured any traumatic experiences or significant loss in your life that could be affecting you in the present through implicit memory?
- Do you have difficulty getting in calm-and-connect mode to have a meaningful conversation with your spouse or fiancé? If so, how will you put on the brakes before you sit down to talk? This may be particularly important to plan when you are coming home from a stressful day at work.
- What are three goals you would like to set to develop the powers of your mind?



SIFTing Exercise

Taking the time to practice SIFTing daily is a helpful time investment. In this way, you make it automatic when you need to use SIFTing to shift out of distress in the moment.

If you'd like an expert to talk you through SIFTing as you get accustomed to it, you can find Dr. Siegel's free download here: https://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/wheel_of_awareness/. Entering a name and email address is required to access it.

Find a quiet space. Set aside 10 minutes and simply answer the questions for each section of the SIFTing wheel on the following page. You can practice this for different states of mind, or play a song like Celebration and SIFT the state of mind it evokes.

SENSES (3-8 minutes)

- What are you seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and sensing?
- Do a body scan. What are you sensing from the top of your head to the tips of your toes?
- What are you sensing inside your head?
- Are your muscles tense or relaxed?
- What do you sense in your gut?
- Is your breathing quick or relaxed?
- Is your heart pounding or beating slowly?

IMAGES (0-3 minutes)

- What pictures are popping into your head?
- Does this picture correspond to a particular memory?
- How does this memory relate to your current state of mind?

FEELINGS (1-5 min)

- What emotions are running through your mind?
- Frustrated, upset, angry, irritated?
- Sad, discouraged, blue, down?
- Bored, uninspired, disinterested?
- Happy, playful, interested, enthused, curious, inspired, grateful, loved, amused?
- Afraid, anxious, worried, overwhelmed?

Return to the hub after each section, using the three defusion statements:

I am so ___; I am feeling so ___; I am noticing that I am feeling so ___.

If your current state of mind is not helpful, answer the following questions to shift focus:

What signature strengths can I focus on using?

What goal can I focus on working towards?

THOUGHTS (1-5 min)

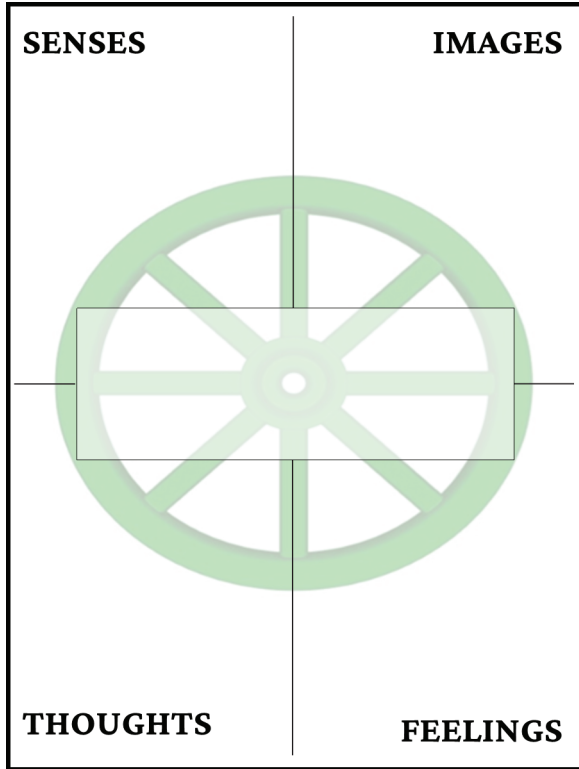
- What words are running through your mind?
- What is the tone of voice being used to express these words or phrases?
- Are these words or phrases encouraging you to go after important goals?

- Other emotions not mentioned:
- What sensations, thoughts, and images lead to and correlate with your current feelings?
- Are these words or phrases encouraging you to go after important goals?

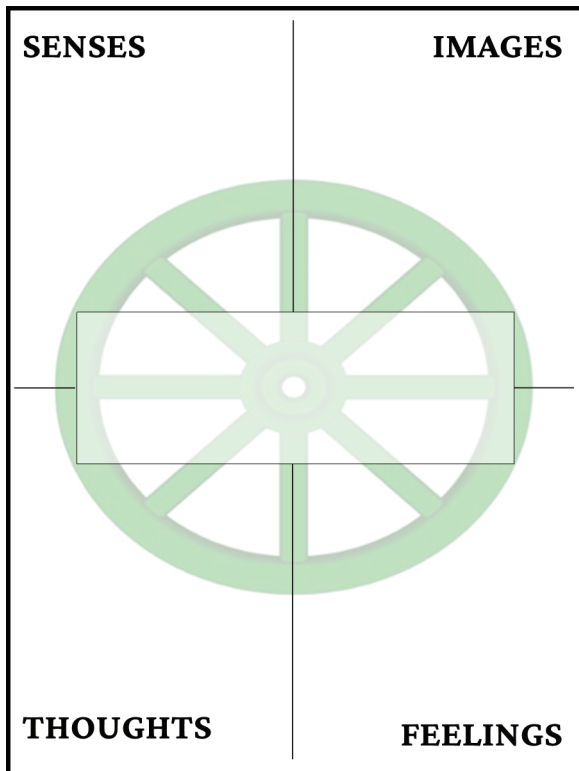
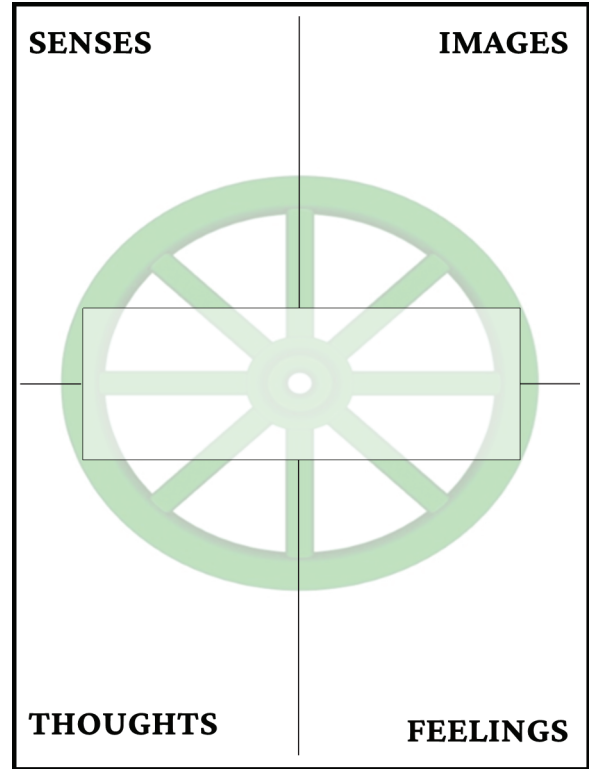


SIFT-IT-TO-SHIFT-IT Exercise

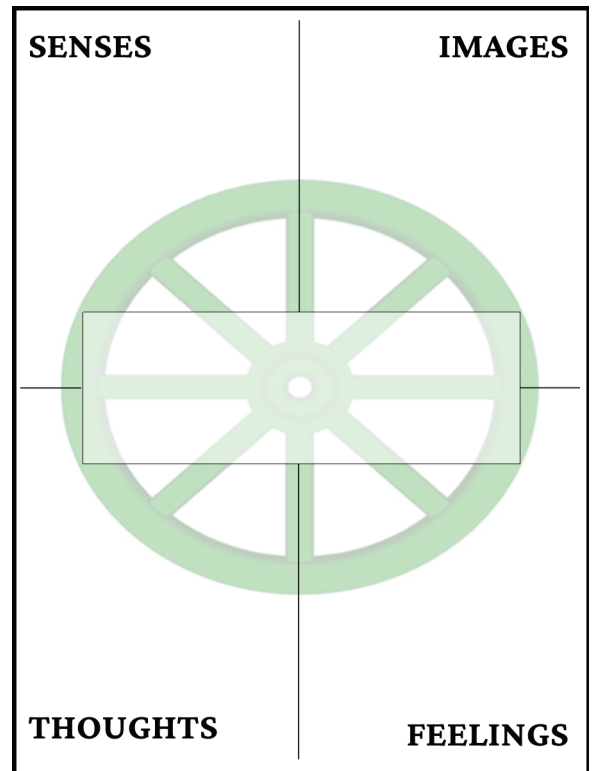
- Choose an unproductive state of mind that you frequently experience, and place it in the box.
- Defuse with it using the 3 phrases: *I am* ____ . *I am feeling* ____ . *I am noticing that I am feeling* ____ .
- Or, choose another defusion technique found in this chapter.
- List the senses, images, feelings and thoughts that accompany this state.
- Next, determine the productive state of mind to which you will shift, write it in the box, and note the senses, images, feelings and thoughts to which you will then shift in order to effectively transition to this new helpful state of mind.
- Summarize how you will plan to shift to the helpful, productive states of mind.



Shift
to . . .



Shift
to . . .





Chapter 5

Look Out World, Here We Come

**Developing a mission for your marriage
gives you meaning and satisfaction.**

A Meaningful Life

When you describe the kind of life you want, is the word satisfaction a part of it? Life and relationship satisfaction is what thriving is all about. In order to have the satisfaction you want as a couple, you must set mutual goals, have the willpower to achieve them, and be able to effectively communicate. These skills are necessary to be equal and cooperative partners in life! They should sound familiar because we have already covered how to develop these essential components of your thriving relationship.

Recall we also pointed out that all goals are not created equal. Unfortunately, this kind of “spinning our wheels” happens a lot. There are many assumptions in life leading us to set goals that are either futile or even detrimental to well-being.

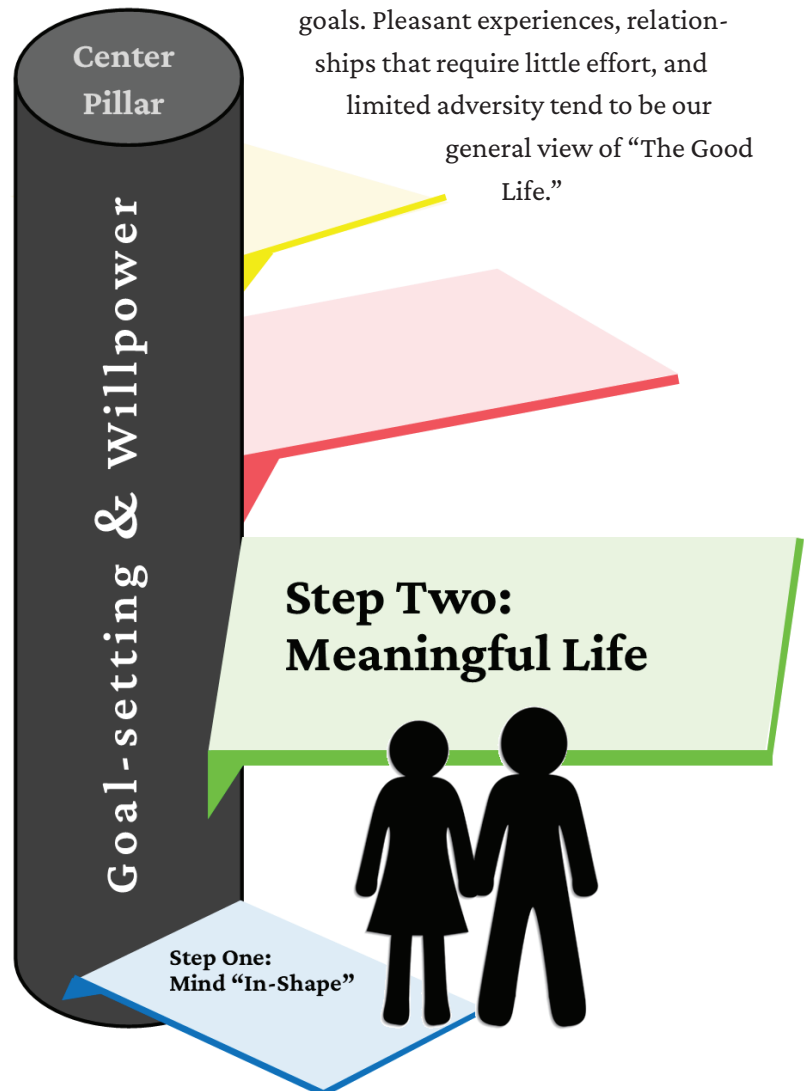
Climbing the Staircase: Authentic Happiness & Living a Meaningful Life

The purpose of step two in the spiral staircase to your thriving love is to empower couples with the knowledge to make sure they are chasing dreams that result in life satisfaction and fulfillment. This step is also imperative to having an oxytocin-rich relationship. A brain that is generally stressed or depressed from pursuing goals that lead to dissatisfaction (or obsessed with hedonic treadmills) cannot produce oxytocin. But a balanced, authentically happy brain can produce more and more oxytocin as time goes on. So, step two is all about creating lasting happiness, in love and in life!

Define your picture of “The Good Life:”

Contrast this with how you would define a meaningful life:

According to psychologists, a meaningful life is what leads to satisfaction, however, our personalized picture of an ideal life frequently excludes meaningful goals. Pleasant experiences, relationships that require little effort, and limited adversity tend to be our general view of “The Good Life.”



Think about the satisfaction you get from:

- selflessly helping another person.
- doing well at something.
- purchasing a sports car or a new power tool.
- or ladies, buying a new pair of shoes... I'm talking Prada-grade, really nice shoes!

Compare these three activities. You will find a substantial difference in both the amount of satisfaction we get and how long the satisfaction lasts among them. Most people (unless they have a personality disorder) derive the greatest amount of and most enduring satisfaction from helping others. In contrast, most people receive the least and most fleeting satisfaction from getting some new stuff. One is meaningful, and the other is not.

Dr. Martin Seligman is known as the father of positive psychology. This is an area of research focused on discovering what truly makes people happy. In the book *Flourish*, Seligman defines a meaningful life as: **“Us[ing] your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are.”** (2002, p. 263)

A meaningful life has nothing to do with retiring early, being financially independent, traveling Europe, driving a Porsche, or enjoying caviar and champagne on your own private yacht. None of these activities are bad in and of themselves. However, thinking that happiness ultimately lies in this type of pleasant life (by wishing it was a reality) is like going after a mirage in the desert. It is an illusion that results in disappointment, disillusionment and discouragement. Most of us know this in our upstairs brain, but do we

REALLY believe it deep down in our gut? And, if we believe it, do we live accordingly?

Achieving a mind in balance gives us a broader perspective and the long-term vision to discover our purpose in life. Effective communication skills are essential to keeping both partners on the same route to life fulfillment and are an outgrowth of a powerful mind. These initial components of the staircase also strengthen our self-regulation so we can develop and focus on our mission over time.

Characteristics of Happy People

Once you have set the goals to develop willpower and a strengthened mind, you are ready to work on developing your joint mission for a meaningful life. A meaningful life is an essential part of authentic happiness, but sometimes our own ideas about happiness don't align with positive psychology research. A brain that is happy can also produce oxytocin. Since happiness is so essential to our thriving relationship, we have to fill in yet another information gap. Let's take a few moments to answer some questions about what you think makes people happy, and see how meaningfulness fits into it.





What do you think are some characteristics of happy people? In other words, what makes people happy?

Another way to evaluate what you really believe leads to happiness is to write down your if list. How many times a week do you mutter to yourself, “I would be so much happier if . . .” Come up with five things you commonly wish for under your breath when all the chaos in life breaks loose.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Now that you have your ideas on happiness in mind, let me throw out two different lists of characteristics.

First, consider a person who is well-educated, attractive, healthy, and financially well-off.

Is this person happy?

Now imagine someone who has temperance, courage, wisdom, optimism, a sense of justice, transcendence, and is loving.

Which of these two people is more likely to be happy?

Some people think it is the first list, others the second, and the rest believe that both lists impact happiness. We are not taking a major detour here from the path of research into religion. Though if you have a religious background, you may be having flashbacks from Sunday school when you look at the second list of characteristics. But in fact, these six

characteristics—temperance, courage, wisdom, justice, humanity and love, and transcendence—did not come from a theological text.

Rather, they are the characteristics that Dr. Seligman, the father of positive psychology, and his colleagues discovered when they looked at what makes people happy all over the planet. This group of scientists were primarily atheists and agnostics, so they were surprised to find that wealth, health, and physical appearance had no influence on people’s overall happiness as long as the most basic needs were being met. They also found a slightly inverse relationship between happiness and level of education. This means that the farther someone climbs up the education

ladder, the less happy he or she tends to be. Therefore, a wealthy runway supermodel (or NFL football star) with a PhD is not likely to be happier than you or me.

Now I want you to take a look at the five things on your “if” list. How many of those “if’s” revolve around the six characteristics of happy people?

I would be so much happier IF:

- I was 10 lbs lighter.
- I had my degree in_____.
- I won the lottery.
- I had the power and influence to make ____ happen.
- I got that promotion or a different job.
- I did not have to work and could just travel to amazing places.

We do not tend to “if-list” the six characteristics of happy people. No one mumbles to themselves, “I



would be so much happier if I had a greater sense of justice....or if I had more transcendence.” I definitely did not do this when I was younger. However, knowing this research now, I do. I still think I would be happier if I won a million dollars, but now I add “so that I could set up my own research center and enable more people to thrive in life!” I know, not everyone is a nerd like me. But this qualification turns my pleasant life goal into a transcendent, meaningful one.

Perhaps now you’d like to steer your “If-List” toward a meaningful life? According to Dr. Seligman, you need two things to infuse your life with meaning. You need to develop the character strengths linked to authentic happiness, and then, use them in service of a purpose bigger than yourself. Each person has a set of signature strengths. Signature strengths are a person’s go-to characteristics. They are easily accessed by the person and give them a sense of value and self-confidence when used in daily activities. Meaning researchers, drawing from Aristotelian philosophy, call this use of character strengths to promote good a eudemonic life philosophy, in contrast to a hedonic life philosophy. Those with a hedonic life philosophy are simply searching for one pleasant experience after another (more dopamine), rather than working toward a meaningful mission or purpose.

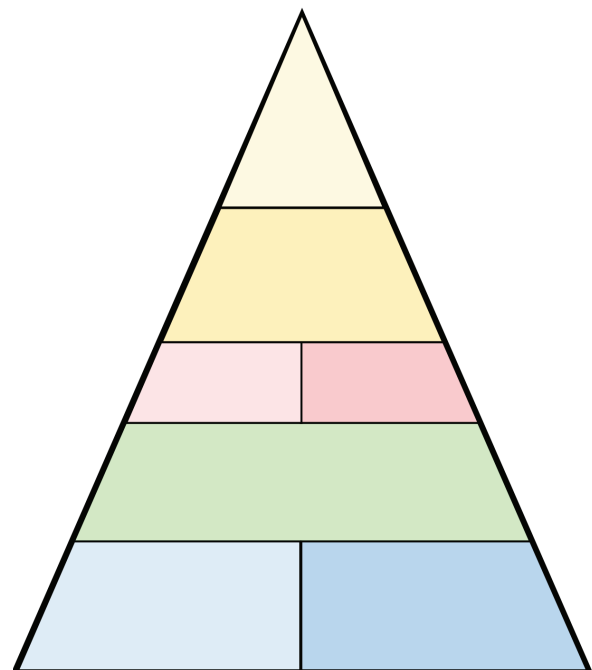
Dr. Seligman and Dr. Christopher Peterson have broken down the six characteristics of happy people into twenty-four character strengths, which they refer to as the list of sanities (2004). Note that I listed optimism as a separate character strength because it’s so important to happiness. Optimism is a sub-set of hope, found under transcendence in the positive psychology list.

The seven main categories are:

- Temperance
- Optimism
- Courage
- Humanity and Love
- Justice
- Wisdom
- Transcendence

Let’s look at these seven qualities more closely. They are all interconnected and build on each other. I like to demonstrate their interconnectivity in the form of a happiness pyramid. The most fundamental strengths make up the pyramid’s base. Each subsequent layer of the pyramid relies on the layer underneath and sets the stage for the layer above it. As a thought-provoking exercise, pencil in where you believe each characteristic belongs on the pyramid. Don’t read any further until you take a guess!

The Happiness Pyramid





The base of the pyramid is made up of temperance and courage. **Temperance** is the intelligent direction of the appetites, rather than the suppression of them. The four main appetites are food, money, sex, and power. **Courage** is the ability to endure discomfort right now to attain a greater good in the long-term future. **Temperance** and courage make up our essential friend—self-regulation! Development of these characteristics keeps us off hedonic treadmills. Regulating dopamine in the brain broadens our vision of reality. In other words, we can actually see the bigger perspective in life when dopamine is kept in check.

The next layer of the pyramid is wisdom. **Wisdom** is the ability to see reality as it is. It enables you to have an objective, unbiased world view. Self-regulation sets the stage for this, and developing a powerful mind helps to build it!

The third layer of the happiness pyramid includes justice and love. Once we have some wisdom to see reality more objectively, we can use it in how we relate to other people. We can start asking the question, “What do I owe them, and what do they owe me?” This is **justice**. Justice and love are on the same level because these two character strengths work together. **Love** is going above and beyond the call of duty or what we owe a person. This means doing something that is difficult, or even causes personal pain, to promote our loved one’s good and well-being. Love is given and received. We cannot recognize when someone is loving us if we do not have an objective view of what they owe us.

A person who has a distorted sense of justice is very high-maintenance. He or



she thinks that loved ones owe them the world, but very little is owed in return. These high-maintenance people have a very hard time being loving toward others. They often cannot recognize love from another person either, even when it stares them in the face! Psychologists have found that you need loving relationships in your life if you really want to be happy—more on this later (Peterson, 2006). But you can’t stop there.

The fourth layer of the happiness pyramid contains transcendence. **Transcendence** is having a sense of higher purpose, higher being, or higher power in life. This sense of purpose found through transcendence is the essence of a meaningful life.



Finally, the pinnacle of the happiness pyramid is what psychologists call learned optimism. Optimism is technically placed under the main category of transcendence, but it is so important to happiness that it deserves its own layer on the pyramid. Dr. Seligman has

written two books on it (*Learned Optimism* and *The Optimistic Child*). So, it needs to be mentioned, especially when you are talking about thriving love and life. Optimism is not just having a glass half-full view of life. Nor does it equate to those semi-nauseating, always positive, shiny, happy people who run around skipping and holding hands. Rather, true **optimism** is a productive way of thinking and responding to stress that can be learned and practiced.

Refer back to chapter three (or Dr. Seligman’s book) for a more detailed review of learned optimism.

The seven foundational characteristics of happiness foster personal growth in an integrative and balanced direction. Recall



from the previous chapter on mental strength that the essence of well-being lies in moving from a lower level of integration to a higher level of integration.

Temperance allows us to enjoy life without letting emotions and impulses block us from bigger picture long-term goals. **Courage** is an integration of the logic and emotion centers of the brain as we modulate fear.

Wisdom is an objective view of reality that can minimize distress. This helps us maintain a clear perspective as we integrate the past and present by bringing implicit memory into conscious awareness and move into the future.

Justice creates a balance between individuals and between an individual and any organizations in which they are involved. **Love** is an interpersonal integration of the goals and aims of two people.

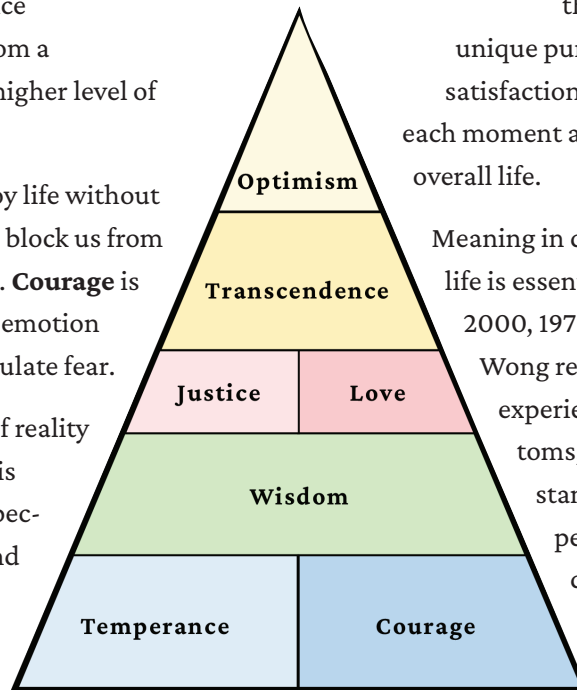
Transcendence is the integration of an individual with the world. **Optimism** creates a balanced, integrated response to adversity in daily life.

If happiness is found in the process of becoming a more and more integrated person, it is clear why these seven qualities are fundamental to a stable, durable sense of life satisfaction.

A Fully Meaningful Life

Ultimately, these seven qualities of happy people can be applied to living a meaningful life. Putting dopamine in balance through self-regulation helps a person to minimize pleasant-only orientated

The Happiness Pyramid



activities. This opens one up to the discovery of his or her own unique purpose, giving life meaning and satisfaction in both the micro-experience of each moment and the macro-experience of overall life.

Meaning in daily living and across all areas of life is essential to our happiness (Frankl, 2000, 1979). When life lacks meaning,

Wong reported (2012) that we frequently experience physical and mental symptoms, without necessarily understanding the source of them. A person who experiences life as depleted of meaning will most often have little energy, show little motivation for acting, lack libido and love, and have

little interest in the outer world. Of interest to researchers is that this person can have what seems to be a perfectly normal health, both mentally and physically. The loss of meaning of life is a hidden killer; it is like a worm eating an apple from within.

Without meaning, the brain becomes distressed. We tend to treat the distress with an immediate and fleeting “fix” in the form of dopamine—as we have discussed in depth. Meaning research refers to these dopamine traps as “compensatory meaning,” which leads to a slow spiral downward (Wong, 2012).

Reflect

When bad or difficult things happen during the day, how do you respond?



Character Strengths

So, what is a meaningful life, and how do we establish a life that is *fully*, rather than *partially* meaningful? We start by identifying your go-to strengths, so that you can use them in service to that “something bigger” you are called to do. Let’s look at all the character strengths.

The six main categories of character strengths contain 24 total strengths. It is interesting to take a look at all of them. The sub-characteristics will help you look at the major categories from different angles.

Follow the steps for the card shuffle below. Take out your green Signature Strengths cards contained in your materials. They look like this:



Wisdom

Creativity: Thinking of different (novel) and productive ways to think about and do things; originality, ingenuity.

Curiosity: Taking interest in what is going on around you; finding information and other people fascinating; openness to new experiences.

Judgment/Critical Thinking: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence; open-minded.

Love of Learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and information either on one’s own or in school; enjoying adding systematically to one’s knowledge.

Perspective: Being able to provide wise advice to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people; wisdom.

Courage

Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right; acting on conviction even if unpopular.

Card Shuffle

Lay out your cards and choose what you think are your top 5-7 strengths as well as your fiancé or spouse’s top 5-7 strengths. Use this list of descriptive statements to help you determine your signature strengths:

- This strength gives me a sense of “This is the real me!”
- I get a feeling of excitement when displaying or using the strength.
- It is easy to use the strength.
- I feel energized, not tired, after using the strength.
- I feel joy, pride, happiness and zest when doing something that uses the strength.

Perseverance: Finishing what one starts; persisting through obstacles; enjoys completing tasks.

Honesty: Acting in a sincere way; speaking the truth; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

Zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; excited to be alive!

Humanity

Love: Valuing close relationships with other people, being close to people; caring for others and being cared for by others; promoting the good of other people.

Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them, taking care of them; compassion.

Social Intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of others people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

Justice

Teamwork: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.

Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving others what is owed to them.

Leadership: Encouraging a group to get things done and at the same time maintain good relationships within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen; having a positive influence on other people.

Temperance

Forgiveness: Letting go of hurt or anger when someone has done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not seeking revenge.

Humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is; modesty.

Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking big risks; not doing or saying things that will later be regretted; cautious.

Self-Regulation: Controlling what one feels and does; willpower.

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in different domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science—and people's moral goodness.

Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen, taking time to express thanks.



Hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

Humor: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side of things and situations.

Spirituality: Having consistent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; having beliefs about the meaning of life that influence behavior and provide comfort in bad times; faith; religiousness.

Dr. Martin Seligman and his colleagues have developed a self-assessment, called the virtues-in-action



questionnaire, to measure these 24 character strengths in an individual person. This test will rank these characteristics from strongest to weakest.

You can visit authentichappiness.com to take the VIA (virtues-in-action) questionnaire at no cost. It is a good way to discover where you have the most opportunity for growth and development (which

characteristics could use some work) as well as identify the strengths you most easily access. The test takes 15-20 minutes. Don't overthink the questions, but simply go with your initial response. Once you have completed the survey, compare the list of your top strengths according to the scored online assessment with the list you created yourself. The online VIA survey is not foolproof, so consider both lists to finalize your true five to seven signature strengths. As a couple, you can then explore how your go-to strengths fit together and do what positive psychologists call *strength work*.

Strength Work Builds the Foundation of a Meaningful Life

In order to live a meaningful life, we need to know our strengths and foster a transcendent outlook.

Psychologists define a meaningful life as ***using your signature strengths in service to something bigger than yourself*** (Seligman, 2012). According to this definition, there are two essential components to a life full of meaning—an understanding of how to use our signature strengths and a clear picture of “something bigger than ourselves” to guide us. This something bigger is reflected in our core values. Values are aspects of life that guide the direction of our goals.

To establish a meaningful life, we will:

1. Introduce the concept and process of strength work. We began this step by taking the VIA to discover our signature strengths list.
2. Determine our own personal set of core values.
3. Form value-guided, strength-fueled goals on our Life List.



Strength Work

We need a basic competence in all seven main categories of character strengths, but we have identified that each person has their own signature strength list. This list is composed of those strengths we identify with most, come easy to us, and energize us when used (Niemiec, 2018). We have already determined this list by taking the VIA survey. Now, we are going to dive a little deeper into the strength research and systematically begin to incorporate these qualities into daily living through strength work.

Niemiec (2018) describes strength work as a three-step process—Aware-Explore-Apply (AEA):

1. Become aware of your top strengths and a few of your lower strengths.
2. Explore how you have used your strengths in the past.
3. Apply your strengths in new ways and different areas of life.

Aware

It is helpful for well-being to spend time becoming more aware of our go-to strengths and exploring how we use these strengths in daily life. You have already

begun this process by solidifying your signature strength list.

Once you have taken the VIA, you can increase awareness of strength use by creating a name plate or strengths frame to display in a place you frequently work (or several different areas at work and home). Simply take a blank sheet of paper, write your name surrounded by your signature strengths, and pop it into a frame. Keep it simple with a black marker or get creative if it's a signature strength for you (use Photoshop or different colors and images). Place this frame on your desk or in a visible place, and you have a prime reminding you to recognize these characteristics throughout the day. You can also set an alarm on your phone or display a sign (perhaps in a drawer you open frequently) that asks you, "What strengths have I used in the last hour?"

Explore

The second phase of strength work involves exploring how you use your strengths, where you use each signature strength in your current routine, as well as how you have habitually utilized them in the past. When exploring personal strength use, ask and answer the question: Am I underusing or overusing this particular strength? Overuse and underuse of signature strengths can cause us problems or distress. For example: overuse of curiosity can result in nosiness or intrusiveness into other people's lives. Zest can be an inspiring attribute or annoying when overused. Underuse of perseverance at home might manifest itself as giving up instead of resolving a conflict with your loved one; overuse of perseverance at work might mean you are obsessive and perfectionistic about tasks until they are completed, putting you behind.

Keep some notes in your phone, on your computer, or on signature strength cards about when, where, and

Discovering and Discussing Your Core Values

Which Direction to Grow?

The second part to a meaningful life involves clearly defining the “something bigger than yourself” that will challenge you to use your strengths and give life a sense of integration with other people, your community, and the world. This “something bigger” is typically reflected in your core values. We choose charities to volunteer for because these organizations align with one or more of our core values. Values are not destinations, goals, or personal attributes. Rather, values are directions, guiding the choices we make and the direction we choose to grow (Hayes & Smith, 2005). When we make decisions, moving toward our values, then we feel good about our lives (the best kind of natural reward for the brain).

Values not only guide personal growth but typically drive us to promote other people’s growth in a positive direction, including those closest to us, as well as those within the greater community/world. Values have the potential to guide and give meaning to the micro-experience each day and the bigger picture we are continually working toward. When we see problems that violate our values—we get angry or indignant. When we see our values promoted or lived, we are elevated, inspired, and united with other people.

Reflect Before we look through a list of values, answer the following questions:

- What causes are you passionate about?
- Who do you find inspiring?
- What problems or adversity do you see on the news or in other people’s lives that you would like to help alleviate?

Core Values

The following is a list of possible core values—you can add to it or subtract from it, as you see fit. You will notice some overlap between strengths and values. For instance, love is both a strength and a value. We want to exercise the strength of love in our relationships, and we want to see love manifested in the world around us, guiding our own actions and the actions of other people.

Selflessness/Self-Giving: Concern more for the needs of others than one’s own.

Autonomy: Self-directing freedom.

Health: The state of well-being in body, mind, or spirit.

Freedom: The right to act, speak, or think as one wants without extrinsic control or restraint; the ability to choose what is good.

Altruism: Selfless concern for the well-being of others.

Equality: The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Liberty: The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s way of life, behavior, or political views.

Compassion/Empathy: Sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

Love: To promote the good of another.

Acceptance: The action or process of being received as adequate or suitable.



Knowledge: Facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education.

Understanding/Complete Intelligibility: The power of comprehending.

Morality: Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.

Excellence: The quality of being outstanding, extremely good, or accomplished.

Wisdom: The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment.

Truth: That which is in accordance with fact or reality.

Progress/Innovation: The process of improving or developing something over time.

Purposefulness: Having meaning and significance.

Transcendence: Sense of a higher purpose, higher being, or higher power.

Safety/Security: The state of being free from danger or threat.

Justice/Common Good: The quality of being fair and reasonable.

Responsibility/Fulfilling One's Duty: The state of living up to expectations and being accountable for one's actions.

Goodness: The quality of being morally good or virtuous.

Harmony/Integration: A consistent, orderly, or pleasing arrangement of parts; congruity.

Simplicity: Being natural, sincere, plain or easy to understand.

Order/Beauty: The arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method that is pleasing to the aesthetic sense.



Card Shuffle

Locate the blue Core Values cards included in your materials. They look like this:



Core values typically correspond to causes you care about and people you find inspiring. You may need to make several passes through the cards to narrow down the values you are most passionate about promoting for the benefit of yourself, of others, and of the world. You may also group values together. For example, love could be grouped with altruism and selflessness. Excellence could be grouped with responsibility and wisdom. Try to narrow it down to 5-7 values or groups of values.

Card Shuffle

When defining your core values, flip through the value cards and group them into three groups:

- Strongly held value
- Moderately held value
- Weakly/not at all held value

You strongly hold a value when you want to:

- manifest the value more in your own life.
- see it more as a part of the lives of others.
- facilitate it within your family, company, community, and world at large.

Other questions to ask yourself as you narrow down your list:

- Why did you choose your particular degree or profession?
- What do you value most? What is worth living for?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are three things that truly matter to you in life?
- If you had to choose one value from your core value list as the theme for your daily life— what would it be?

Value-Guided, Strength-Fueled Goals on your Life List

Establish a life full of meaning, rather than one restricted by partial meaning, by populating your entire Life List with value-guided, strength-fueled goals. You have your list of signature strengths and have decided on a set of core values. Now, let's apply these to some goals on your Life List.

Record your core values below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Record your signature strengths below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Forming goals in this way boosts satisfaction in moment-to-moment living, ensuring we head in a worthwhile direction. You will also feel good about yourself in the process because these goals require you to use your signature strengths—the facets you esteem most about yourself.



Card Shuffle

Steps to forming value-guided, strength-fueled goals:

1. Choose three areas of the Life List as your focus for meaningful goal-setting. Just as we did in the initial goal section, it can be helpful to choose one area you are highly satisfied with, one area you are somewhat satisfied with, and one area in which you are experiencing frustration. You may discover particularly high satisfaction in categories where you already have some meaningful goals in place.
2. Set one short-term goal and one long-term goal in each area.
3. Look at your core value list, and pair them with the goal(s) that promotes or reflects each value. If you do not see any of your core values promoted by or reflected in your goals, modify the goal to align with one or more of your core values.
4. Try to add more values to your goals by re-wording the goal or set a new goal that reflects more of your core values.
5. Now look at your strength list. What strengths will you use to achieve these goals? Pair the strength cards with the value and Life List cards. Can you modify each goal to challenge you to use additional strengths?

Here's an example of this process from my corporate coaching experience:

One participant had a common goal to get in better shape. However, he had tried for many years to increase exercise and make a healthy shift in eating habits to no avail. He wanted to focus on getting more active and felt that the biggest obstacle to change was lack of time.

His core value list included love, selflessness, altruism, morality, health, excellence, responsibility, and purposefulness. His strength list included love, leadership, appreciation of beauty and excellence, perseverance, creativity, bravery, and fairness.

Although health was on his core value list, he didn't feel the goal was aligned with his core values of love, selflessness, responsibility and purposefulness—which were stronger held values than health itself. We discussed with him how he felt in the evening after working out versus when he didn't. He recognized that working out reduced stress and aided his general sense of well-being. However, he felt guilty taking the time away from his family (a very common sentiment for parents trying to juggle work and family life).

So, we got creative. His present point of view on working out was—I have to hit the gym on the way home from work for an hour. This aligned with his core values of health and excellence but seemed to contradict his core values of love, selflessness, responsibility, and purposefulness. But, could he find a way to work out with his teenage son part of the time? In our sessions, he had frequently expressed a desire to model good behaviors for his kids—was this any different?

We discovered he had always wanted to get into cycling/biking—but never did because of the time it would take from his family. He also liked the idea of



learning to lift weights, and both activities would be something that might interest his son.

We revisited the goal from this perspective. If he were to explore cycling and lifting with his son whenever possible, it would align with his values of love, responsibility, purposefulness, health, and excellence using the strengths of love, bravery (trying something new) and leadership as he demonstrated for his son new habits to live a healthier life. We also discussed shifting his overall perspective on exercise, as a personal energy booster and stress reducer (especially the resistance training/weight lifting). With more energy and better stress management, he had more to give at home. He could be more present and available to his children and wife, even when his son couldn't join him at the gym. He also wanted to be around for his children and grandchildren—as well as be healthy rather than a burden on them as he aged. From this vantage point, exercise really did align with his core values of responsibility, love, and purposefulness and incorporated his strengths of perseverance, love, and fairness. Through the lens of core values, exercise shifted from a constant struggle to an integrated part of daily life.

By forming these value-guided, strength-fueled goals on your Life List, we infuse meaning into the micro-

moments of daily living. Incorporating meaning this way is important, but we also need a macro-picture of transcendence that acts as a compass. You can foster transcendence by asking and answering existential questions that have to do with your overall worldview as well as proactively trying to grow in the different character strengths.

Existential Questions and Worldview

Evaluate your overarching perspective on life by contemplating the following “existential questions” (Wong, 2012):

- Who am I?
- What should I do with my life to make it worthwhile?
- What can I do to find happiness and life satisfaction?
- How can I make the right choices in an age of moral ambiguity and conflicting values?
- How do I determine what is right and what is wrong?
- Where do I belong and where do I call home?
- What is the point of living in the face of suffering and death?
- What happens after death?

Answer these questions as a couple to learn about each other's world view and life philosophy. Scientists have traditionally held the only thing we should believe in is what we can concretely sense and prove through experimentation. However, developments in quantum physics, astrophysics and psychology are making many scientists question this premise. Many contend it is both reasonable and beneficial to believe in God and the presence of a soul.

Transcendence and Mission

Victor Frankl, M.D., a Jewish psychiatrist who was imprisoned in a concentration camp during World War II, studied the impact of limiting one's perspective to what we can sense and physically prove—he called this world view material reductionism.

According to Frankl (2000), when we limit or constrict our perspective to what we can sense and prove, the meaning of our life consists of accumulating pleasurable experiences and avoiding things that are uncomfortable. In other words, the goal is to live a pleasant life, which ultimately ends in boredom and frequently depression or other mental illnesses. These results of a pleasant-only orientated life are confirmed by neuroscience; namely, the impact of hedonic treadmills and dopamine adaptation on mood, judgement, perspective and motivation over time.

On the other end of the spectrum is an outlook that is limited to or focuses only on the spiritual aspect of life. This limited view of the world is also detrimental because humans are physical, mental, spiritual and relational beings. We cannot fix physical problems with spiritual solutions any more than we can solve a spiritual problem with a physical solution.

The bottom line is we need both a scientific and spiritual perspective on life if we want to thrive as individuals and as a couple. We have talked a lot about science, so let's take a quick intermission to focus on increasing our spiritual outlook.

Mission, meaning, and purpose go hand in hand with the character strength of transcendence. The causative arrow goes both ways between having a mission and developing a sense of transcendence. Establishing a mission leads to greater transcendence, and developing transcendence helps us to better define and develop our mission.

So, how do we increase transcendence? Working on mental strengthening to harness the powers of your mind, as discussed in the previous section, will eventually lead to transcendence. However, there are



other ways to directly work on this characteristic which is so essential to overall life satisfaction. Let's take a closer look at the various character strengths that Seligman and Peterson (2004) have placed under transcendence in their *Manual of Sanities*. There are five different facets of transcendence: appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, spirituality, and humor.

Let's define each characteristic, discuss what happens when it is absent in a person's life, and suggest ideas on how to develop it. As we learned in the powerful mind section, bringing these qualities into awareness will help us steer our life towards greater transcendence. Ultimately, we can then put pen to paper and form a joint mission statement. If you also set some goals based on the information, you will find greater meaning in your day-to-day life!

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

Definition: The appreciation of beauty and excellence refers to the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of goodness in the physical and social worlds. This means having a sense of admiration, wonder, and elevation as opposed to blinders to what is good, true, and beautiful all around us.

There are three types of goodness we can admire. We can appreciate physical beauty in the environment or in sound. This would include music and nature. Skill or talent can also be admired. This includes Olympic athletes or Nobel peace prize winners. Finally, we can recognize virtue or moral goodness, such as displays of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

In contrast, people who lack appreciation tend to be coarse, crude, shallow, uncultured, trivial, or drawn to the mundane. In neuroscience terms, this can be defined as qualities that do not lead to integration. Appreciation of beauty can take many different forms. Some people have a difficult time seeing the excellence in classic artwork, but they sit entranced by a well-choreographed ballet or symphony. Intellectual-types will admire a well-designed and highly applicable research study. A mountain top view may give you altitude sickness, while a beachside sunset leaves you gaping at nature with your mouth wide open. Thriving couples pursuing a meaningful mission and giving themselves in service to others is also a thing of beauty to be admired! Simply look for goodness in the world, and you will find it.



Enabling factors: Little is known currently, except there is a correlation with the personality trait of *openness to new experiences*. Like all personality traits, openness to new experiences is partially genetic.

Inhibiting factors: Little is known currently. However, the nurture aspect of how you were raised probably has a significant influence. Parents always seem to get the praise or the blame for these things!

Why is it important? The appreciation of beauty and excellence has been loosely correlated with motivation toward self-improvement, personal change, altruistic intentions and actions, and devotion to others (like we

want to have in marriage). Motivations in this direction result in increased relationship commitment, altruism, warmth and connection felt towards others, enhanced social relationships, and greater purpose in life.

This strong connection equals oxytocin-rich relationship. The importance of this transcendent character strength becomes most evident in its absence. Cynicism is the result of a lack of appreciation and the presence of the attitude of ill will toward others. People who lack appreciation in life are frequently *black holes*. We discussed black holes in chapter three, conserving willpower. These people tend to rejoice in other people's failures, and this is something we need to guard against.



How do we develop this character strength?

Here is an example of a goal aimed at increasing appreciation of beauty and excellence: Take time weekly or monthly to look for inspirational things, places, or people. Print a picture, and hang it near your desk as your prime for the week or month.

Or consider this one: Do not let a day go by without admiring someone or something for the authentic beauty in that person or thing. Text it to your spouse when you notice it, or talk about it together in the evening. Eventually, you will find that nothing is too small or insignificant to appreciate.

Developing the powers of your mind by taking time to think about what fills you with awe will kill two birds with one stone (review the SIFTing exercise from the previous chapter). So, achieve two goals at once by increasing the integration within your mind and upping the appreciation you have in life.

- What do you step back and admire?
- What fills you with a sense of awe and appreciation?
- Write down some ways you will stop to “smell the roses” as a couple:
- How will you express your appreciation for each other on a regular basis?
- What are some qualities of your spouse which fill you with awe and appreciation?
- How can you fill your spouse with awe and appreciation?



We need to know what fills us with awe before we can define a mission that will keep us going for a lifetime!

Discussion Notes:

Gratitude

Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for 17 years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans.

Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn't consider it the highlight of his career just to associate with them for even one day? Sure, I'm lucky. Who wouldn't consider it an honor to have known Jacob Ruppert? Also, the builder of baseball's greatest empire, Ed Barrow? To have spent six years with that wonderful little fellow, Miller Huggins? Then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology, the best manager in baseball today, Joe McCarthy? Sure, I'm lucky.

When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift — that's something. When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies — that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter — that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so you can have an education and build your body — it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed — that's the finest I know.



So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for.

-Lou Gehrig (Farewell Address at Yankee Stadium following a diagnosis of ALS, July 4, 1939)

Definition: Gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift. The gift may be something tangible given to you by a person or a moment of peaceful bliss experienced after witnessing something beautiful. You can be grateful to other people or to God for His creation. Psychologists call these two types of gratitude *personal gratitude* and *transpersonal gratitude*. There are three components of gratitude, including: warm sense of appreciation for somebody or something, sense of goodwill toward that person or thing, and disposition to act that flows from appreciation and goodwill. This last component means paying it forward, and this can be turned into a mission.



Enabling factors: Optimistic and generous outlook, having a sense of spirituality and authentic religion, empathy, humility, a broad outlook on life, having the ability to see experiences in one's life and life itself as gifts.

Why is it important? Gratitude is associated with happiness and is inversely proportionate to depression, anxiety and other mood disorders. Gratitude fosters pro-social behavior, resulting in larger social networks of friends and better intimate relationships (i.e. thriving marriages). We need gratitude to be happy in our relationships and professional successes.



Discussion Points:

- Make a goal to jot down three things you are grateful for a couple times a week.
- How will you express your gratitude to each other on a regular basis? In little notes or texts? As a kick off to your date night?
- What do you do on a regular basis (or can you do) that causes a sense of gratitude in your spouse?
- When was the last time you were filled with gratitude?

Take these moments into consideration when thinking about your mission statement.

Hope

Definition: “Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, and future orientation represent a cognitive, emotional and motivational stance toward the future. Thinking about the future, expecting that desired events and outcomes will occur, acting in ways believed to make them more likely and feeling confident that these will ensue given appropriate efforts to sustain good cheer in the here and now, galvanize goal-directed actions.” (Character Strengths and Virtues, Seligman and Peterson, pg. 570)

Enabling factors: The skill of learned optimism fosters hope. You can argue your way into having hope! We will discuss this thinking pattern more in chapter

eight. Adherence to religion has been shown to enable hope. The optimistic outlook of other people in our lives tends to be contagious. So, surround yourself with those friends and family you have identified as cheerleaders.

Inhibiting factors: Trauma and failure related to major goals inhibit hope and an optimistic outlook. Implicit memory is the underlying cause to blame here.

Why is it important? Hope and optimism predict achievement in many aspects of life—academic, athletic, military, political, and vocational. It is

associated with freedom from mood disorders like depression. Hope is also linked to having good social relationships. People with hope are more active problem-solvers. They are able to readily recognize information that is relevant to the task at hand and tend to be more creative.



Discussion Points:

- How can you try to foster greater optimism in your life?
- What sends you for a ride on the negative superhighway?
- Who are the people in your life that give you a sense of hope?
- How can you spend more time with them?



Spirituality

Dr. Seligman, who labeled himself as an atheist in his earlier books, has introduced the topic of religion and spirituality as an important part of a person's happiness. In a culture that largely views the topic of spirituality as a conversational taboo, it is fascinating to take a closer look at the research in this area. Dr. Seligman has opened the door to an intellectually honest and open exchange between people of diverse belief on how spirituality affects the human person's pursuit of happiness.

Definition: "Spirituality is universal. Although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred and divine force. Further, all religions seek to help people to grapple with core existential concerns (i.e. questions of purpose and meaning) and posit rules and values that guide individuals' relationships, as well as their efforts to cope with the travails of life," (*Character Strengths and Virtues*, Seligman and Peterson, pg. 601).

As many people relate, there is a psychological difference between spirituality and religiousness. For a

summary of the differences found in research, take a look at Seligman and Peterson's textbook.

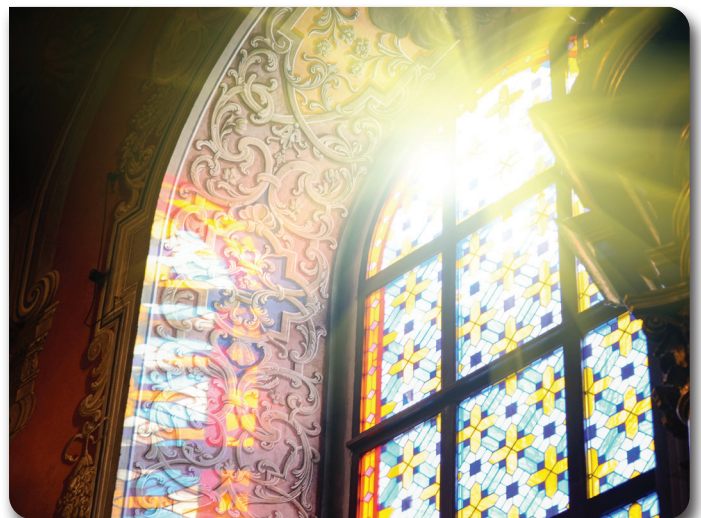
Enabling factors: Secure attachment to parents and family cohesion enable the development of spirituality.

Inhibiting factors: Negative experiences associated with religious people and an inability to reconcile encounters of adversity with the notion of a loving and just God inhibit spiritual development.

Why is it important? There is a correlation between spirituality and self-regulation, emotional regulation, well-being, increased life satisfaction, and positive family relationships.

Some spiritual goals for you to consider include:

- Do you subscribe to or did you grow up with a certain religion?
- Do you want to explore this religion's core beliefs as an adult?
- Do some reading to increase your understanding.





Humor

Humor is the final character strength component of transcendence. It is both a thinking skill and a social skill. Like the other traits, it can be actively developed. We can understand, develop, plan and implement humor to infuse more laughter into our lives. This effectively elevates mood.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom,” (Victor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*).

Using humor to cope with small things that stress us out is helpful. We can’t find humor in everything, but a “Don’t sweat the small stuff!” attitude can help set a more positive tone to the day as well as strengthen us to tackle bigger adversity. When we flip into accelerator mode and the downstairs brain takes control—it is difficult to find humor in a bad situation. But later when the upstairs brain is back online, we are often able to laugh about it. Think of times when this has happened.

Negative emotions are not bad in and of themselves, and they shouldn’t be ignored or repressed. All emotions have purpose and usually drive action to improve our situation or relationships. However, looking at negative situations from different perspectives—I can either laugh or cry, this is so bad!—can give a greater sense of control and interior freedom. Cancer patients who “find their giggle” report that laughter makes them “feel more normal” and helps improve relationships with family and friends. We all have a humor bank we can proactively pay into regularly. This elevates

our general state of mind. Come up with five laughter triggers, and always be on the look out for more! This is a way to stock pile your humor bank.

List five of your laughter triggers (or at least one, if you can’t think of five):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Laughter triggers can include comedians, funny videos, people, situations, songs, comic strips... anything that has made you laugh in the past! For more information on developing humor, check out the book *Laughology: Improve Your Life with the Science of Laughter* (Davies, 2013).



Directing the Compass

Part two (of step two in our spiral case to your thriving relationship) is finding your purpose together. The second part of Dr. Seligman’s definition of a meaningful life requires plugging into a picture “bigger than” yourselves. So, where do we look to discover that “something bigger” to build a mission around?

How will you make a difference? What will give your life meaning and purpose? As we become more aware of how values and strengths fuel and guide daily life, a central idea will emerge. Ultimately, we need to form a personal mission statement that ties together and integrates the goals we set for day-to-day life and the big-picture ideal we hold. A clear mission gives your life transcendence, which brings resilience in adversity (Frankl, 1979, 2000), durable life satisfaction, and joy (Seligman, 2002).

In order to begin to discover this central idea or theme, consider the following questions:

- What do you admire or what fills you with a sense of awe?
- What makes you go, “Wow, that is amazing!”?
- What books or movies, based on a true story, inspire you?
- What do you do that elicits gratitude and admiration from others?
- What do you do that makes other people go, “Wow, you are amazing!”?



- Have you experienced any adversity in your life that you could help others avoid or overcome?
- Have you seen other people suffer from a big picture problem in our world—that you would like to fix?
- What do you believe makes life worth living?
- What do you want to live for?

A mission statement combines your own interests, talents, strengths, and values, giving you a theme to incorporate in both personal and professional life.

I will share my personal mission statement as an example:

I am interested in and have a talent for understanding different areas of behavioral neuroscience and psychology, and I want to align with my core values of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, love, selflessness, and excellence using my signature strengths of love of learning, bravery, creativity, social intelligence,



judgment, and perspective in order to empower others with the knowledge and skills they need to live a thriving, integrated life.

I typically shorten this to “I am all about empowering people to live a thriving and integrated life”— and the rest is implied or kept to myself. This applies to empowering my husband, children, and friends who are interested, as well as any and all people I come into contact with through speaking and coaching in my professional life.

Focusing in on what you are “all about” helps you to prioritize your time, guide volunteer work, and set clear and integrated goals. It is all too easy to get swept away by the inertia of daily life in today’s world. The daily drill of meeting the immediate needs of others and fulfilling duty commonly results in disengagement. Sometimes, we keep waiting to live the life we really desire until a certain circumstance changes. I will do what I really want when I retire or when I get my graduate degree or a different job. We end up

putting life on hold instead of making the most out of each moment.

The purpose of deliberately focusing on the development of meaning is to foster your uniqueness, potential, and strengths in everyday life. We want to do this in the here and now, rather than in some distant, far-off future.

We have begun to define your personal mission statement, increase awareness of your signature strength use in daily activities, and focus on setting goals that align with your core values. Let’s continue with more self-reflection—on what you value and what are the objective limits and givens in your life.

Mission Statement

Give your personal mission statement a go by filling in the blanks:

- I am interested in _____
- and have a talent for _____
- I want to align myself with the core values of _____, _____, _____
- Using my signature strengths of _____, _____, _____
- in order to _____.

Grab a few blank sheets of paper to write out your personal mission statements, and keep them folded in your book here:

Discussion Questions

You will not submit these answers online to your mentor. They are only for couple discussion. Discuss the questions on the following pages to begin forming your joint mission statement.

- When all hell breaks loose in life...what really matters to you?
 - Write your ideas on what you think a “meaningful marriage” looks like:
 - List 5 things you want to do before you die, or look at your life list and pick out your top five goals:
 - Are these things oriented towards a meaningful life or a pleasant life?
 - Are any of your top five goals conflicting with your spouse’s top five goals? Can you resolve the conflict?
 - What is your personal mission in life?
 - Is your personal mission compatible with his/her personal mission? (Does he/she have a personal mission, and if not, is he/she willing to talk about one?)
 - What are your mutual areas of interest?
 - What comes naturally to each of you?
 - What causes are you both passionate about?
- What big picture problems do you see in the lives of people around you that you both want to help solve?
 - On a blank sheet, write down a few ideas for your joint mission statement based on your answers above.
 - Share with each other how you inspire each other. What are the qualities your spouse possesses that fill you with awe?
 - Take a look at your top five character strengths from the VIA survey. How do your strengths match up, and how do they complement each other?

His

Hers

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)



- What characteristics from the VIA questionnaire would you like to strengthen? Come up with goals to target these areas.

His

Hers

1)

2)

3)

- Now, craft your marriage mission statement.
- What, when, where and how will you work towards your mission together?

Discussion Notes:



Chapter 6

Attaching in Style

A secure attachment equals a balanced love.



Step Three: Secure Attachment Style

In the previous chapter, we learned how to infuse meaning into every aspect of life so that we set goals leading to long-term happiness and fulfillment in our marriage. It is time to take another step up in our spiral staircase to thriving love!

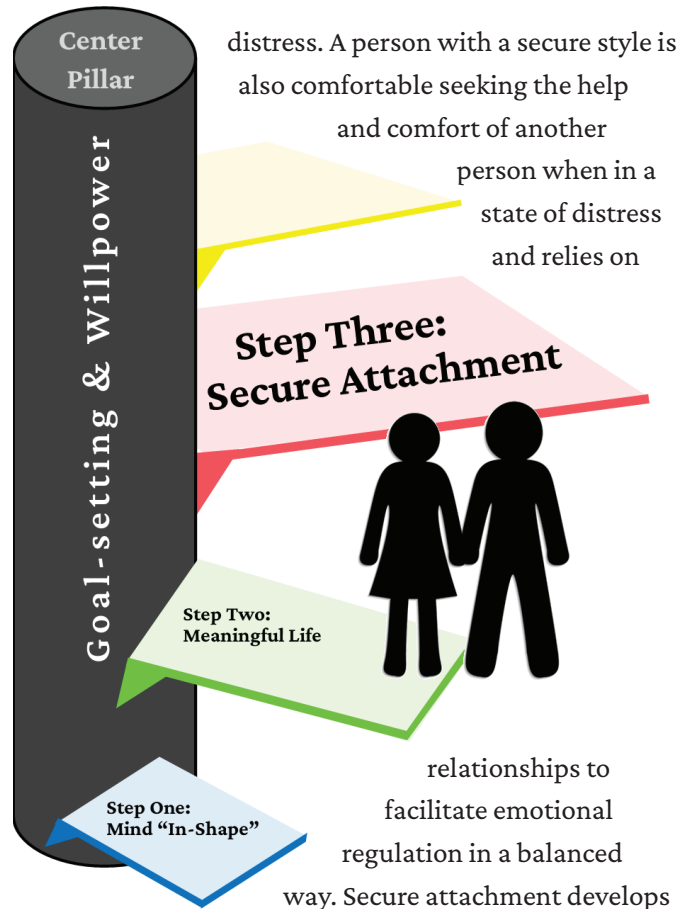
Attachment style is defined as how we bond and relate to others and is particularly important in close, intimate relationships. *The attachment bond means desiring regular contact with someone and experiencing distress when separated from that person* (Johnson, 2019).

Four Attachment Styles

We inherit our pattern of relating to one another from our parents or primary caregivers. This relational bonding style is also shaped by friendships, family members, and dating relationships as we grow older. Ultimately, then, a person's attachment style is largely a result of *implicit memory*, which plays a major role in his or her willingness to be open to connection. A caregiver's interactions with a child shapes his or her response to bids for connection in adulthood, whether that person has learned to respond with a defensive reaction or an eagerness for connection.

There are four main attachment styles reflecting a person's habitual pattern of relating in relationships: **secure**, **anxious**, **avoidant**, and **disorganized** (Levine & Heller, 2010). Let's review each one to help you identify your own, as well as the style of your fiancé or spouse.

A person with a **secure** attachment style is open and flexible in relationships. This person is comfortable with sharing emotions and empathetic in the face of



when parents are emotionally available, stable, predictable (with clear guidelines), even-keeled, caring, affectionate, and supportive.

Anxious attachment style is just what it sounds like. It is marked by a lot of anxiety and stress in intimate relationships. A person with this attachment style habitually needs reassurance from his or her partner. This person tends to be very unsure, frequently doubting the spouse's devotion to and interest in him or her. An anxiously attached person struggles with feelings of inadequacy and frequently misinterprets the spouse's comments or actions. This person misinterprets the typical ebb and flow of connection and disconnection as a threat to the relationship. The

person may also sense disapproval or other negative sentiment coming from his or her spouse when it isn't present.

Anxious attachment develops with parents who are emotionally intrusive one minute and aloof or emotionally distant the next. This unpredictable behavior from the parents makes a child both clingy and wary of what comes next.

Avoidant attachment style is characterized by emotional distance. Bids for connection activate either the SNS, causing a flight response, or the dorsal vagal nerve, in which the person shuts down and withdraws. Someone with an avoidant style tends to take pride in his or her independence and views emotions as “something for the weak and needy.” This style makes a person uncomfortable with intimacy and emotional closeness. Friends and loved ones of an avoidantly attached person frequently feel like they are being held at arms-length or not “let in.” Avoidant attachment develops from caregivers who are emotionally unavailable to their children. In this environment, the child learns to dismiss or deny any emotional needs, never relying on other people for emotional regulation.

Some people develop an anxious or avoidant attachment style throughout their dating years. For instance, when a dating couple hops on a dopamine-driven sexual hedonic treadmill, the relationship typically ends with loss of sexual interest interpreted as “I don't know what happened, I just don't love you anymore.” As a result, the partners encode implicit memories that anticipate the negative outcome of falling out of love with their next partner. Men tend to withdraw emotionally, thus forming an avoidant attachment style. Women tend to develop increasing anxiety, forming an anxious attachment style with each subsequent relationship. This is generally, but not

always, the outcome of a dopamine-driven relationship that fizzles out due to dopamine adaptation. The results can be reversed, usually with counseling.

Disorganized attachment style develops in an abusive home or can be the result of a traumatic experience. A person with this attachment style will erratically and sometimes explosively move back and forth between anxious and avoidant patterns of relating. It is very helpful for a person in this situation to meet with a counselor trained in attachment-based therapy.

End Goal—Secure Attachment

You must begin by identifying your attachment style. It is also important to be able to identify the attachment style of your spouse. There are some good online resources to determine your current attachment style.

Visit:

www.traumasolutions.com/attachment-styles-quiz and take the quiz to determine your attachment style. Next, share the results with your spouse. Or, see the suggested questions beginning on page 125. Then, you can intentionally work to maintain your secure style, or you can work together towards it if you determine that you are not yet securely attached.

Let's take a look at your own style.

His style:

Her style:

Changing Your Attachment Style

The good news is you are not stuck in one attachment style. The brain is actually very flexible! Even if you had a less than ideal upbringing or a series of negative dating experiences, there is still hope! If you currently have an avoidant or anxious attachment style, entering into a loving relationship as an adult can help you learn how to securely attach in the here and now. Psychologists call this *earned secure attachment*.

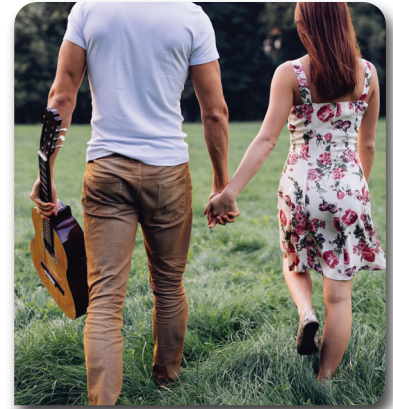
How the Past Impacts the Present

Changing your attachment style begins by recognizing how your past experiences impact your current behaviors. We are not big on dredging up the past, but bringing implicit memory into conscious awareness is a valid exercise. In the previous chapter, we discussed that implicit memories are involuntarily triggered when something in the present reminds our brain of a previous experience. These triggers could be as simple as a sideways glance or a certain word said in a particular tone. When the brain connects this memory from the past with the present, it predicts that the current situation will share the same good or bad outcome we experienced previously. This is one very good reason to practice SIFTing regularly—so you can recognize when your reactions, rational or not, are being affected by the past. Recall a time when you completely overreacted to something a friend or loved one said and only later wondered, “Why was I so upset?”

Understanding the influence of these implicit memories helps you to dial down your overreactions in the present. Start the awareness process by reflecting on a series of attachment-based questions, and summarize your answers into an attachment narrative. *Your attachment narrative is the story of how you were raised.*

SIFT your responses to these questions with an emphasis on the *images* you identify.

Since our attachment style is rooted in how our parents related to us as a child and how our first few dating relationships played out, we need to use hindsight to investigate whether our past memories are negatively affecting our marriages, and if so, identify them.



Attachment Narrative Questions

We do this by SIFTing what psychologists call an *attachment history*, followed by writing an *attachment autobiography*. You can follow up this exercise by journaling the thoughts and feelings you have in response to each question, and can discuss your answers with your spouse. In doing so, you will turn the negative and positive aspects of your past into a relationship-building exercise that will increase insight, empathy and intimacy in your marriage.

Attachment Narrative Exercise

The attachment history questionnaire on the following page was adapted from Dr. Daniel Siegel’s book *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (2013, p. 163-168). To complete the attachment narrative exercise, it is beneficial to journal or create a summary of your answers, emphasizing significant discoveries and how the past impacts your current relationships. Answer the narrative questions and then discuss with each other. Choose one section at a time.

Family of Origin Questions

Background

Can you connect any of the aspects of how you were raised to current responses in relationships?

What was it like growing up in your family?

What was your parents' philosophy about raising children?

What did or didn't you like about growing up in your family?

What will you do the same as your parents, and what will you do differently?

Relationships

Were relationships sources of calm and comfort growing up—or were they unstable and unpredictable?

Did you get along with the people in your family?

How do (did) your family members get along with one another?

How have your relationships in your family changed over time?

If you have two parents, how are (were) your relationships with each parent similar or different? State a few words that reflect your relationship with each parent from your earliest years.



Are there ways you have tried to be like or not like each of your parents?

Are there any others in your life who have served as parenting figures to whom you feel attached? If so, please answer the above questions regarding that person or those persons.

Separation

How do you currently deal with separation from loved ones? Do you see any correlations with how often you were left by yourself as a child?

Can you remember your first time being separated from your parents?

What was that like and how did it affect you and your parents?

Did you ever experience a long separation from your parents in your childhood? What was that like for you and for your parents?

Fear and Threat

How do you currently respond to conflict? Do you see any similarities between how you were related to by your parents/caregivers as a child? Did you have a sense of being “on edge” or “safe” with them?

Have you ever felt threatened by your parents?

Have you ever felt rejected by your parents?

Have there been any other experiences that may have been overwhelming in your life? What were these, and how do you feel they influenced your life?

Do any of these experiences feel like they are still very much alive now in your life?



Loss

Have you experienced any major losses of family or friends in your life?

Has anyone significant in your life died? Has anyone significant in your life left?

What impact have these losses had on you and your family?

How do these losses affect you now in your life?

Emotional Communication

Did you experience positivity resonance on a regular basis with your parents or primary caregivers? Were your caregivers available, responsive and engaging on an emotional level?

How do (did) your parents communicate with you when you are (were) happy and excited?

What happens (would happen) when you are (were) distressed, unhappy, injured, or ill?

Does (Did) each parent respond with different patterns of connecting to you when your emotions are (were) intense?

How do you communicate with others now when emotions run high?

Safe Harbor

Did you feel safe and accepted at home as a child?

Are (Were) there relationships you can (could) turn to, or places you can (could) go, that you can (could) rely on to help you feel comforted at difficult times? Did such a safe harbor exist when you were a child?

How do you feel those sources of a safe haven affect (affected) your life? Do (Did) you feel seen, safe, and soothed by your parents?



Launching Pad

Were you consistently encouraged and supported to pursue your interests and dreams?

How do (did) your parents support your explorations away from them or outside the home? How are (were) your interests supported by your parents?

Did you feel secure as a child to go out and explore the world?

Now

How would you describe your relationships with family and friends now?

What is your relationship like with your parents now?

Why do you think your parents act (acted) the way they do (did)?

Do you try to not do things because of how your parents treat (treated) you?

As you reflect on all these experiences, how do you think they influence the ways you relate to other people?

How do you feel all these things we have been exploring have influenced who you are now as a person and how you have come to be the way you are?



Future

Do you feel you experience positivity resonance with your family and friends on a regular basis? Are there ways you relate to family and friends that you would like to change?

How do you imagine the experiences from your attachment relationships and early childhood might shape the person you can become?

Are there any factors from your past that are restricting you in the present and limiting who you can be in the future?

What do you see as your “growth edge” for things you’d like to change in yourself so that you can be free to be the person you would like to be in the future?

What do you wish for yourself in loving relationships?



A Style Overhaul

Once you have explored your history together, you can put a plan in place to make sure you maintain or move yourself towards a secure attachment. Now it's time for a style makeover, if necessary! Let's look at common pitfalls as well as strategies to help you move from unhealthy attachment styles into secure attachment.

Avoidant Attachment Style

A person with an avoidant attachment style or someone who simply tends to be less open emotionally (because he or she is very left-brained) tends to flip into deactivating strategies when a loved one tries to get close on an emotional level. Deactivating strategies are ways of putting mental distance between yourself and other people.



Identify Deactivating Strategies

- Thinking “I’m not ready to commit” but staying together for years
- Focusing on small imperfections in your partner and allowing it to get in the way of romantic feelings

- Pining after or obsessing about an ex
- Flirting with other people, on purpose and in front of your partner
- Not saying “I love you” but implying it
- Pulling away when things are going well
- Checking out mentally when your partner is talking
- Keeping secrets and being indirect or unclear in order to maintain your sense of independence

Ways to move from avoidant to more secure:

- Identify when you are flipping in to deactivating strategies. Remind yourself that you need intimacy even though it makes you uncomfortable.
- De-emphasize self-reliance, and focus on mutual support.
- Be aware of the anxious/avoidant trap. If one spouse tends to relate in an avoidant way, and the other spouse is more anxious, this can create a vicious cycle. One person will be pulling away from intimacy while the other is clinging more intensely. This is extremely exciting in the beginning of a relationship—especially on a physical level—but will cause big problems and conflict over time.
- Be aware of your tendency to misinterpret behaviors.
- Create a relationship gratitude list. Intentionally look for ways in which your spouse made your day better.
- Get rid of the phantom ex.
- Find mutual hobbies or activities that you are both enthused about.

Ways to move from anxious to more secure:

- Acknowledge and accept your true relationship needs—intimacy, availability, and security.
- If your partner is avoidant, be patient and recognize that he/she may not be able to fulfill your needs until he/she moves toward having a more secure attachment style.
- A new way of relating: Be your authentic self, and use effective communication to let your spouse know your real needs.
- Buy the book *Learned Optimism* by Dr. Martin Seligman. This skill will help you to tame your anxious thoughts!

Reflect

Discuss together, “Do we need a style makeover?” Keep in mind that this process of discovery can be painful and takes time.

Practical Tips

Consider these potential goals that can help foster a secure attachment.

Launchings and Landings

Build into your routine a way of connecting in a meaningful way at the beginning and end of each day. Coffee in the morning before you both rush out the door and a snack (or drink) at night before bed are good habits to get into. Psychologists have also found that greeting each other with a hug (without an ulterior motive) for a minute or two or three, until you

feel the oxytocin kick in and your stress melt away, is a powerful tool to promote a secure attachment!

What will be your launching and landing routines?

Dating

You need to keep dating! Shoot for once a week, so it will at least happen every other. Take your Life List and goals with you, and revisit the list. Add to it, make plans, and set more goals you are both excited about! Use all the communication techniques we talked about in the mindsight section. Don’t double date. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have and socialize with friends as well. But you can’t build oxytocin effectively when you invite other people. So, prioritize your date nights, and socialize at another time.

You can be creative with date nights to be more cost-effective if necessary. For instance, mini dates can happen at home on the couch after the kids go to bed. But keep in mind that some expense in babysitting and/or going out is a worthwhile investment in your relationship.

How often will you date, and what will you do?





Arguments

Psychologists refer to arguments as ruptures in a secure bond, so we have to repair these ruptures consciously and effectively. Consider the following tips:

- Take some time to regain your composure. Turn on the calm-and-connect state of mind.
- Make sure some experience in your past isn't irrationally affecting how you feel by doing a few mindfulness exercises. Plan what you want to communicate to your spouse, and be objective about how you contributed to the argument.
- Make sure your willpower fuel tank isn't running low. If you are in a state of ego depletion, fill up the tank first.

- When you communicate with your spouse to resolve and repair your bond, use reflective listening. Express a summary of what he/she just said, then convey your thoughts. This is called connect-and-redirect, rather than the command-and-demand style of communication, in the face of conflict. Resolving conflicts in this way is important to maintaining a secure attachment in your relationship.

How do you react to a conflict in your relationship? Do you explode at your partner? Do you withdraw from conversation?

Make some plans on how you will try to repair ruptures in your attachment. When, where, and how will you resolve conflicts?



End Goal: Secure Attachment Equals a Balanced Love

Insecure attachment style increases the risk of having a dopamine-driven relationship and hopping on a sexual hedonic treadmill. A person with an avoidant attachment tends to engage in what Susan Johnson, PhD, an international expert on marriage and attachment, calls sealed-off sex. The primary goal of sealed-off sex is not a holistic connection with your partner but rather the sensual pleasure of the experience. It is mostly physical and checks the emotional and psychological connection at the door.

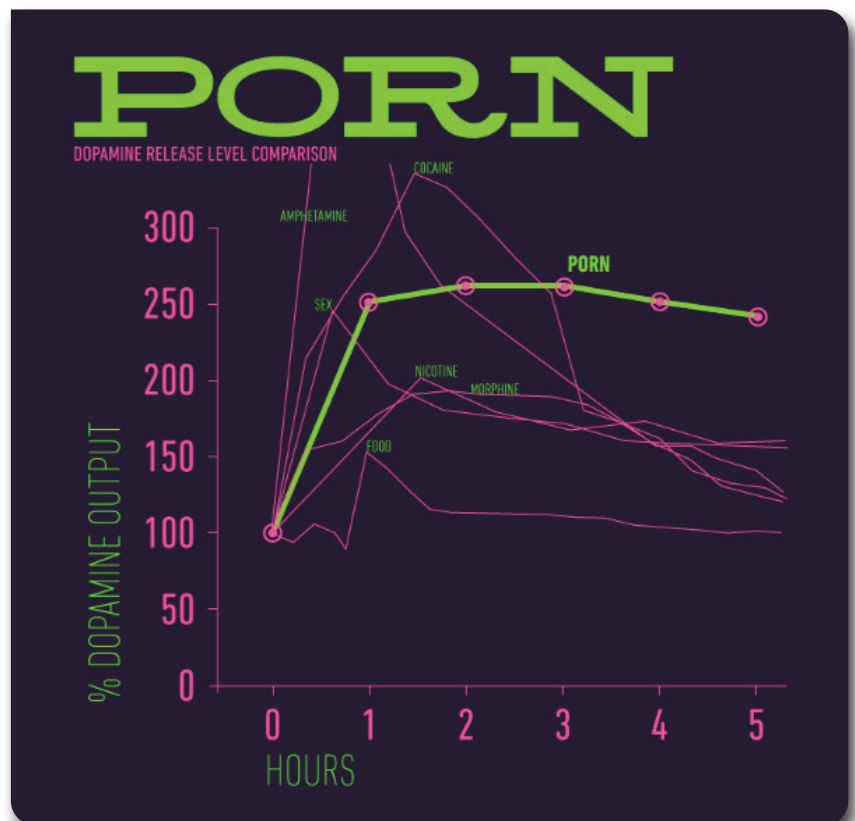
A person with an anxious attachment style has a propensity to engage in comfort sex. When the brain is stressed, it seeks out dopamine as a quick fix to temporarily relieve the stress. The dopamine seeking of a stressed out brain is one reason people stress eat. Comfort sex is about the temporary relief of a person's feelings of insecurity and doubts about the love and devotion of the person's partner. A brain that is stressed or anxious has a difficult time producing oxytocin, which means dopamine dominates the sexual relationship.

Both of these situations lead to adaptation of the brain to dopamine. Eventually the thrill decreases for a person with an avoidant attachment style, and the comfort or relief from uncertainty wanes in a person with an anxious attachment style. Fostering a secure attachment makes sex act like connective glue rather than an increasing wedge in a couple's relationship, because feeling safe and secure

around one's spouse puts the brain in a state that can continually produce oxytocin.

Obstacles to a Balanced Love

Pornography use is one common pitfall men and sometimes women fall into that has gradual but highly destructive effects on our relationships. Pornography use is a very good example of an epsilon-cost choice. If you want a long-term and highly satisfying loving relationship, stay off the internet (or whatever medium provides the temptation) and invest that time in connecting with your spouse in a meaningful way. This is an essential goal to set together and is worthy of the willpower investment required.





This is not just being recommended by theologians or pastors, but rather by a growing number of couples counselors and sex therapists. Susan Johnson, PhD, explains the effects of porn on the brain as follows:

A screen-generated orgasm triggers a rush of 'feel-good' chemicals, including endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin. It does not, however, discharge oxytocin, the attachment hormone, which produces consummate contentment and calm. Habitual users of porn soon find that they need more and more porn to get release. Porn simply makes you want more porn...and less and less of your spouse. Recent research is showing that, in all addictions, overstimulation results in an excess of the reward hormone, dopamine, being released in the brain. To maintain equilibrium in the nervous system, the brain shuts down the receptor sites that take up dopamine, and response to dopamine slows down. This is like pleasure fatigue. As physiological tolerance rises, more and more stimulation is necessary just to feel normal, let alone high (Love Sense, p. 143).

Dr. Johnson later continues:

Porn addiction is a perfect example of the consequences of cutting off sex from attachment and connection with others. Sex and attachment are meant to go together. Most addictions are at base, desperate attempts to find a substitute for secure attachment to others. But such substitutions

cannot satisfy, and they are destructive to health, happiness, and even, ultimately, to sexual functioning (Love Sense, p. 143).

This destruction of health and sexual function is culturally evident by the growing number of men in their late 20's now suffering from erectile dysfunction.

Dr. Todd Bowman, an expert in sexual addiction recovery and the effects of porn on relationships, states that the effects of pornography use include malaise, lack of motivation, depression, decreasing attraction to one's partner, and a constant need for other dopamine-driven activities (gaming, gambling, drinking, fantasy sports, more pornography). A person trapped in this cycle (recall the supernormal stimuli funk diagram from chapter 3) bounces between highs of brief relief or boredom to the opposite feelings of either depression or anxiety and irritation. In this low state, or "funk" as Dr. Bowman describes it, the person has little motivation to meet the



needs of others or the world around them. This vicious trap spirals down into less and less satisfaction and more and more dependence on pornography. This is the polar opposite of the thriving love you desire and deserve.

Please note: Pornography is destructive to relationships and overall thriving in part because of the effect of dopamine on the brain. If you or your spouse is struggling with this, please consider consulting with an expert.

Discussion Questions

Attachment style and narrative histories are deeply personal and can be very emotionally painful. If these exercises are overwhelming or too painful, do not push yourself or each other past your limit.

Counselors who are trained in emotion-based therapy and attachment style can be very helpful and healing to a person and to relationships. Discuss together whether you think counseling is a necessary step for you or your relationship. These answers will not be submitted online to your mentor; they are just for discussion with each other.

- Were you surprised by your attachment style result or your spouse's attachment style result?
- What do you think is the attachment style of your mother and father or your primary care givers? Of your in-laws?
- Think of three goals to help you maintain or earn a secure attachment (Hint: Take a look at the lists on going from avoidant or anxious to secure and the practical tips section.)
- Think of three things you can do for your spouse to help him/her maintain or earn a secure attachment (make sure you take into account his/her style). Discuss them together.
- How do you plan to repair ruptures in your secure bond as a couple?
- What will you say when you need some time to regain your composure (and activate your calm and connect arm of your nervous system) before starting to work it out?
- What is your ideal date? List three date night ideas.
- Are there any insights you gained from reflecting on the attachment history questions?
- Are there any ways you plan to relate to your own children that are different or the same as how you were raised?
- How do you see pornography impacting loving relationships today?

Discussion Notes:



Chapter 7

Let's Get Physical

**Hurdle the physical obstacles to your
THRIVING relationship.**



Hurdle the Physical Obstacles to Your Thriving Relationship

Our physical health is as important to thriving as having a fit mind and emotional balance. So, physical factors impact our mental and emotional states and vice versa. If we really want to keep circling up and around the spiral staircase to thriving, we need to take care of the mind, soul and body along the way. In an intimate relationship, how a couple relates physically is particularly important. Prioritizing self-regulation (by actively working on dopamine reset in the brain) and secure attachment builds the foundation of a balanced love. One significant physical factor that is frequently overlooked, however, is the choice to use birth control. Let's take a look at how birth control and sex relate to each topic we have covered and how they affect a couple's physical relationship.



Discussion Questions:

- How does a couple's physical relationship affect the rest of their relationship? (Think about how dopamine affects judgment, focus and perspective.)
- How do the psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects of a couple's relationship affect their physical relationship?
- What percentage of couples do you think are in a dopamine-driven relationship? What percentage of couples do you think have a balanced love?
- Can you think of any common factors or ways of relating sexually that lead to a love that is out of balance—meaning dopamine-driven?

Notes:

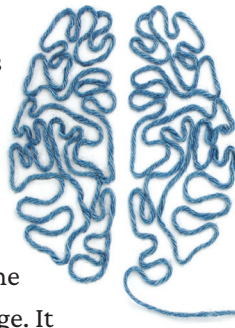
Rethinking Birth Control with The Brain In Mind

Take a few moments and think about an ideal method of family planning. By ideal we mean one that takes into account what we have learned about the brain science of love, self-regulation, focus, balance, communication, characteristics of temperance, courage, wisdom, justice, love, transcendence and optimism, living a meaningful life versus a pleasant life, and attachment style.

The ideal method would include...

Self-Regulation

Sexual self-regulation is essential to a happy marriage. Dopamine and the downstairs brain can overwhelm a couple's relationship, which leads to boredom and disillusionment in the long run. An ideal form of birth control puts a pattern of relating in place that keeps the upstairs brain large and in charge. It also regularly and effectively resets the dopamine receptors in your brain so you do not lose interest in one another over time. Sexual self-regulation is one very atypical goal you want to keep on your priority list for your marriage!



relationship. Family planning is not *her* responsibility or *his* responsibility, but rather *our* responsibility.

A form of family planning that involves enduring something challenging to achieve a mutual goal is an act of love and brings a couple closer together. The challenge of abstaining from physical intimacy for 10 days to prevent dopamine adaptation (and to avoid pregnancy when necessary) also increases trust in each other. Trust then increases a sense of optimism.

A form of family planning that keeps the sexual relationship connected to the potential of a new human being gives sex itself a sense of transcendence. Sex that is meaningful as well as pleasant has lasting satisfaction.

Mindsight

From a mindsight perspective, a form of family planning that is radically different than methods used in past sexual relationships has advantages when it comes to memory – especially implicit memory. Sexual self-regulation increases the ability to focus and balance the brain (especially between the upstairs and downstairs portions of the brain).

Attachment

If either spouse has an insecure attachment style, an ideal form of family planning would help him/her earn a secure attachment style. Increasing sexual self-regulation, decreasing links to past relationships, cooperating and communicating to avoid pregnancy, and giving sex a transcendent meaning all increase the security of a couple's attachment (because of an increased production of oxytocin).

Mission and the Characteristics of Happy People

A form of family planning that promotes sexual self-regulation sets the stage for wisdom. When the brain is not on a dopamine roller coaster ride or a sexual hedonic treadmill, we can view the world more clearly.

A form of family planning that is a cooperative effort between two people increases a sense of justice in the



Beyond Birth Control: What Is An Ideal Way to Manage Your Fertility As a Couple?

Natural fertility management (natural family planning or NFP) helps foster a balanced love of passion and friendship.

Every couple wants to have a love that is passionate and exciting as well as warm, intimate and stable. **These two feelings of love are driven by dopamine and oxytocin in the brain.** A balanced love in neuroscience terms is oxytocin-rich and maintains the passion powered by dopamine over time.

It is difficult for a brain that is stressed, depressed or obsessed to produce oxytocin. Dopamine, when it isn't kept in check, obsesses and overwhelms a person. This is true whether you are talking about a craving for chocolate or sex or ____or _____. Dopamine-driven behavior is like being on a treadmill (called a hedonic treadmill) that is never-ending and going nowhere. It makes a person extremely short-sighted. The hedonic treadmill also makes a person narrow-minded, self-centered and very irritable or depressed when the dopamine-driven brain is denied what it wants.

Dopamine-driven sexual hedonic treadmills tend to create very volatile relationships. After two to four years into this kind of relationship, the dopamine receptors adapt, and a couple loses sexual interest in each other. The only way to renew sexual interest at this point is to introduce another sexual partner or see a counselor who specializes in the treatment of sexual addiction.

The answer to avoiding the treadmill and adaptation is ongoing self-regulation when it comes to sex. **A couple can reset the dopamine receptors with 10 or so days of abstinence in a row out of every 30 days.**



Managing your fertility naturally accomplishes this goal by avoiding sex during the woman's fertile 7-10 day window when the couple intends to avoid pregnancy. If you're interested in starting or growing your family, simply reverse the days you use for the dopamine reset. Abstain during your infertile days for increasing sexual self-regulation, and use the fertile time to achieve pregnancy.

The flip side of the love coin involves oxytocin enrichment. During the time of abstinence, we need to intentionally infuse our relationship with oxytocin-producing patterns of relating. **Oxytocin helps calm the brain when it really wants some dopamine.** So, intentionally ramping up the oxytocin creates the dual effect of fostering intimacy and making abstinence a little less difficult!

Natural fertility management builds a person's capacity for self-regulation.

Our success across the board in life is directly proportionate to the amount of self-regulation we possess. Sexual self-regulation affects every step of the spiral staircase to your thriving marriage. Therefore, it is the starting point of the happiness you desire and deserve. The periodic abstinence is usually viewed as the biggest negative, but it is actually one of the greatest positives. It gives the couple the opportunity to continually hardwire self-regulation into the brain. This increased self-regulation is an asset in every aspect of life.



Natural fertility management builds the seven character strengths of happy people.

Recall that positive psychologists have shown that happiness is dependent on the growth and development of seven character strengths. We discussed these in chapter five. These character strengths are built by exercising them—and the pattern of relating that is created by using a natural fertility management method works on every single one of them.

Temperance and courage make up self-regulation, which is the foundation of happiness. Self-regulation keeps us off hedonic treadmills. Minimizing hedonic treadmills sets the stage for the next character strength. Wisdom is the ability to see reality as it is. Nothing is more blinding in a romantic relationship than a sexual hedonic treadmill. Managing fertility naturally keeps this blinding treadmill at bay!

Justice is the ability to see and fulfill our duty to others. Natural fertility management fosters justice in a relationship because the burden of family planning is not placed on either the husband or the wife. The wife reads the signs of fertility, but both spouses abstain to avoid pregnancy (and prevent dopamine adaptation in the relationship). It is fair that both are involved in keeping the sexual appetite in check and planning their family.

Love is the ability to endure something difficult for the good of another or to achieve a mutually beneficial long-term goal. Anytime we do something that is difficult in order to achieve a mutual goal, it is bonding and has lasting satisfaction. Natural fertility management gives us this opportunity every month.

Transcendence is the next rung of the happiness ladder. Psychologists have found we can only be happy if we are living a meaningful life, as opposed to a pleasant life. The more meaning we can infuse into every aspect of our relationship, the more satisfaction we get from it. Managing fertility naturally infuses a real sense of transcendence into sex by continually reminding us of the fact that it can bring about a new human being! This makes sex meaningful rather than just pleasant.

Optimism is an outgrowth of the rest of these character strengths, but it is also a skill we can develop. Using a natural means of family planning helps build



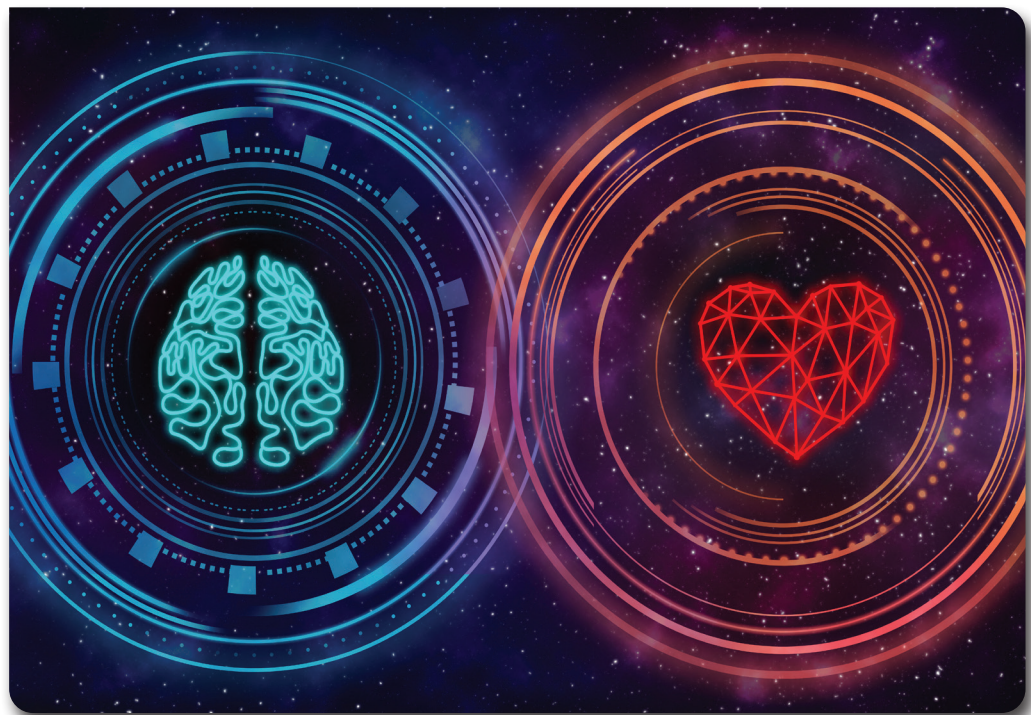
trust in each other. This trust says, “If we can successfully do this, then we can do anything!” Trust in our ability to tackle challenges equals optimism.

Natural fertility management supports the development of a powerful mind.

Increased mental strength is the outgrowth of focus and balance among the different parts and functions of the brain. A person who has developed the powers of the mind has an increased understanding of himself or herself and other people (especially someone as close to us as our spouse). This leads to better communication and cooperation in our relationships. **Natural fertility management increases the balance between the upstairs and downstairs brain through ongoing sexual self-regulation.** Building sexual self-regulation also *increases focus* as the brain becomes less and less vulnerable to the effects of the dopamine roller coaster ride. **Using a natural means of family planning fosters a balance between the past and the present by changing the meaning of sex** (by keeping it connected to the power of bringing a new person into the world). **This transcendent change sets the physical aspect of a couple’s relationship apart from any past sexual experiences, decreasing the effects of implicit memory on the present.**

Natural fertility management gives sex a transcendent meaning and therefore, more satisfaction overall.

One mission for marriage is to have a family. The idea of having children with your spouse gives your relationship a meaning and purpose that is exciting! If you talk to couples who have decided to start trying for a baby, they generally say that their physical relationship is infused with greater love and passion. The couple will say, “It’s the best sex we’ve ever had!” A couple who uses a natural method of fertility management as their method of family planning can have transcendent sex every time. When trying to avoid, the couple is aware of the power of their physical relationship by abstaining (resetting dopamine receptors) when the woman can get pregnant. And when a couple decides to start their family, the knowledge of when conception is taking place is a powerful, unifying experience.



Natural fertility management fosters a secure attachment, ensuring that sex acts like glue, rather than a wedge, between the two of you.

Dr. Todd Bowman is an expert in sexual addiction recovery and couples counseling. He developed the acronym STACKED for teaching couples how to form an oxytocin-rich relationship, which equals a healthy, secure attachment.

Structure: Couples need to put into place a structure of relating that involves feasting and fasting.

Touch: We need physical, emotional, and spiritual ways of touching during the fasting timeframe that do not have an ulterior motive.

Accountability: We need a system of accountability to stick with the fasting from sex. Natural fertility management offers a built-in accountability because of the fertile window.

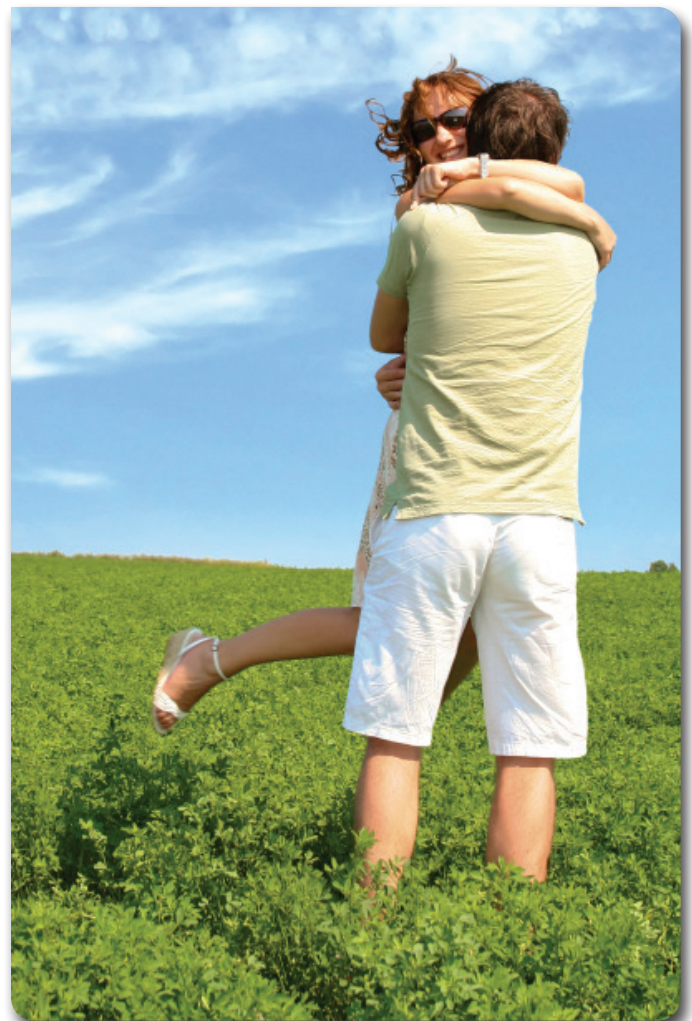
Communication: We need to use oxytocin triggering ways of relating (reflective listening, sit facing each other looking left eye to left eye, hold hands, be aware of your tone of voice and facial expressions).

Kinesthetic: We need shared interests, such as a joint mission and common goals on your life list.

Emotional regulation: This is an outgrowth of the spiral staircase to your thriving relationship as well as something you can proactively develop. We will talk about this in the final section on positivity and productive emotion.

Discipline: Effort is required in maintaining the pattern of relating and focusing on forming a secure attachment.

Natural fertility management methods create the time and space to dive into the psychological, emotional and spiritual connections between spouses that are essential to a secure attachment. The feasting and fasting pattern of relating is not arbitrary. The mutual objective of avoiding pregnancy (or abstaining for dopamine reset when not necessarily avoiding pregnancy) in the present for the good of the couple and their family gives meaning to the sacrifice and satisfaction to the relationship.





An Oxytocin-Rich Relationship: Putting It All Together

An oxytocin-rich relationship that maintains the passion over time is really what we want to have with our spouse over a lifetime!

The following is a list of the key components needed to make thriving a reality in your life:

1. A permanent relationship: The brain needs to know you are in this for life! A permanent relationship lowers what psychologists call an attachment threat. The more permanent the commitment, the less anxiety the couple experiences about the relationship. Dr. Susan Johnson, expert on emotion-based therapy for couples, says there's no better way to establish a permanent commitment than standing up in front of your family and friends and vowing your lives to each other. Cohabiting has not shown the same effect in the research literature (Johnson, 2011). And less anxiety related to the relationship means the brain can produce more of our essential friend, oxytocin.

2. Dopamine reset and ongoing sexual self-regulation with about ten days of abstinence per 30 days is essential. Using a natural fertility management system puts this pattern into place and provides a built-in accountability.

3. Infuse your relationship with oxytocin-producing relationship tips (especially during the times of abstinence). Examples: hug until you feel the body relax, communicate face to face looking left eye to left eye, express gratitude frequently, learn the technique of reflective listening, forgive, hold hands, smile at each other, laugh together! Refer back to chapter two for more ideas.

4. Actively grow in the characteristics of happy people. The happier you become, the easier it is for the brain to produce oxytocin. Go to the authentic happiness website and take the VIA survey to learn your strengths and weaknesses. Then, make a plan for self-improvement!

5. Find a mission for your marriage. A great book to help you figure this out is *The Exceptional Seven Percent* by Gregory Popcak. He talks about forming your marital imperative. Large amounts of oxytocin are produced during a conversation about your marital imperative or mission.

6. Determine your attachment style, and make sure you stay secure with good communication and other strategies. Refer to the book *Wired for Love* by Stan Tatkin or *Love Sense* by Susan Johnson. If you are avoidantly or anxiously attached, research how to move yourself into a more secure style. It is well worth the effort.

Reflect Which of these key components do we already have in place? Which ones do we need to actively strengthen in our relationship?

Physical Health: Natural Hormone Balance

TGIF: Thank God I'm Female

Another physical factor with huge impact on our relationships is women's hormonal health. Let's start by taking a look at the common perceptions we hold regarding women and their hormones.

When I say, "HORMONES!"... What pops into your head? List five things, feelings or adjectives you associate with the word *hormones*:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

What are some characteristics of women that we love and esteem? Name three characteristics we particularly think of as feminine traits:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What gives women these characteristics?



Living in a State of Natural Hormone Balance

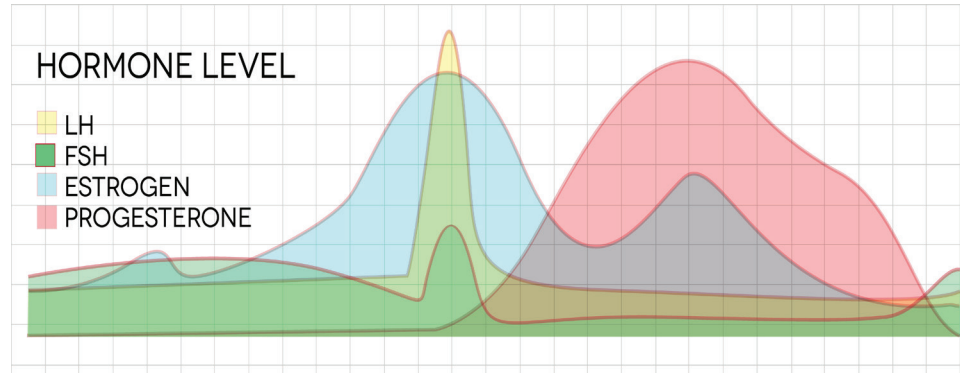
I LOVE my hormones?

Women are wonderful—at least they can be wonderful! We all know incredible women who have taken care of us and who have helped shape who we are. These amazing women in our lives are untiringly generous;

they will give and give and give! Women are nurturing and have a profound attention to detail. When I first read “attention to detail,” I thought to myself, “Oh no, what am I, a man? I am not great with details!” But then I discovered it is more specifically an attention to interpersonal detail, meaning women have a keen sense of all the likes and dislikes of the people in our lives. We walk into a room and immediately know what needs to be done to put everyone at ease, or we can do the opposite.

Women have the ability to multitask. This can be an asset or a liability, so sometimes we need the single-mindedness of a man’s brain to balance us out. “Let’s focus on one thing and finish it to completion, my Love,” is something I hear often from my husband. Otherwise, we can feel like the Cat in the Hat bouncing around on the ball with 50 things we are trying to balance all at once...just before the whole thing collapses. Men and women need each other!

Women have a profound capacity for empathy, along with the ability to tune into other people and “read” what is going on in their heads. This ability, plus the attention to interpersonal detail, makes women very good at nurturing others. These incredible feminine qualities are a result of how



estrogen and progesterone work together to impact and wire our brains.

Let’s take a look at what goes on in a woman’s body over a 30-day time frame. LH and FSH are hormones released from the brain that signal the ovaries to produce estrogen and progesterone. The rise and fall of estrogen and progesterone are dependent on ovulation. Estrogen rises and falls leading up to ovulation, and progesterone dramatically rises and falls after ovulation.

Does the above illustration remind you a bit of a roller coaster ride at the theme park? Do you think, “No wonder I’m crazy! I literally don’t know who I am, hormonally speaking, until I wake up in the morning!”?



Women tend to have a love-hate relationship with their hormones, lamenting that they are something we all “just deal with” in being female. However, most women do not understand that **this rollercoaster-like rise and fall of hormones is the physiological norm, which results in a profound sense of well-being.** It is only when our hormones do not look like this that we just don't feel (or act) like ourselves. Buckle up, Ladies, because this coaster ride is the definition of living in a state of natural hormone balance!

Hormone Balance Impacts Our Relationships

Most women, and the men who love them, do not think of hormones as an asset that shape us in a good way. When we look at what happens to our hormones over a 30-day or so time frame, we don't think, “Wow, how beautiful! I just love my hormones!” with a warm and fuzzy feeling inside.

Instead, when we look at the previous diagram, we mumble to ourselves, “No wonder I'm such an emotional mess. I'm crying at commercials!” Or, “this is why I am rockin' it on my diet and exercise plan for 2 weeks, but then I can't shove enough chocolate, french fries, ice cream and onion rings in my mouth for the next 2 weeks.”

And our poor husbands- they don't know what to do! What's okay one week is NOT okay this week. Guys think to themselves, “I left the toilet seat up last week, and it wasn't that big of a deal. This week it caused World War III...huh?!”

We can experience feelings like “I was happy last week, and he was wonderful. But this week I feel fat and irritable and EVERYTHING HE DOES IS DRIVING ME CRAZY!”

This unpredictability makes our husbands' heads spin and can negatively impact our relationships. So, women's hormone issues are not just a woman's issue. Women's hormonal health is also a relationship issue.

The previous diagram makes our hormones look like a roller coaster ride. In reality though, if our hormones are doing this 30-day dance, we should actually have a profound sense of well-being. We should be full of energy, even-keeled emotionally, and feel like ourselves. I like to call this living in a state of natural hormone balance. It is only when our hormones don't look like this that we experience all the above-mentioned symptoms.



In addition to feeling well (in other words, we bust out of bed feeling fabulous at least 27 days out of every 30—we have to be realistic), living in a state of natural hormone balance has a dramatic impact on several other systems of a woman's body.

Can you think of any other systems that are affected by estrogen and progesterone?

Hormones and Whole Body Health

Believe it or not, hormones are about much more than reproduction. Women have estrogen and progesterone receptors all over the body. Here are a few of the systems impacted by the natural hormone balance (or imbalance) that women experience.

Cardiovascular Health

Estrogen: increases blood pressure, decreases cholesterol, increases clotting, causes a prediabetic-like state.

Progesterone: decreases blood pressure, increases cholesterol, decreases clotting, normalizes the body's reaction to blood sugar.

Brain Health and Development

Estrogen: protects brain cells from the damage that leads to Alzheimer's disease, wakes the brain up and makes us alive and alert.

Progesterone: calms the brain, acting like a natural anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medication.

Breast Health

Estrogen: increases breast cell division, causes the DNA damage that leads to cancer cells forming.

Progesterone: stops breast cells from dividing, protects cells from the damage that leads to cancer cells forming.

Bone Health

Estrogen: builds bones up and makes them stronger.

Progesterone: breaks bones down (which is necessary to build up bone density in our youth).

As if that wasn't complicated enough, there are two other systems involved in maintaining natural hormone balance. They are the thyroid and the adrenals (which produce the stress hormone cortisol). **Thyroid hormone runs our metabolism.** Our metabolism is all the tiny little chemical reactions that happen in our cells. Thyroid hormone controls the rate of those reactions. If we don't have enough thyroid, our cells are sluggish, including cells in the ovaries, and our entire system struggles.

Cortisol is a stress hormone that impacts the cell's ability to use thyroid hormone. A little bit of cortisol due to short term stress is not a problem, but when we have too much stress for too long, thyroid hormone is blocked from use by the cells.



The Connection Between Three Different Systems

Women are so simple to understand...or not?

Thyroid

Active thyroid hormone is needed for the ovaries to produce the proper amounts of estrogen and progesterone. Low thyroid function can mimic PMS and menopause.

Adrenal Glands

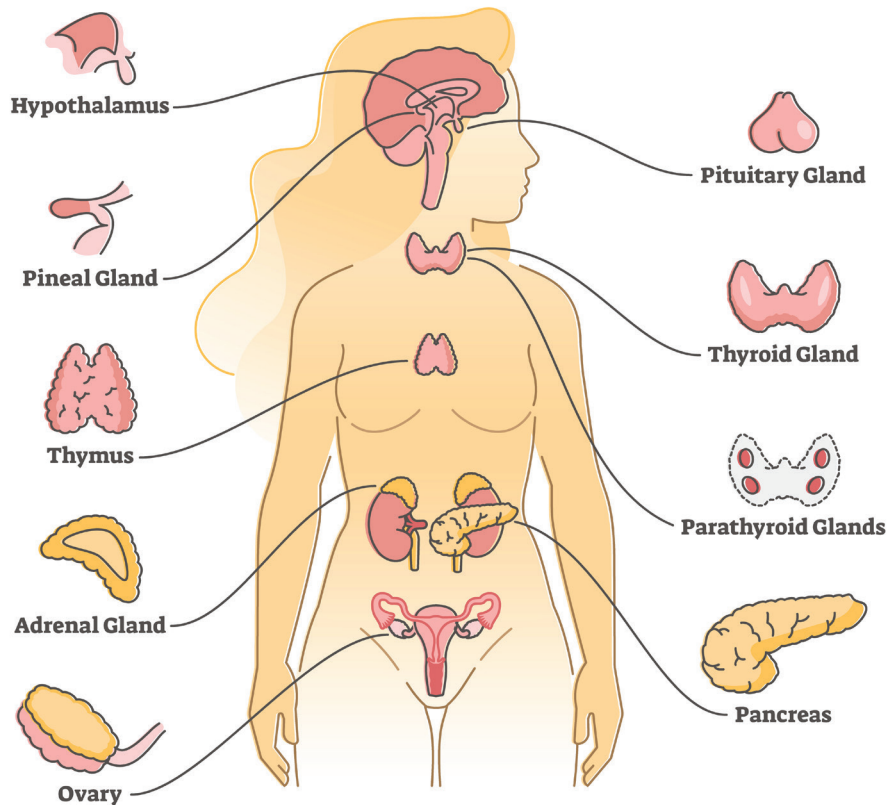
Cortisol is produced in response to stress. In the case of chronic stress, it inactivates thyroid hormone, like insulin resistance in type II diabetes.

Progesterone is required by the body to make cortisol. So elevated production of cortisol equals decreased levels of progesterone.

Ovaries

The ovaries are dependent on active thyroid hormone in order to function. The ovaries have to supply the adrenals with progesterone to produce cortisol. If the demand for cortisol is too high because of too much stress for too long, the body ends up being progesterone deficient.

FEMALE ENDOCRINE SYSTEM



Natural Hormone Balance—Why Only Ten Percent?

As women, we feel great when the thyroid, adrenals and ovaries are all functioning normally. Natural hormone balance and all of its head-to-toe health benefits sound like a fabulous idea! Right?

But how many women are actually living in this ideal state? What percentage of women feel even-keeled throughout the month, have a clear head and are in control of their emotions and reactions, wake up with energy that accurately reflects the sleep they got the night before, and have low risk factors for cardiovascular disease and cancer?

Most people guess around **10% of women are probably living in a state of natural hormone balance.** Over the last 20 years in speaking with women in small group settings, this number is pretty accurate. Only about one in ten or one in 20 women will report not having symptoms of hormone imbalance. But natural hormone balance *is* normal physiology. This is how our bodies are supposed to function. So, why are only ten percent of women living in this healthy state?

What are the obstacles to living in a state of natural hormone balance?

The answer is the same one we've been getting all along...why aren't more people happy, and why aren't more couples living out the fulfilling love we all desire? Once again, there are cultural norms, a lack of information, and unquestioned perceptions in place. These are the obstacles blocking women from living in this ideal physical state.



Next, we are going to consider **four obstacles:**

1. Cultural norms surrounding birth control practices which limit couples' family planning options.
2. Cultural norms and standard practices in women's medicine that limit women's treatment options. Standard treatment of hormonal imbalance focuses on symptom-masking and medicine-stacking, rather than restoring normal physiology to the woman's body.
3. Lack of knowledge regarding effective stress management strategies.
4. A relationship that is low on oxytocin.

Road Blocks to Natural Hormone Balance

When a couple wants to avoid conceiving a child in the present but plans to have kids in the future, what form of birth control are they generally offered? Some form of hormonal contraceptive, right?

This is a given, an unquestioned cultural norm. We hold the assumptions that the pill and all variations of hormonal contraceptives (the patch, the shot, the implant, the ring, etc.) are highly effective, easy to use, and very safe. If you look at the research on effectiveness, compliance and side effects, these assumptions may not be as valid as most people think. Also, consider what we've just learned about the benefits of natural hormone balance for women, as well as how the pill works to disrupt the reproductive system in the body. Safety then becomes a real question mark.

When dealing with cultural norms, it is helpful to step back and examine the "norm" in question with a healthy amount of skepticism. An effective method of critical awareness is key.



Let's walk through this critical awareness process to assess a prevalent cultural norm that more and more people are recognizing as harmful to young women. Then, we can use the same process to look at some of the cultural norms within women's medicine today.

Think about the following questions concerning our cultural norm of beauty:

What is the picture of a beautiful woman? In other words, what is the standard we all compare ourselves to when we look in the mirror?

Where does this image of beauty come from? Who perpetuates it or promotes it? Who benefits by maintaining this image of beauty?

In her book *Women and Shame*, Brene Brown, Ph.D., assimilates research showing that our cultural norm of beauty is a tall, rail-thin, blond-haired, blue-eyed woman (2004). When women look in the mirror, this cultural norm causes women of all ages to reject themselves and feel like they are not enough. This image is perpetuated by several industries. Cosmetic, health and beauty, fad diet/fitness, and plastic surgery industries all profit from women trying to conform their outside appearance to this "unhealthy for 99% of women" standard. Because the norm is cultural, it is also reinforced by the medical community when doctors shame women at yearly "weigh ins" and checkups. Friends and family, despite good intentions, can also unknowingly perpetuate the norm through diet and exercise advice or excessive praise of weight loss or other changes in appearance.



The impact on women is profoundly negative. Eating disorders, plastic surgery, low self-image, bullying, and mood disorders like depression and anxiety are all outgrowths of this cultural norm that makes women reject themselves on the outside. We need to maintain a healthy BMI, but our standard for beauty significantly influences how women relate to themselves. The message is not, “You are beautiful in your own awesome way! And because you are awesome, you need to be healthy!” But rather, “You aren’t enough as you are!” plays over and over in women’s minds as they look in the mirror. This leads to the question men hate and can’t possibly answer the right way, “Honey, does this outfit make me look fat?”



Let’s go ahead and take a look at three obstacles to natural hormone balance that many women face today:

1. Limited options for treatment of women’s health needs
2. Limited family planning options
3. An epidemic of chronic stress and thyroid imbalance

Obstacle One: Limited Options for Treatment

Symptom Masking and Medicine Stacking Rather than Restoring Balance

The vast majority of women think PMS, pain, and “not feeling like themselves” for one to two weeks out of every four is just “part of being female.” But this isn’t true! We are not defective and disadvantaged by nature, ladies. Take a look through the following list of symptoms.

PMS Symptoms you don't have to live with:

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Bloating or weight gain
- Breast tenderness
- Depression or “feeling down”
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low self-esteem
- Decreased interest in activities
- Fatigue or “lacking energy”
- Food cravings for sweets, salty foods or chocolate
- Stomach upset, nausea
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Headaches
- Impulsivity or feeling out of control
- Mood swings, irritability
- Muscle and joint pain
- Difficulty sleeping
- Tension



Thyroid symptoms you don't have to live with:

It is important to note that even if your thyroid is being treated, recent studies have shown that many patients continue to struggle with symptoms of decreased thyroid function. In these cases, you could benefit from a different treatment regimen. So, take a look at the following list.

- Fatigue
- Inability to concentrate or foggy brain
- Feeling down or have the blues
- Difficulty losing weight
- Headaches
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Feeling cold all the time
- Food cravings
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Heartburn



- Food intolerances
- Frequent colds, sinus infections, sore throats and urinary tract infections
- Infertility
- PMS
- Irregular cycles
- Dry eyes or dry skin
- Ear infections
- Joint and muscle aches
- Skin blotchiness
- Hair loss
- Prematurely gray hair
- Easy bruising



If you have sought treatment for these symptoms, what did a doctor do for you? If you struggle with depression that ramps up a week before your period, what is a woman offered? An anti-depressant and usually a birth control pill, right? If we have trouble sleeping before that time of the month, we are given a sleeping pill. If anxiety increases, we are offered an anxiolytic.

The standard “solution” is more symptom masking and medicine stacking.

Evaluation and Treatment

Standard care in women’s medicine is to treat the symptoms, rather than the underlying cause. When a woman goes to her family practice physician or gynecologist seeking help for hormone-related, cyclical problems, is she ever offered the “restore hormone balance” approach?

Does standard medicine seek to figure out what is wrong with our hormones so the imbalance can be remediated? In other words, does it seek to restore the physiological norm? Nope. In fact, this is the only area in medicine that doesn’t seek to identify problems and restore normal physiology as the standard practice. Unless we seek out specialized care from a complementary/alternative medicine doctor, we are instead offered prescription on top of prescription.

Why doesn’t the standard of care involve lab work to look at our hormone levels compared to where they should be? If you look at what goes on with our hormones over a 30-day time frame, the answer is simple...women are crazy! Neither husbands nor most of their doctors can figure them out.

Men, I am not responsible for what will happen to you if you repeat this statement to the ladies in your life! I am a woman, so I am allowed to say that we are crazy. But why are we crazy? Let’s revisit the “roller coaster” diagram from the beginning of this section to note how dramatically the hormone levels change throughout the menstrual cycle.

A woman’s hormones are difficult to evaluate for multiple reasons:

- Her hormones fluctuate dramatically throughout her cycle.
- The dramatic changes are centered on ovulation (see diagram, p. 161).

- The time between the beginning of a woman's period and ovulation can change from cycle to cycle in an individual woman. It is the time from ovulation to the beginning of her next period that should always be the same.
- Only 15% of women have a 28-day cycle. So, relying solely on a certain cycle day to draw blood for checking hormone levels will not produce valid results for all women.

For a woman who is charting her cycle, it is simple to evaluate her hormones. Cooperative hormonal evaluation uses the woman's chart as a guide to determine when to draw blood. The knowledge that a woman is "X" number of days after ovulation gives her doctor an accurate idea of how high or low her estrogen and progesterone levels should be at that particular time.



Getting to the Root of the Problem

The vast majority of women experience symptoms of hormonal imbalance. PMS is the most prevalent problem that many women "just live with." So let's use PMS as an example to demonstrate that treatment based on charting the cycle is the ideal. Typical treatment for PMS is geared towards masking symptoms. Women often find this ineffective or find the

side effects of the cure to be as disruptive as the PMS itself. There are three underlying causes of PMS. They include low progesterone and low calcium with or without low estrogen.

Take a look at the symptoms associated with each underlying problem.

Symptoms Associated with Low Progesterone

- Heavy bleeding
- Breast tenderness
- Increased premenstrual symptoms
- Fibrocystic breasts
- Ovarian cysts
- Abdominal weight
- Anxiety or irritability
- Water retention
- Increased triglyceride levels

Symptoms Associated with Low Estrogen

- Foggy mind
- Hot flashes
- Depression
- Memory lapses
- Headaches
- Vaginal dryness
- Irregular periods
- Urine leakage
- Sleep problems
- Bone loss

Symptoms Associated with Low Calcium

- Abdominal cramps



- Arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat)
- Depression
- Irritability
- Lethargy or sluggishness
- Muscle spasms
- Seizures

Effective treatment for PMS is geared towards correcting the underlying problems. Treatment that restores balance is twice as effective as symptom masking with antidepressants.

Overview of Treatment: Restoring Natural Hormone Balance

Step 1: Become an expert on yourself by learning to chart your cycle.

Step 2: If you have PMS symptoms and signs of hormone imbalance on your chart, begin supplementing vitamin B6 and calcium citrate, timed with your cycle.

Step 3: See a Naprotechnology-trained physician to evaluate hormone levels and supplement, if necessary, based on the results.

Step 4: Implement lifestyle changes to help with stress management and to increase happiness. This will lower cortisol levels.

What a Doctor Can Do for You

Physicians who are trained in restoring natural hormone balance can properly time hormone testing, based on your chart (yet another reason to learn to chart your cycle). Then, treatment can be geared toward restoring normal levels.

Lab Tests a Doctor Can Order

When you go to one of these specially trained physicians, he/she will order a hormone evaluation based on how many days you are after ovulation.

Progesterone peaks around 7 days after ovulation, so this is the ideal time to check progesterone levels associated with PMS symptoms. In addition to a progesterone level, your doctor may want to test estradiol, a TSH, T3, reverse T3, beta-endorphins, and a Vitamin D level.

Treatment Based on Test Results

Prometrium is a commercially available bioidentical progesterone. It comes as a 200 mg capsule that can

be taken orally or may be used as a vaginal suppository. You will start the Prometrium 3 days after ovulation and continue taking 200 mg every day for 10 days. If taking the capsule by mouth isn't giving you adequate relief, you may not be absorbing enough progesterone through your gut. Talk with your doctor about using the capsules as a suppository. In addition to the Prometrium, you should be taking both B6 and calcium citrate post-ovulation.

If your lab results show that you have both a low progesterone and estrogen level or your PMS is severe, your doctor may prescribe beta-HCG injections. Beta-HCG stimulates the ovaries to produce both estrogen and progesterone. If you start it 3 days after ovulation and take it every other day for 7 days (4 doses), it will give your body the extra boost of hormones it needs. By restoring balance in this way, 85 to 95% of women report feeling like themselves again!

Results

- 84% of women treated with progesterone and vitamin supplements reported moderate to marked improvement of symptoms.
- 43% of women reported moderate to marked improvement with standard treatment (anti-depressants and birth control pills).

Fix the underlying problem and restore well-being. It just makes sense! I like to compare this approach to how we treat an insulin-dependent diabetic. We simply give the body what it needs when it needs it. Treating women's hormonal issues is actually simpler than diabetes. Instead of timing medication by the hour, targeted hormonal treatment is timed over the course of 30 days.

This approach can be used to treat any women's health issue: painful periods, irregular cycles, abnormal bleeding, hormone-related acne, and infertility. It is a total women's health perspective that makes sense.



Obstacle Two: Limited Family Planning Options

Is disrupting natural hormone balance a cultural norm we should question?

Let's consider the cultural birth control norms we have in place today. What is the standard approach to women's reproductive health today? When a healthy, 18-year-old woman goes to her physician for a yearly check-up before going off to college, what advice and prescription is she typically offered? Where does this approach to women's medicine come from, and who benefits from it?

The synthetic hormones in hormonal birth control methods are 100 to 1000 times more potent than the natural hormones produced by the body. These potent synthetic hormones act on all the estrogen and progesterone receptors throughout a woman's body—not just on receptors that are associated with the reproductive system (the ovaries and the uterus). The action of synthetic hormones disrupts the balance (also called homeostasis) of the entire body—cardiovascular system, central nervous system, bones, breast, digestive system, immune system, and the skin are all impacted. **The bottom line is, normal physiology and homeostasis is good for women's health.**

There is a prevalent cultural norm today insisting that a disruption in the normal function of a woman's reproductive system is a good and healthy thing to do. Pharmaceutical companies clearly benefit from the perpetuation of this norm. The president of Searle, a leading pharmaceutical company, called a contraceptive pill "the golden egg" of the industry back in the late 1950's since it is given to healthy women of reproductive age. This norm is supported by political forces as well as personally through family and friends. In a subtle but real way, the message to

women is to reject this aspect of yourselves because it is a dead weight that will hold you back. According to this norm, the normal physiology of a woman's body is "not enough," and we therefore reject ourselves on the inside (and out).

Another cultural norm that perpetuates this form of birth control is the generally held belief that dopamine-driven sexual hedonic treadmills are necessary and good for couples. We have already discussed how this is self-destructive and counter-productive if you want to establish a thriving, long-term relationship characterized by deep friendship (oxytocin-rich) and ongoing passion (dopamine). Now that we've called it to attention, let's take a look at how this cultural norm impacts women.



Exercise in Risk vs. Benefit Assessment

Before we get into the side effects of synthetic hormones, let's do a little risk versus benefit exercise. Every medication has potential risks and benefits. The art of medicine involves ensuring the benefits outweigh the risks to each patient.

The following lists are side effect profiles from *Mosby's Drug Reference* (a medical text which discusses the medications that doctors prescribe) of a drug given to men. Read through the side effect profile, and try to guess the disorder treated by this medication.

Greater than 5% of the patients experienced the following side effects: Hot flashes, sexual dysfunction, decreased erections, lower urinary tract symptoms, lethargy, pain in the testes, edema (swelling), upper respiratory infection, rash, sweating, anorexia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure, insomnia, dizziness, and nausea.

The following additional adverse reactions were reported in greater than 1% but less than 5% of the patients treated with this medication: arrhythmia, cerebrovascular accident (stroke), hypertension, myocardial infarction, peripheral vascular disorder, chest pain, anxiety, depression, headache, constipation, diarrhea, ulcer, vomiting, anemia, gout, hyperglycemia, weight increase, chills, fever, renal insufficiency, urinary obstruction, urinary tract infection, breast swelling and tenderness.

What disease do you think a man has that would warrant the risks listed above? _____

Now let's turn to a woman.



The following is a list of side effects and risks of a medication given to women. Try to guess the condition suffered by the women who receive this drug: Nausea; vomiting; gastrointestinal symptoms (such as abdominal cramps and bloating); breakthrough bleeding; spotting; change in menstrual flow; amenorrhea; temporary infertility after discontinuation of treatment; edema; melasma, which may persist; breast changes: tenderness, enlargement, secretion; change in weight (increase or decrease); change in cervical erosion and secretion; diminution in lactation when given immediately postpartum; cholestatic jaundice; migraine; rash (allergic); mental depression; reduced tolerance to carbohydrates (as in diabetes); vaginal candidiasis (yeast infections); change in corneal curvature (a change in the eye that may cause a change in vision); intolerance to contact lenses; increased bad cholesterol, and decreased good cholesterol; increase in high blood pressure.

Less common but more serious risks include: Thrombophlebitis, arterial thromboembolism, pulmonary embolism, myocardial infarction, cerebral hemorrhage, cerebral thrombosis, hypertension, gallbladder disease, hepatic adenomas or benign liver tumors, increased risk of breast cancer, cervical cancer and liver cancer, increased susceptibility to HIV, death.

What disease does a woman have that would warrant the risks listed above? _____





The medication given to men is a chemotherapeutic agent called goserlin, which is used to treat prostate cancer. In this case, although the risks of the medication are severe (and more common than compared to the medication given to women), the benefits outweigh the risks. The medication *may* kill the man, but his cancer will certainly kill him eventually.

The medication given to women is the birth control pill. You probably saw where I was going with this, but I encourage women (and the men who love them) to read through the entire list. I cannot tell you how many women have had an “Ah-ha!” moment when the phenomenon I like to call **symptom masking and medicine stacking** is brought to light. The phenomenon generally plays out like this:

A young woman is prescribed the pill in high school or college for painful periods or birth control...

...six months later she gets depressed, so she is put on an anti-depressant...

...six months after that she starts struggling with heartburn, so she is given a reflux medicine...

....six months after that she starts having headaches, so she is given a headache medicine....six months after that...

This symptom masking and medicine stacking is standard care in women’s health today, and women are left to put the picture together. In addition to these minor side effects (with major impact on quality of daily life), hormonal contraceptives also have major risks. Most people are aware of the major, but extremely rare risks, of heart attack, stroke and pulmonary embolism. We hear these on commercials. But can you name other significant risks?

Major Long-Term Risks of Synthetic Hormones in HRT and Hormonal Contraceptives

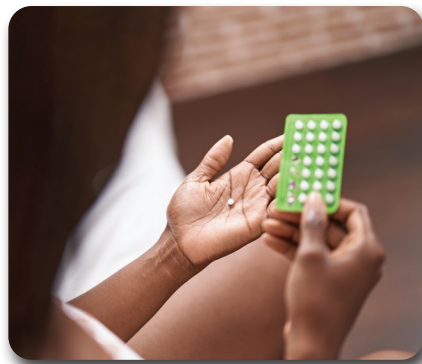
Synthetic Hormones and Cancer

Many men and women are not aware of a link between breast cancer and synthetic hormone use. In 2005, the **World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer** published a review of the medical research on the link between certain types of cancers and the synthetic hormones in hormonal contraceptives and hormone replacement therapy. The committee of doctors who reviewed the medical literature concluded that **synthetic hormones are**

“carcinogenic to humans” with regards to breast, cervical and liver cancer (2005, Schneider, Mueck & Kuhl).

The IARC committee categorized synthetic hormones as type/group I carcinogens. Type I means two things:

1. Synthetic hormones cause the **cell damage** that leads to cancer cells forming.
2. Once a cancer cell is present, these chemicals feed it and **make it grow faster**.



Epidemiological studies have found between **24% to 480% increased risk with pill use**. The highest risk is for **premenopausal breast cancer**. Research has shown hormonal contraceptives decrease the risk for ovarian and endometrial cancers. Even with a decrease in these two types of cancers, the overall shift is towards increased risk. This is because breast and cervical cancers are much more common than ovarian and endometrial cancers. It is also important to understand that endometrial cancer can be prevented

by restoring natural hormone balance to a woman's body, and it can be detected early with the approach to women's health presented in the following pages. Women can decrease their risk for ovarian cancer by breastfeeding their children. With this approach, you can have the beneficial protection from ovarian and endometrial cancer without the increased risk for more common cancers of the breast and cervix.

The increased risk of breast cancer was debated for decades in the medical literature, but it is now well-established as a major risk. Women were not informed of this possibility during these decades of debate, and women are still not being informed. However, many women would have taken this into consideration when deciding on what form of birth control they would choose.

There is also another risk researchers are now investigating. The increased risk for atherosclerosis, the clogging of the arteries that leads to heart attacks and strokes, in women's 50's and 60's is now underway. The following are just a few articles from the growing body of evidence that have been published on this connection to date:

Synthetic Hormones and Cardiovascular Disease

- In 2001, the Nurse's Health Study found that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) actually was increasing the number of heart attacks and strokes in women during the first year of treatment. This finding along with the increase in breast cancer caused the researchers to discontinue the study early for obvious ethical reasons. The pill contains the same synthetic hormones—at a ten times higher dose.
- A Belgium study found a 40% increase in plaque formation of women on oral contraceptives for 10 years in the past (Sept 2007,

MD consult, Dr. Ernst-R. Rietzschel at the Annual Congress of the European Society of Cardiology).

- Oral contraceptives increase the atherogenic index of plasma (Scandinavian Journal of Clinical & Laboratory Investigation, 2011; Early Online, 1–7).
- In 2011, research was published showing an increase in two more factors of concern, homocystiene and C-reactive protein, in women on oral contraceptives. The researchers concluded that the increase in these two factors in the blood should be taken into account if a woman has other risks for developing atherosclerosis. (www.anakarder.com/sayilar/68/buyuk/698-702.pdf)
- In 2012, effects on lipid profiles—LDL and HDL—along with other less known molecules also point to a correlation between oral contraceptive use and clogging of women's arteries. Yet few doctors and even fewer women are informed on this research. (<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00404-011-2192-3>)

If you look at what the natural balance between estrogen and progesterone does for a woman's body, these minor and major side effects and risks make perfect sense. We cannot disturb an entire system without impacting the body as a whole. Researchers justify the risks and side effects by reasoning that it is better than an unintended pregnancy. This risk versus benefit assessment would be more understandable if there was no other way to avoid pregnancy. But what if there was a way to effectively avoid pregnancy while living in a state of natural hormone balance? Wouldn't that change the risks?

What do you think?



Typical Risk vs Benefit Analysis

Hormonal birth control is an unquestioned norm today, so it can be helpful to look at a standard risk assessment to inform your own investigation.

Here is a typical risk versus benefit assessment for the birth control pill, assuming that the woman is not pregnant.

Advantages typically listed for the Pill:

- Decreased risk of ovarian cancer
- Decreased risk of endometrial cancer
- Decreased incidence of benign breast cysts
- Menstrual regularity
- Reduced duration and amount of flow of menses
- Treatment for acne
- Treatment for painful periods

Disadvantages typically listed for the Pill:

- Increased risk of blood clots, heart attack, stroke (very rare)
- Effectiveness is compromised if not taken correctly
- Offers no protection from sexually transmitted diseases
- Return to fertility can be delayed
- Sometimes causes depression

Except for the decrease in ovarian cancer, the advantages of hormonal contraceptives can be achieved by restoring natural hormone balance to a woman's body....so stay tuned!

Reflect Take a few minutes to discuss your own risk versus benefit assessment. Don't forget to add in things we have learned about the brain on love and relationships.



A Viable Solution: Family Planning and Women's Health

I never present a problem without a solution! And the solution has been around for years. Natural family planning is also referred to as NFP. I don't like the term NFP. If people have heard of it, they may associate it with "their grandma with 12 children" or their mother saying, "That's how we got your hellian of a brother!" Or sometimes people have no idea what I am talking about. I use the term fertility management in order to decrease the implicit memory associations of people who have heard of it before. It also makes

sense to others because we manage things that are important to us. We manage our money, our time, our marriage...why not manage our fertility? Managing something means intelligently directing a significant resource. The ability to create a new human being is a superpower that we care for and manage wisely!

Before we can even consider using something new, we need to learn about it. That makes sense with anything, but we are talking about health and reproduction here. The weight of the topic and the presence of much misinformation out there about NFP/fertility management systems makes the learning process even more critical.

Understanding the effectiveness of natural fertility management systems begins with looking at how a woman gets pregnant. Well, perhaps not HOW a woman gets pregnant. If you don't know that, then you need a whole different book...Let's look at what I like to call the physiology of pregnancy.



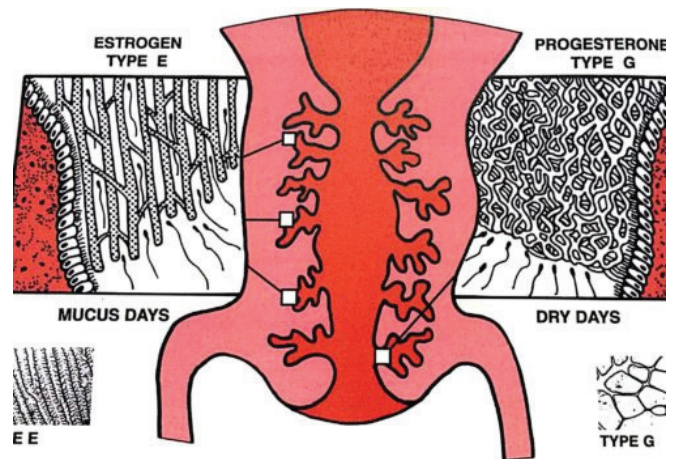
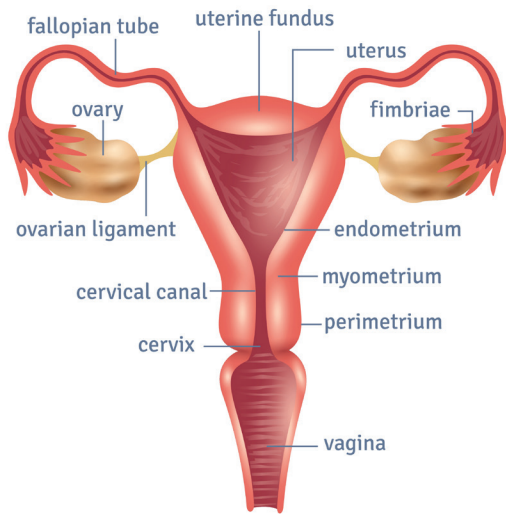
Let's say a woman is shown to be ovulating on an ultrasound, and a man checks out "normal." This means he has a good sperm count, and the little swimmers are able to get from point A to point B (or have motility). Do you think the couple can get pregnant?

Ninety five percent of people answer, "Yes." And that is a reasonable answer; however, it reveals a general lack of knowledge about all factors necessary for pregnancy to occur. In reality, there is an essential third factor. It is a female factor—a fluid produced by the cervix. This cervical fluid is produced in response to the same rise in estrogen which prepares the ovaries to produce an egg. If cervical fluid is present, then pregnancy is possible. If this cervical fluid is absent, then pregnancy is impossible. In fact, a decrease in the production of this fluid is one contributing factor to infertility problems.



What are Fertility Management Systems?

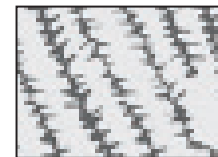
A picture can be worth a thousand words, so let's look at the physiology of pregnancy with the following diagrams. Below (on the left) is a picture of the reproductive organs in a woman's body, and on the right is an image of the cervix. The cervix is a cone-shaped organ between the vagina and the uterus. There is a channel that runs through the center of the cervix called the cervical canal. Along the walls of this channel are little pockets or indentations called cervical crypts (shown in the picture on the right). Within these crypts are groups of cells that produce the cervical fluid that is necessary for pregnancy to occur.



There are two types of substances produced by the cervical crypts during a woman's cycle: Type E (produced in response to estrogen), called "motorway mucus" in the above diagram, and Type G (produced in response to progesterone). Below are images of what this fluid looks like under a high-powered microscope.

Type E Fluid

This is the consistency of the substance produced by the cervix during the time leading up to ovulation (in response to the increasing levels of estrogen, hence the term "Type E Fluid"). Type E cervical fluid forms channels, allowing sperm to pass through to the uterus and the Fallopian tubes.



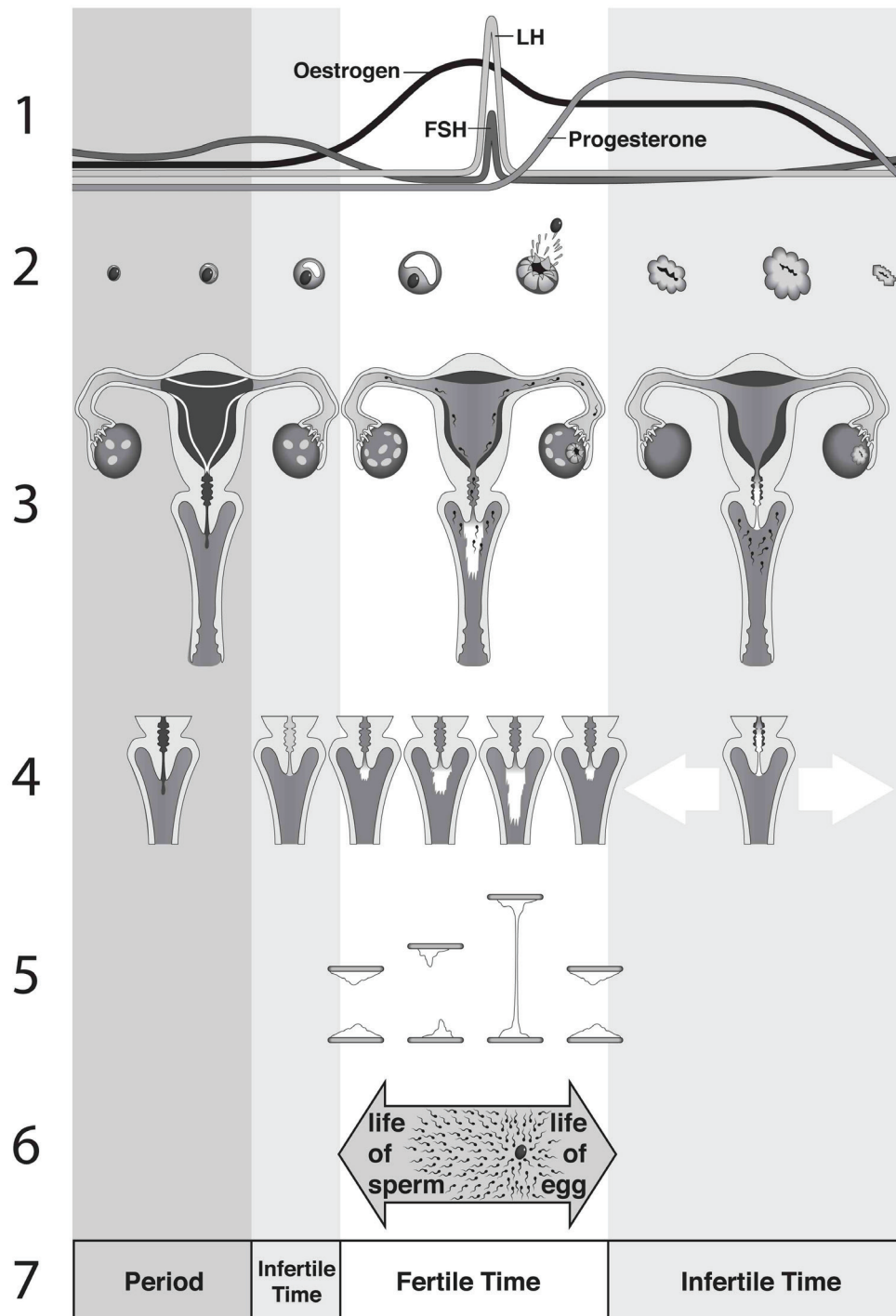
Type G Fluid

This is the consistency of the substance produced by the cervix outside the time of ovulation (partially in response to progesterone). Type G fluid is often referred to as a "stone wall," which prevents sperm from passing through the vagina into the uterus and Fallopian tubes.



A Woman's Cycle

This following diagram of the woman's cycle puts a complicated system all on one page. See the next page for a line by line explanation.





Description by line number:

1. The hormones estrogen and progesterone rise and fall dramatically throughout a woman's cycle. FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone) and LH (luteinizing hormone) are messengers sent from the brain to the ovaries dictating what to produce and when to release the egg/ovulate. The surge in LH triggers ovulation and happens only one time per month (or cycle). Modern fertility monitors are able to detect a rise in estrogen and the LH surge via urine test, which is similar to a pregnancy test. These monitors can be helpful if a woman is feeling uncertain, especially during the initial learning curve.

2. Depicts what is going on in the ovaries. In the beginning of the cycle a single, small group of cells form a follicle. Hormones feed the follicle's growth until mid-cycle, at which point the LH surge triggers the now "mature follicle" to release the egg. After the egg is released (ovulation occurs), the cells left behind form the corpus luteum. The cells in the corpus luteum produce the large rise and fall of progesterone during the second half of a woman's cycle.

3. Demonstrates how the production of the cervical fluid impacts when sperm can and can't swim through the cervix.

4. Shows how the cervical fluid evolves during the cycle.

5. Demonstrates how the quality and consistency of cervical fluid evolves during the fertile window. Understanding this evolution is important because many people think of the cervix like a door that is either open or closed. One moment the door is closed, and then "BAMM!" the next moment it is flung wide open! But this isn't how it works. Think of a tunnel filled with tightly packed stones, and

then imagine water washing it out of the tunnel over time...It is a gradual process. In the cervix, as estrogen rises there is a gradual shift from the production of type G stone wall substance to the type E fluid. This gradual turn over translates into a lower probability of pregnancy on the first days of the fertile window. This crescendos as the body gets closer and closer to ovulation. Following ovulation, there is a dramatic shift back to the type G stone wall within the cervix, and pregnancy is no longer possible. The gradual increase in fertility during the fertile window makes it possible to use the method very accurately.

6. Represents the fact that sperm cannot survive long (a maximum of a couple of hours) unless they are in the type E cervical fluid. If cervical fluid didn't extend the life of sperm, our species would have died out long ago. Eggs live only 12-24 hours if not fertilized, and pregnancy would be extremely difficult to achieve in such a narrow window of time.

7. Demonstrates how all these different aspects of a woman's cycle translate into when pregnancy can and cannot occur. The type G stone wall fluid within the cervix is not observable by the woman. So, this time is observed as essentially "dry." This dry time following the menstrual flow is infertile. Once an observable cervical fluid appears, the woman is potentially fertile until 3 days after the type E fluid disappears. Ovulation can occur anytime from the first day of observable cervical fluid (although less likely this soon) up until the end of this full 3-day count from the last day of type E fluid. So, infertile time begins again 4 days after the type E fluid disappears. The remainder of the cycle is generally back to the dry days and is infertile until a new cycle begins.

Becoming an Expert On Yourself

All this information would be worthless—unless couples can be taught to use it. And fortunately, there are several methods of natural fertility management systems. Ladies, I call this becoming an expert on yourself. The sample *Billings Ovulation Method* chart shown below is an example of what a woman might record during one menstrual cycle. Because every woman is unique, cycle length, number of days of menstruation and number of days of cervical fluid will vary. Please also keep in mind that becoming an “expert” on yourself requires finding a certified teacher or resource to help you get there. Do not consider this overview as a replacement for meeting with a trained teacher, as successfully using these methods requires proper instruction. See the next page for method-specific resources.

Now that you have a general understanding of how fertility management systems work, how effective do you think they are at avoiding pregnancy?

100%?

50%?

Jot down a percentage: _____

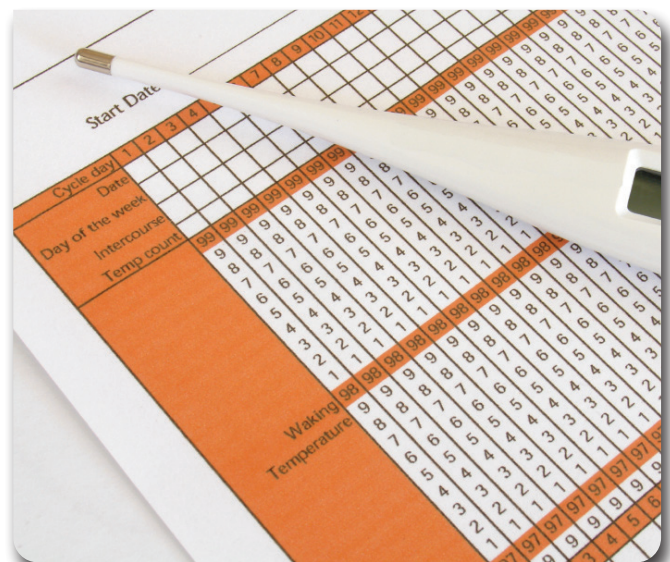
How do I learn a Fertility Management System?

Women can learn these methods through the internet, by reading a book, attending group classes, or meeting with a teacher one-on-one. The different methods commonly available to women in the United States include the Sympto-Thermal method, the Creighton Model Fertility Care System, and the Marquette Model.

The Sympto-Thermal Method

The sympto-thermal method can be learned from a book called *Taking Charge of Your Fertility* by Toni Weschler. This author is a women’s health activist, and she also has a website to help you learn to chart and track your cycles. For more information visit: www.tcoyf.com.

If you want to attend a class, the Couple to Couple League and the Creighton Model Fertility Care System offer personalized sessions. The Couple to Couple League is a Christian-based organization that teaches the sympto-thermal method to groups of couples. Women are taught to observe for the presence of cervical fluid (by simply checking the tissue paper in the bathroom) and take the basal body temperature (BBT) each morning. The BBT increases after ovulation in response to a rise in the hormone progesterone. You can find a Couple to Couple League class at <http://register.ccli.org>.





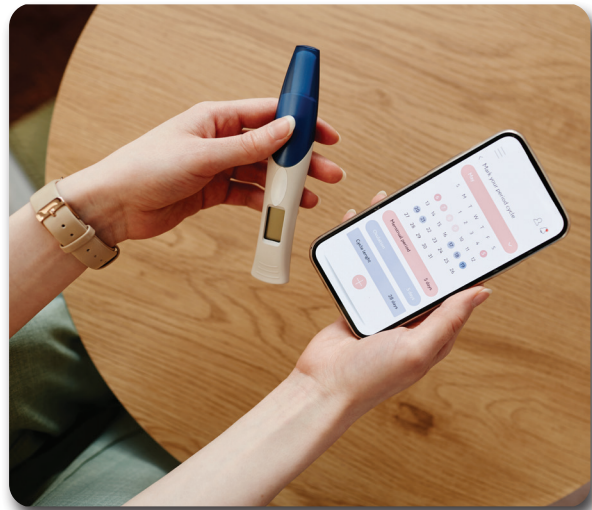
The Creighton Model Fertility Care System

The Creighton Model Fertility Care System is taught by highly trained allied health professionals called Fertility Care Practitioners. After an initial introductory session presented to a group, follow-up teaching is done one-on-one with the woman or couple and the practitioner. During the follow up sessions, the woman learns to observe and describe the cervical fluid as well as how to chart what she has observed. Each session also provides the opportunity to answer specific questions and address concerns. This system is well-researched, and the teaching method has been standardized. Standardization of the teaching method means that a woman learning the method in Kansas City is taught the same way as a woman in Ireland or anywhere else.



The Creighton Model Fertility Care System was developed by an obstetrician gynecologist in Omaha, Nebraska. Dr. Thomas Hilgers has been researching this method since the mid-1970's. He has dedicated his entire career to helping women manage their

fertility and treat their medical problems in a way that allows them to maintain or restore the natural balance of reproductive hormones that their bodies produce. There is also a network of physicians called medical consultants associated with the Creighton Model Fertility Care System. Find a list of these physicians and practitioners at www.fertilitycare.org.



High Tech Fertility Management

The Marquette Model is the newest available method and incorporates the Clear Blue Easy fertility monitor along with observing for cervical fluid. Instructions for this method can be found on the internet at no charge. Please note that the developers of this method refer to it as natural family planning or NFP. The website is nfp.marquette.edu/index.php.

Effectiveness Studies in Avoiding Pregnancy

Getting research published in a peer-reviewed, professional medical journal is not easy. Medical journals have boards of doctors, considered to be experts in their fields, review the studies submitted for publication. After a study is reviewed, the board decides if the research is valid and important enough to be included in their journal for subscribers to read. If a professional medical journal publishes bogus research, it loses credibility and will go out of business. The Journal of Reproductive Medicine is a very well-respected source for gynecologists.

The following is a list of effectiveness studies published on the Creighton Model Fertility Care System:

- Hilgers, TW & Stanford, JB. Creighton Model of NaProEducation Technology for avoiding pregnancy: Use effectiveness. J Reprod Med 1998; 43 (June): 495-502. This study looked at approximately 1700 couples who had used the method for 18 months. The couples were from five different geographic areas of the United States. The study concluded that the Fertility Care System has a method effectiveness of 99.6% and a use effectiveness (taking into account user/teacher error) of 96.4% at avoiding pregnancy.
- Howard, MP & Stanford, JB. Pregnancy probabilities during use of the Creighton Model FertilityCare System. Arch Fam Med 1999; 8: 391-402.
- Doud J. Use-effectiveness of the Creighton Model of Natural Family Planning. Int Rev Nat Fam Plann 1985; 9(1) Spring: 54-72.
- Fehring, RJ, Lawrence, D, & Philpot, C. Use effectiveness of the Creighton Model Ovulation Method of natural family planning. J Obstet Gynecol Neonat Nurs 1994; 23: 303-309.

These studies were all performed to look at the effectiveness of the Fertility Care System at avoiding pregnancy. All these studies found similar results of greater than 99.6% method effectiveness and 96.4% use effectiveness.

When reading scientific studies, a little lesson in terminology is very helpful. **Method effectiveness** in a study means perfect use by the user. So, if the method is used 100% accurately according to the instructions, the method effectiveness is 99.6% according to these studies. **Use effectiveness**, on the other hand, takes into account user and/or teacher error. This is important to keep in mind, as these terms apply to studies of any family planning method, natural or otherwise.



Studies from Around the World

If you are needing effective family planning as well as treatment for hormone-related symptoms, these systems can help you do both. Natural fertility management really is an all-inclusive women's health perspective. If a woman wants to use one of these methods to both avoid pregnancy and serve as a

foundation for treatment of hormone-related issues, then the best approach is to attend a Creighton Model Fertility Care introductory session and one-on-one follow-ups to learn about making observations for cervical fluid. Don't let this scare you! It is relatively simple.

It is important for us to realize that fertility management systems are highly effective at avoiding pregnancy. Studies have been done all over the world and consistently found a 95% or greater effectiveness rate.

The following is a list of scientific studies done all over the globe on the effectiveness of fertility management systems:

1. Study #1: Clubb EM, et al. A pilot study on teaching NFP in general practice: Current knowledge and new strategies for the 1990s. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University; 1990: 130-132. This study done in the United Kingdom found an effectiveness rate of 97.3% use effectiveness and 98.7% method effectiveness.
2. Study #2: Frank-Herrmann, P., et al. Effectiveness and acceptability of the symptothermal method of NFP in Germany. *Am J Obstet Gynecol.* 1991; 165: 2045-2052. This study done in Germany found a 97.7% effectiveness rate.
3. Study #3: Frank-Herrmann, P., et al. The effectiveness of a fertility awareness-based method to avoid pregnancy in relation to a couple's sexual behavior during the fertile time: A prospective longitudinal study. *Hum Reprod.* 2007 May; 22 (5): 1310-19. This study looked at 900 women for a total of 17,638 months of use and found a 1.8% "unintended pregnancy rate" and a 0.6 out of 100 pregnancy rate for perfect use.

4. Study #4: De Leizaola, MA. De premiere d'une etude prospective d'efficacite du planning familial naturel realisee en Belgique francophone. *J Gynecol Obstet. Biol. Rev.* 1994, 23: 359-364. This study done in Belgium found an effectiveness rate of 98.3%.

5. Study #5: Dorairaj, K. The modification mucus method in India. *Am J Obstet Gynecol.* 1991; 165: 2066-2067. This study done in India found an effectiveness rate of 98%.

6. Study #6: Zhang, DW., et al. The effectiveness of the ovulation method used by 688 couples in Shanghai. *Reprod Contraception.* 1993; 13: 194-200. This study done in China found an effectiveness rate of 95.6%.

Some Studies Show a Lower Effectiveness Rate...Why?

When looking at research that investigates the effectiveness of fertility management systems, a person needs to look at how the study defines "method failure." Some studies have found up to a



20% "failure" rate. These studies invariably define any pregnancy that occurs as a method failure—

without questioning the couples who did become pregnant as to whether they intended to become pregnant. This gives the impression that natural fertility management systems have a higher failure rate than is accurate.

This was demonstrated by a group of researchers who did a study, published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, of one study that had found a 12% failure rate (Wade et al, 1981). The scientists found that 9.8% of the 12% of women who became pregnant intentionally used the fertile phase to become pregnant. Since the couples did not give advance notification of their intention to attempt pregnancy, these pregnancies were attributed to failure of the method rather than a change of heart. This would be like saying a couple on the birth control pill experienced a “pill failure” when they actually stopped pill use six months into the study to intentionally achieve pregnancy.

In this report, the rest of the couples surveyed were found to have known that pregnancy was possible. Even though they did not “intend to become

pregnant,” they reportedly “took a chance.” The authors noted that in fact, out of 100 couples questioned in follow up, there were no method failures whatsoever.

The following study assessed the pregnancies that occurred in women who were using the Creighton Model Fertility Care System:

Howard, MP and Stanford, JB: Pregnancy probabilities during use of the Creighton Model Fertility Care System. Arch Fam Med. 8: 391-402, 1999.

This study's findings demonstrated similar results as the one discussed previously.





Fertility Management Systems are 100% Reversible

I know this will shock you, but you can also use fertility management systems to get pregnant! Why is this important? We all know a couple who has struggled with infertility. It is a very difficult burden to want a child and not be able to conceive, and infertility has been on the rise in recent years.

The standard definition of infertility is the failure to conceive after a year of regular intercourse without contraceptive use. Using a fertility management system to plan your family empowers you to avoid pregnancy when necessary and achieve pregnancy when you are ready!

The following study looked at 50 couples of normal fertility:

Hilgers, TW, Daly, KD, Prebil, AM, Hilgers, SK: Cumulative pregnancy rates in patients with apparently normal fertility and fertility-focused intercourse. *J Reprod Med* 37(10): 864-866, 1992.

The study found that 76% of the couples achieved pregnancy in the first month of using the method to achieve pregnancy. By the third month, 90% achieved pregnancy, and by the sixth month, that number had risen to 98%. When using the Fertility Care System, a couple will know that an underlying problem

potentially exists after six months of trying rather than an entire year. In addition to simply empowering a couple when they start trying for a baby, charting a woman's cycle can reveal possible underlying infertility problems before a couple has difficulty getting pregnant.

Many people have a plan as to when they will want to start their family, but we often make this decision without considering one very important factor—the

state of a woman's fertility. If a woman is monitoring her fertility, signs indicating she may have an infertility problem will show up on the chart. Because infertility is due to an underlying problem that gets progressively worse with time, this knowledge can be vital to answering the question, "When will we start our family?" Couples empowered with knowl-

edge of their fertility can make informed decisions and cooperate to plan their family. So, fertility management systems help us hurdle the obstacle of cultural norms in both ways! Now let's turn to obstacle two, the treatment of symptoms due to an underlying hormone imbalance.



Obstacle Three: Cortisol, Thyroid and Chronic Stress

Obstacle three to women living in a state of natural hormone balance is the epidemic of chronic stress today. This leads to an overload of cortisol, the body's stress hormone.

Cortisol is an interesting hormone. Levels of cortisol rise and fall over a 24-hour period. The natural fluctuations of cortisol during a normal day have a profound effect on how well we sleep, how well our immune system functions, and our mood. Higher than normal cortisol levels for an extended period of time, due to chronic stress, can throw our bodies and our hormones "out of whack." Happy people have been shown to have lower cortisol levels. Scientists believe the connection between lower cortisol levels and happiness is why happy people live longer and have fewer health problems.

Another detrimental effect that chronic stress has on our health occurs due to cortisol's influence on thyroid function.



Take the Chronic Stress Self-Assessment:

Do you frequently feel overwhelmed with all the demands of life?

Do you deal well with unexpected problems in day-to-day life? Do you feel discouraged?

Do you have too much to do and too little time to do it... always?!

Are there people in your life that consistently cause problems or pain?

Are you moving, getting divorced, dealing with a loved one who has a chronic illness?

Do you have a highly demanding job, a husband who travels frequently, travel frequently yourself, or have financial problems?

If you are dealing with any of these issues, chronic stress could be at the root of how you are feeling physically. The following strategies decrease cortisol either directly or indirectly. These should sound familiar:

- Develop a personal and couple's mission statement to put life into perspective.
- Boost happiness by understanding what research says about it.
- Develop the powers of your mind.
- Foster a balanced, strong and thriving relationship.
- Proactively develop positive and productive use of emotion in day-to-day life (stay tuned for more on this topic in the next chapter).

Everything that is good for the mind is good for relationships and for the body, too!



Thyroid System Dysfunction

If you have gone through an era of chronic stress, then you are more likely to have low thyroid function. You can have this problem, even if a doctor has done the standard thyroid tests which checked out as normal.

The standard thyroid function test measures thyroid-stimulating hormone, or TSH. TSH is the chemical messenger produced by the brain (within the pituitary) that signals the thyroid gland in the neck to kick out thyroid hormone. The thyroid gland produces an inactive form of thyroid hormone called T4. T4 then must be converted to its active form, called T3, in order for it to do its job within the body. High levels of cortisol block the conversion of T4 to T3 in the cells. The brain responds to the level of inactive T4 in our systems, not to the amount of active T3 in our cells. Therefore, a person can have plenty of T4 available, resulting in a normal TSH lab result, but still have symptoms of low thyroid functioning.

In the presence of elevated cortisol levels, due to chronic stress, the conversion of T4 to T3 is blocked. Not only does cortisol block the formation of T3, but it promotes the production of reverse T3. Reverse T3 is the active T3's evil twin. Reverse T3 binds to receptors in our cells, but it does not trigger the chemical reactions needed to maintain a healthy metabolism. Thyroid scientists call this reverse T3 dominance. Once reverse T3 dominance is established, it is difficult to correct. Even when cortisol levels return to normal, reverse T3 itself blocks the conversion of T4 to active T3. This establishes a vicious cycle within the cells.

This is a controversial diagnosis in the medical community today. However, an increasing number of doctors are recognizing the existence of the problem.

How do I know if I have a thyroid problem?



Note: Guys can have this problem, too! Let's look at the criteria for TSD.

Criteria 1: Basal Body Temperature

Basal body temperature is a good indication of thyroid function because it is affected by the body's metabolism. In order to perform this test, you will need a basal body thermometer. Shake down the thermometer before you go to bed, and place it on your nightstand. Or buy a digital thermometer, and skip this step. Place the thermometer under your arm right after the alarm clock goes off, before you get out of bed. Press the snooze button, and leave the thermometer in place for ten minutes. If using a digital thermometer, just wait for the beep indicator. Normal temperature is above 97.8. For women, basal body temperature is normally higher in the last half of the menstrual cycle (from the time of ovulation to the beginning of the next period). For the most accurate reading, a woman should measure her temperature three to eight days into her cycle.

Criteria 2: The A to Z Checklist of Symptoms

Many people with TSD struggle for years with a long list of seemingly unrelated problems. Going through the A to Z checklist can help put it all together. The

following symptoms can be due to other causes, which should be ruled out first. When many symptoms are present and treatments do not seem to be effective, TSD is reasonable to consider as the underlying source. The top ten symptoms experienced by patients with TSD include: "I eat chocolate," fatigue, mood swings, "I drink colas," irritability, cold intolerance, PMS, fluid retention, dry skin, depression, decreased sex drive.

The Complete A to Z Checklist

The following is a complete list of possible symptoms due to this form of low thyroid function:

- General well-being: Inability to concentrate, difficulty remembering, decreased sex drive, depression, fatigue, listlessness, irritability, lightheadedness, low motivation, clumsiness, anxiety, low self-esteem, panic attacks
- Allergies: Allergies, asthma, hay fever, hives, sinus drainage, stuffy nose
- Heart and cardiovascular system: Low blood pressure, high cholesterol, chest pains, palpitations
- Intestinal problems: Heart burn, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers
- Diet: Easy weight gain, easy weight loss, excessively tired after eating, food cravings, food intolerances, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)
- Eyes and ears: Ear infections, ringing in ears, blurry vision, dry eyes
- Fertility: Infertility, miscarriage, low sperm count, decrease in the length of sperm's life



- Skin, hair and nails: Brittle fingernails, dry hair, hair loss, prematurely grey, thinning of outside third of eyebrows, acne, light or dark spots, skin blotchiness, coarse skin, dry skin, easy bruising, flushing, increased skin infections, itchiness, slow wound healing
- Hands, feet and joints: Carpal tunnel syndrome, numbness or tingling in hands or feet, joint aches, arthritis, muscle aches, slow reflexes
- Head: Headaches, migraines
- Infections: Ear infections, frequent colds, frequent sore throats, frequent urinary tract infections

Treatment of TSD

Breaking news: women are more complicated than men!

Like many complementary and alternative medicine solutions, treatment is focused on getting to the root of the underlying problem. For men, three steps to wellness are necessary. Women require four steps

to treat the underlying problems associated with TSD. As we have discussed, the thyroid gland is interconnected with our adrenal glands and cortisol levels in both men and women. In women, TSD is more complex because it is also interrelated with ovaries and reproductive hormones (estrogen and progesterone). We have already covered how to treat PMS symptoms associated with low progesterone and estrogen.

Vitamins and Supplements to Support the Thyroid

Iodine: The thyroid needs 150 micrograms of iodine per day to function. Taking an iodine supplement is helpful as long as you don't overdo it. Too much iodine can actually have the opposite effect and shut down the thyroid gland. Please note: If you are taking the



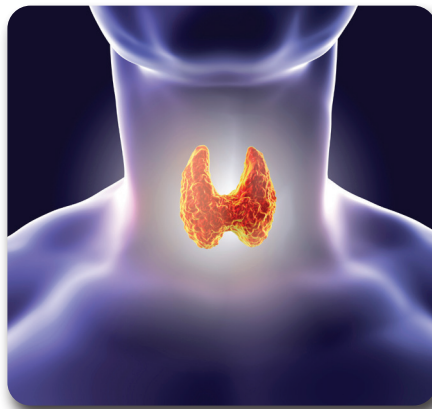
Solaray Thyroid Caps you do not need iodine supplements. One Thyroid Cap contains 150 micrograms of iodine.

B complex vitamins: Our cells need the B vitamins to convert T4 into active T3. A good natural source of the B complex vitamins is Brewer's Yeast.

Thyroid Caps (by Solaray): Thyroid Caps contain iodine, herbs, B complex vitamins, and other nutrients. Many individuals who struggle with TSD symptoms find this supplement extremely helpful with fatigue and general sense of well-being. The directions for use recommend up to three capsules a day.

However, the iodine content in this supplement is 150 micrograms per capsule. One capsule per day gives the thyroid enough iodine for the day. So, it is not recommended to take more than one of these capsules (or two at a maximum) per day.

Selenium: Cells also need selenium to convert T4 to T3. Plants and vegetables absorb selenium from the soil. Most Americans consume enough selenium in their diets, making supplements unnecessary and even dangerous. There are parts of the United States that have selenium deficient soil. These areas are mainly in the Pacific Northwest and the Eastern seaboard to Florida. For people living in these areas, a supplement may be needed. The maximum dose of selenium should not exceed 400 micrograms per day. Including foods like liver, shellfish and Brazil nuts is a safe way to ensure that our bodies have enough selenium to keep the thyroid happy. Other helpful supplements include: Zinc, magnesium, omega-3, and copper.



Break the Vicious Cycle of T3 Dominance

Armour Thyroid, *Westhroid*, and *Nature-Throid* tablets are a mixture of active and inactive thyroid hormone. Desiccated thyroid tablets are less potent than straight T3 from a compounding pharmacist and may be a better place to start.

If you have been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and are on Synthroid or Levothyl but are still experiencing symptoms like depression, anxiety, and fatigue, *Armour Thyroid* or compounded T3 may help.

Conventional treatment for hypothyroidism is to give thyroid hormone in the inactive T4 form. A study published in August 2009 found that a significant number of patients respond better to a combination of

T3 and T4 tablets than T4 alone, especially with respect to mood symptoms like depression (Ma et al, 2009).

Sustained-release T3 (a prescription medication) has some pretty potent effects when too much is taken too quickly. Overdosing with T3 can cause hyperthyroidism. "Start low and go slow" is a good motto when using T3. It is necessary to monitor

your pulse, body temperature, blood pressure, and look for hyperthyroid symptoms to make sure you are not overdoing it. Careful monitoring and following your doctor's recommendations is essential when dealing with T3.

The good news is that once you break the reverse T3 cycle, you should be able to gradually decrease the amount of T3 or *Armour thyroid* tablets you require. If you work on lowering cortisol levels while supplementing with T3, your body is able to clear the reverse T3 from your blood and break the cycle of reverse T3

dominance keeping you down. You will have to work with a doctor to implement this solution.

The following resources will help you find a physician who can help:

- Dr. Broda O. Barnes Research Foundation: www.brodabarnes.org
- The Body Logic website also has a physician locator for the treatment of thyroid problems using Armour thyroid tablets.
- Mary Shomon's website www.naturalthyroidguide.com is another good place to look for a doctor who will treat this issue seriously and get you on the road to recovery.

Lower Cortisol Levels

Stress and unhappiness increase cortisol in the body, which starts the vicious cycle of TSD. Boosting mood and learning to deal with stress in a healthy way are essential aspects of treatment and can prevent recurrence in the future.

"A long and happy life." Age-old wisdom and mottos often turn out to be true when scientists test them as a hypothesis in a research project. The link scientists have found between a long life and a happy life undoubtedly has something to do with the thyroid and cortisol connection. Actively building a thriving relationship and learning the skill of learned optimism will help reduce cortisol in the face of unavoidable stress.

Develop the Skill of Learned Optimism

Happy people have lower cortisol levels, which is something we all want. Lower cortisol levels contribute to our natural hormone balance. But happy people do not have less stress (well, ok, some may), but rather they deal with difficulties and adversity in

an optimistic way. The good news is that this is a skill, called *learned optimism*, that we can all develop.

Step One: Recognize your pessimistic thoughts

When bad things happen or challenges arise, do you give in to despair, thinking to yourself, "I'm not smart enough, so and so will never forgive me, I never___, I always ____"?

Or do you come out fighting and thinking, "I can work through this, it's just a temporary setback, this too shall pass, if I put my mind to it and work hard it will be ok, I wish this situation was different, but it won't kill me..."?

Step Two: Learn to argue with your thoughts

Pretend that those thoughts are being said by someone you despise. What would you say in reply? Look at the evidence. Is it really as bad as you are imagining? Are there other causes?

If you do bad on a test, is it that you are not smart enough, or is it that you didn't prepare enough? Or is the professor unfair, and no one did well? If you get in a fight with your husband, is it due to the fact that you are incompatible, or did you both just have a bad day? If your children misbehave at school, are you really a terrible parent? Or is the child growing, not getting enough sleep or didn't eat well at breakfast? Look at





all the possible causes of problems that arise in life, and find the most reasonable explanation. Next, look at the consequences of what you believe.

Finally, if the cause is something you cannot change, then how useful is it to worry about it? Can you really affect the situation? Is there any way to make things better in the future? If not, then it is a waste of time and energy to worry about it. Distract yourself by focusing on areas of life in which you can have a positive effect.

Step Three: Energization

Energy and a sense of well-being should result from actively and successfully arguing with yourself. I like to call this being intellectually honest in your outlook on life.

Reflect

Lower cortisol levels lead to

increased happiness and life satisfaction. Is learned optimism a skill that you or your spouse need to develop? Consider adding this goal to your Life List.





An Atypical Approach for the Atypical Results We Want

The hidden physical factors which negatively impact couples' relationships are significant! We want a love sparked with ongoing passion and a warm, continually deepening friendship. The way we relate to each other physically truly impacts our ability to make this happen. The typical approach to love today is getting the typical results we see all around us. Managing fertility naturally is radically atypical and changes the way we relate to one another.

We talked about how fertility management fosters and supports this love by:

- Maintaining passion through a regular and on-going dopamine reset.
- Building sexual self-regulation into the brain, which encourages the production of oxytocin and sets the stage for developing the other characteristics of happy people.
- Giving sex a transcendent meaning, which makes it more satisfying.

In addition to these relationship benefits, fertility management has multiple health benefits for women:

- It enables couples to effectively manage their fertility while allowing the woman to live in a state of natural hormone balance. Both men and women benefit from NHB. If a woman feels like herself, she acts predictably and is even-keeled in her relationship.
- Fertility management is the foundation of effective treatment for women's hormonal issues and helps them avoid the symptom masking/medicine stacking of typical medicine. Fixing hormonal imbalance decreases the conflicts in relationships that are a result of a woman's symptoms rather than her actual sentiments.
- The cooperation needed to use a natural fertility management system promotes communication skills that are helpful in all areas of a couple's life together. Charting a woman's cycle also increases empathy and understanding, demystifying women for men. Instead of living on Venus and Mars, women and men can settle together in harmony on earth!



Discussion Questions

Balancing Dopamine and Oxytocin

- Do you think that maintaining the passionate aspect of your love is important? What would you be willing to do to keep that enthusiasm alive?
- Do you think learning a fertility management system as your method of family planning would be beneficial to your relationship? How?
- What characteristics of happy couples are strengthened by using a fertility management system?
- Do you see value in the practice of sexual self-regulation and resetting of the dopamine receptors?

Stress Management

- Stress, increased cortisol and thyroid problems can affect both men and women. Chronic stress will block oxytocin production in the brain, making it difficult to maintain a balanced love. Stress management is an important part of a good marriage. Do you deal well with stress as a couple? If not, how will you help each other have a “learned optimism” response to adversity in life?
- A healthy lifestyle helps decrease cortisol. How will you encourage each other to live a healthy lifestyle?

- Will you exercise together? What do you like to do together that is active?
- How will you encourage each other to eat healthy? Revisit your refuel list, and add in some healthy snacks.

Fertility Management and Hormonal Contraceptives

- What did you find most interesting and surprising in the natural hormone balance/birth control section?
- How do you think living in a state of natural hormone balance provides advantages for women’s health?
- If you are on a hormonal contraceptive, are you experiencing any of the symptoms listed on the previous pages in this section? Do you ever think, “I just don’t feel like myself”?
- Is symptom masking and medicine stacking your doctor’s approach to treatment of your symptoms? If so, are you satisfied with this approach to your health?
- Were you aware of the long-term risks of breast cancer and cardiovascular disease associated with hormonal contraceptives?

- Do you think these risks are worth it if you can effectively plan your family without disrupting the natural hormone balance in her/your body?
- List the symptoms you struggle with and think about how these affect your life and your relationship. (Refer back to the previous symptom lists in this section to help you.)
- Are you interested in looking at treatment geared towards restoring balance to the body for your hormone-related symptoms?
- How, when and where will you start?

Discussion Notes:



A scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills under a bright, cloudy sky. A sunburst effect is visible on the right side, with rays of light extending across the scene. A dirt road winds through the valley, leading towards the horizon. The overall atmosphere is bright and hopeful.

Chapter 8

When the Going Gets Tough...

Setting a Positive Tone in Your Relationship



The Spiral Staircase Step Four: Productive Emotion

The final step in the spiral staircase of your thriving relationship is the ability to use emotion productively in daily life. All the concepts we have covered and skills we have developed so far enable us to regulate emotions in a beneficial way. The productive use of emotion is both an outgrowth of all we have covered and its own step including skills you can develop.

For emotions to be an asset rather than a liability to our well-being, research has shown we need a productive balance between positive emotion and negative emotion. Scientists didn't discover that negative emotions must be eliminated, but instead that a balance of positive versus negative is essential.

Barbara Fredrickson (2019) coined the term "positivity ratio". This is the number of positive emotions compared to negative emotions experienced on average throughout the day. Each person has a productive ratio that acts as a threshold within the brain. Above the threshold, we flip into what Fredrickson calls a "broaden and build state of mind" (Garland, et al., 2010). This state is a creative, optimistic mode in which positive emotions breed more positive emotions. Below the threshold, we experience distress and become

narrow-minded—negative breeds negative (Shrira, et al., 2011). Fredrickson's original research found a 3:1 ratio was a baseline for people in general. However, further study revealed that the baseline threshold may vary among individuals (Kolanowski, Van Haitsma, Meeks, & Litaker, 2014).

Some people may require a 6:1 ratio, while others only need 2:1. The point is that we each have a certain optimal positivity ratio. When we stay above this threshold, well-being, optimism, and resilience are present, and life is good!

Interestingly, you can actually be too positive, with an 11:1 or higher ratio being counter-productive (Fredrickson, 2009). To establish a healthy and productive ratio, most people need to dial down on negative emotions and intentionally boost positive emotion.



Step Four: Positive Emotion



Step Three: Secure Attachment

Step Two: Meaningful Life

Step One: Mind "In-Shape"

What Do You Think About Emotion?

In order to establish a productive positivity ratio in our daily lives, it is helpful to first understand a bit more about emotion in the context of all we have already learned.

We are going to cover:

1. What is emotion, and how does it work?
2. What does emotion do for us?

3. How do we use emotion productively in order to increase our positivity ratio?
4. Construct an emotion storyboard to analyze daily life and make some modifications to increase your positivity ratio.

What is emotion?

What are some of our challenges in dealing with emotion?

Do you think emotions should play a role in your decisions?

Are feelings an asset or a liability in our relationships?

By now you are very aware of how the brain is always assessing the present moment for potential threats or rewards. When the brain senses a threat or sees a reward on the horizon, we have an initial reaction driven by dopamine, which can be viewed as a form of raw emotional energy. Recall how this initial reaction in the downstairs brain tells us to approach or avoid the situation. So, **emotion is an energy surge in the brain when it recognizes the present moment as a significant opportunity to go after a reward or avoid something bad.** After the initial gut/downstairs brain assessment of approach or avoid—the emotional energy flows upward to the right side of the brain where it can be differentiated into one of six core emotions: anger, sadness, shame, fear, joy and surprise.

Emotional energy can go one of three ways in the mind (Siegel, 2010):

1. balanced flow
2. rigidity
3. chaos

Ideally, the emotional energy will flow in a balanced way through the brain circuitry and we will use this power surge to connect the different parts and pieces of our minds. By connecting the upstairs and downstairs, right and left, and past and present pieces, the brain processes the present moment to decide how you feel about it. Recall that going from a lower level of integration to a higher level of integration has an, “I feel good!” effect. Emotional energy can be a driving force towards *integration* and therefore, well-being.

Or, these emotion power surges can be a driving force towards *disintegration* in two ways. Emotion can explode into chaos or shut down in rigidity. When emotional energy explodes into chaos, the potential integrative force flows out into the mind in an unorganized fashion. We experience this chaos as losing it when we are angry, or spiraling down into despair when sad, or feeling paralyzed by our fear when afraid. A chaotic disintegration of our emotional energy is not limited to negative emotions. Positive emotions can also result in chaos. Some people celebrate in an unproductive or self-destructive way, thus letting their positive emotions become a source of disintegration in the mind and in relationships.

On the other end of the spectrum, we may try to ignore or snuff out the emotional energy altogether. In other words, we can stuff it or suppress it rather than use it to our advantage. Neuroscientists call this





rigidity (Siegel, 2010). Unfortunately, trying to suppress emotion has a rebound effect in the mind. The negative emotion becomes even more intense and difficult to suppress. Rigidity is an unproductive use or waste of our mind's energy, ending in less connection between the different departments of the brain. Again, this blocks us from spiraling up along the path of integration, well-being, and thriving relationships. We can avoid the rebound effect by using the various strategies we have learned to manage distress. Recall first accepting negative emotion, then defusing, and finally shifting your focus to something productive (see the SIFT it to shift section in the mental strength section).

Another factor affecting our ability to regulate emotion and maintain a balance is what Siegel (2012a) calls a person's window of tolerance. We all have an individual intensity range of emotion that we can tolerate. If emotion swells outside our window of tolerance, then we shut down into rigidity or let emotion explode into chaos. Factors that impact our window of tolerance include:

- Genetics
- Stress
- Attachment style and upbringing

The mindfulness and mental strengthening exercises we have thus far discussed result in greater emotional regulation, in part because these exercises increase your window of tolerance. For example, if you “don't do sad,” meaning you have a rigid reaction to sadness (a discovery I made about myself after the passing of my father)—then SIFTing a sad state of mind helps a person expand their repertoire of emotion, which can then be utilized for both intrapersonal or interpersonal (as in the case of sadness) integration. SIFTing allows you to experience and observe the emotion from the hub of the mind and gain a level of familiarity with processing and then shifting it in a controlled way. You could view practicing different emotional states as similar to going to an allergy doctor—desensitizing yourself to a severe allergy by taking small doses of the allergen until you no longer have an adverse reaction to it.

Reflect How do you typically deal with emotional energy? Do you have a tendency to suppress it or let it explode into chaos?

Does the concept that emotions fuel the brain change your initial impression of their value?



The Purpose of Balanced Emotions

Finding and keeping an integrative balance between rigidity and chaos in our emotional lives is the goal. In addition to balancing and regulating emotion, we can harness it to fuel personal growth. This growth happens when we use emotional energy to create new perspectives, make connections with other people, inspire concrete actions, and attune emotionally to the people we encounter throughout the day.

Johnson (2019) describes several ways emotions help us when we are regulated and balanced:

- 1. Emotions orient and engage us.** Emotions signal to us “Hey, pay attention! This is important!” Emotion grabs our attention and guides perception by making us focus in on what is relevant to our needs and wants in the current environment. Positive framing of your Life List, including a clear sense of where we are going and why, will help the brain focus on what is essential to well-being.

- 2. Emotion shapes meaning.** We feel good about a situation or action when it clearly fits into our mission and purpose. Emotion is the rudder that steers thinking. People who cannot access emotions due to traumatic brain

injuries cannot make rational decisions or choices. The mind creates a mental picture of possibilities and scenarios in the future—and emotions assess each possible picture as true and good for us or not so true and good for us. This drives rational decisions and helps us decide what to do in the present moment. Without emotion, all mental predictions of the future are viewed as having the same desirability, so that prioritizing and rational decision-making are impossible.

- 3. Emotion motivates us.** It is an energy surge that primes a specific kind of action. “Yes, go for it!” or “No, run away, fight or freeze!” There are two categories of emotions: *approach* and *avoidant*. Approach emotions cause us to mobilize and spur action. Avoidant emotions can lead us to act, but also can cause us to collapse or freeze.

- 4. Emotion communicates with others in a nonverbal way and sets up their response before we even speak.** This communication happens through mirror neurons and the social engagement system, as we mentioned in chapter seven.



Approach vs. Avoidance Emotions

The *approach* emotions are: **joy** (evokes relaxed engagement and receptivity to other people), **surprise** (evokes active curiosity), and **anger**, which is a negative approach emotion (evoking assertion and actively moving to correct a problem).

The *avoidance* emotions are: **shame** (evokes withdrawal), **fear** (evokes fleeing or can make a person freeze), **sadness** (evokes a seeking out of comfort or a withdrawal into isolation).

The avoidant emotions can be difficult to identify. SIFTing is a good way to bring them into awareness. The approach emotions are more overtly displayed and easier to recognize.



Emotion communicates with others in a nonverbal way and sets up their response before we even speak. This communication happens through mirror neurons and the social engagement system. Mirror neurons pick up on emotional cues in the form of facial expressions and tone of voice. Once detected, mirror neurons will create the same emotional state in our own mind and in the minds of others. Awareness of your own facial expression and tone of voice as you go into a difficult conversation can have significant impact on the other person's response. If you have an angry or defensive look on your face and begin with a harsh tone of voice, the mirror neurons will elicit these emotions in the other person and the conversation starts on a negative note. This is the reason the preparation stage of motivational interviewing is so important. Mirror neurons are also the reason why black holes are so disturbing to our willpower and mood. Being aware of how mirror neurons impact our own state of mind and the minds of people around us is a helpful tool to promote positivity within yourself and relationships.

How to Establish a Productive Positivity Ratio

When you have a productive positivity ratio in place, you are effectively using emotion in daily life. Emotion integrated with reason is then fulfilling its purpose of orienting and guiding us towards productive action, connection, and well-being. You can make sure you develop a productive positivity ratio by doing the following four things:

1. Increase awareness of how you deal with emotional situations, experiences, and stimuli by determining your emotional style.
2. Dial down on time spent sitting in negative emotions. When we sit unnecessarily in a negative emotion, Barbara Frederickson (2009) calls this gratuitous negativity. We can make negative emotion productive by changing how we deal with it.
3. Increase the experience of positive emotions.
4. Analyze the past and plan the future using an emotion storyboard.

1. Determine how your emotional style is impacting your positivity ratio.

For emotion to fulfill its purpose in our lives as an asset, it is helpful to look at how we currently deal with emotional events and stimuli. According to Richard Davidson, PhD, and Sharon Begley (2012), this is called our emotional style. Davidson defined six different facets of how we deal with emotional stimuli in daily life. **Awareness, resilience, social intuition, outlook, sensitivity to context, and attention** are the six facets of emotional style. We will look at each one in more detail.

Self-Aware vs. Self-Opaque

Being self-aware involves being conscious of how we are feeling and why. Self-aware people are acutely conscious of their thoughts and feelings, as well as the messages their bodies are sending them. Being “too in tune” leads to increased sensitivity. This can cause anxiety, other mood disorders, or constant distraction by emotional stimuli.

One simple way to test your level of self-awareness is by considering this question: How well can you detect your own heartbeat? We discussed the ability to detect

your own heart rate as a reflection of the amount of integration you have between the upstairs and downstairs brain—this also helps with awareness of your emotions because emotions generally cause a reaction in your body before they hit consciousness in the upstairs brain. How emotions impact the state of your body can give you clues about what you are feeling. Ask someone

to monitor your pulse for thirty seconds. Then, try to sense your own heartbeat without monitoring your wrist or neck. If this is easy for you, you are probably more self-aware than self-opaque. If it is difficult, you may be less aware of your emotions in general.

You can increase integration (as we discussed in chapter four) by regularly doing a body scan. What am I sensing in my head, neck, shoulders, chest, and gut? A helpful strategy to remember is, “Name it to tame it, and then share it to repair it!” You cannot modify positive or negative emotion if you are not aware of your feelings and why you are feeling a particular way in any given moment. When you are not aware of emotion, it is impacting decision-making, but outside





of your control. Awareness is the first step to emotional regulation. What you bring into awareness, you can modify, change, and guide.

Resilience

Your resilience is indicated by how slowly or quickly you recover from setbacks. Slow to recover is marked by difficulty in shaking off the emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, or other negative feelings when you hit roadblocks, speed bumps, or those little annoyances in life. In contrast, quick to recover means you shake it off more easily. Either extreme can cause problems.

Quick to recover results in the lackadaisical attitude of “Nah, nah, nah . . . whatever!” This is problematic when you have little motivation to overcome challenges or persist in the face of adversity. Being extremely quick to recover may also make you seem insensitive to other people’s pain or struggles. This very obviously causes problems in relationships.

If you are extremely slow to recover, setbacks can make you fall to pieces and give up on goals as soon as something doesn’t go your way. It’s important to understand how long it takes you to recover to a baseline emotional state of mind at the top of the autonomic ladder. This helps you to recognize when a funky mood is due to what happened a day or a week ago. If you know you have a low amount of resilience, you could even look back several weeks to understand why you have the blahs in the present. SIFTing is also helpful here.

Anything that strengthens the left brain can be an effective way to boost your resilience. Playing chess,

logic games, or number puzzles are very left-brained exercises.

Social Intuition

Social intuition measures the ability to read nonverbal and social cues. How in tune are you with other people’s needs and feelings? If you are high on the socially intuitive scale, be aware of how other people affect you. Recall our discussion on social contagion in the willpower section. Finding an A team with a positivity ratio of 6:1 will be important to your emotional health.

For someone with low social intuition, mirror neurons and social contagion are less important. If you have an avoidant or anxious attachment style, keep in mind that this can affect your social intuition. Anxiously attached people are typically more aware but also frequently misinterpret social cues, detecting threats when they are not present. Avoidantly attached people are likely to be much less sensitive to social context.

As with all facets of emotional style, you can experience the extreme. For instance, being too sensitive socially can lead to burnout in relationships and in the workplace, especially in giving professions such as healthcare and teaching.

If you are puzzled as to where you fall on the social intuition spectrum, make an effort to pay attention to facial expressions. Watch scenes from a movie with the sound turned off and try to interpret the characters’ feelings based only on facial expressions. Turn on the sound and watch it a second time through and see if you were right! This exercise can help you evaluate where you are, as well as increase your social intuition if it’s on the low end.



Outlook

Is your disposition sunny or cloudy at baseline? When you have a positive emotion, how long does it stick around? The capacity to sustain positive emotion over time is the key measure of the outlook dimension of your emotional style. Like resilience, outlook can cause problems at both extremes of the spectrum.

Sensitivity to Context

Knowledge of the rules of social engagement and the capacity to regulate our emotions and behavior accordingly make up sensitivity to context. How attuned are you to the social environment? How does your emotional behavior change with social context?

The emotional state you flip into is situation specific. Consider how you act differently . . .

. . . with close friends versus acquaintances.

. . . with your partner versus your boss or teacher.

. . . at a wedding versus a funeral.

. . . with your spouse versus your extended family.

Being socially appropriate involves the mental strength we discussed in chapter four. Fostering empathy and cultivating moral awareness help you to understand how your own emotional state and actions impact the world around you.

Attention

The final facet of your emotional style is attention. How well can you tune out emotional distractions and stay focused? Focused people can “plug in” despite being in the throes of emotional turmoil. Unfocused people are constantly distracted by emotional impulses that have nothing to do with the task at hand. As with the other aspects of emotional style, we need a balance. Being so focused that we tune out emotional

stimuli (have a very low sensitivity to emotion) isolates us. If friends or family say that you don’t hear them when you are working or that you become so focused that you “lose the forest for the trees,” then you may need to increase your attention to emotion. The other extreme is an attention deficit. In this extreme, you may be so easily distracted that you find it hard to complete a task or maybe even a thought!

You need focused attention to have positive emotion. An open, objective, and observant focus will also help keep a balance in the other aspects of emotional style (resilience, positive outlook, social intuition, self-awareness, and sensitivity to context).

Ramping up activation of the prefrontal cortex is the key here. Exercise accomplishes this by switching on chemicals and blood flow in the brain. Swimming freestyle helps you breathe in a way that triggers the ventral vagal nerve and activates the prefrontal cortex. Mindfulness stress reduction techniques, such as the SIFTing exercise, strengthens this area of the brain as well.

Action Step: You can take a brief quiz to evaluate your emotional style at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Healthy Minds website: https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3I8Lg914CSnsmjj

Reflect Share your results with your fiancé or spouse. What surprised you? Where do you see the need for more balance?



2. Dial Down Gratuitous Negativity

In order to establish a productive positivity ratio, most people need to dial down gratuitous negativity and increase the experience of positive emotions in daily life. Negative emotion arises when the mind perceives a threat to well-being. We can turn these negative emotions to productive use by harnessing the emotional energy to solve the problem or connect with other people. The following section gives specific strategies for each negative emotion. If you're struggling with a particular negative emotion, jot down your answers to the following questions for that emotion.

Making Negative Emotion Productive

Anger

Anger is an approach emotion that orients us towards asserting our needs or removing obstacles to satisfaction. The different shades of anger include irritation, frustration, annoyance, contempt, scorn, disdain, and hate.

Ways to deal with anger:

- Defuse with movement, breathing, or a healthy distraction to get back to baseline. If the three-step defusion process (I am soooooo angry! I am thinking I am soooo angry! I am noticing that I am thinking I am so angry) works, then use it. However, anger is a supercharged emotion that may require an initial cool down strategy before mental defusion will work. Movement may need to be intense, in order to increase your heart rate above the rate of your angry state; then, slow your breathing gradually, bringing your heart rate down until mental defusion is possible.

Once you have regained your calm and gone to your hub, reflect on the following:



- Name the most obvious emotion and accept it—I am feeling disdain. Don't fight it and don't shame yourself for feeling it.
- What was the trigger?
- SIFT the moment to discover if there are other emotions present or past experiences influencing the level of emotion you are experiencing.
- List any other emotions that are present (Example: Are you angry but also sad because you feel rejected or embarrassed?).
- Are these emotions helpful or unhelpful?
- What is your typical response or action in this situation? Is this reaction healthy and helpful or unhealthy and unhelpful?
- What needs, desires, connections, or elimination of obstacles are these emotions guiding you towards? How does your emotional style impact how you deal with anger and the other more subtle emotions present in this situation? (Example: A person with low resilience could stay angry and fume about an injury for an extended period of time. A person with high social intuition could cause more injury and anger because of how tuned in he is to other people.)
- If your anger is triggered by something another person does, can you use motivational interviewing to ask this person to modify their

behavior along with an explanation of your desire to change how you respond?

- If you cannot ask for change from this person, how can you simply change your response? What are some alternative actions or responses that would be more productive?

Try this plan. Celebrate what works and modify responses that do not work.



Sadness

Sadness is an avoidant emotion evoking the desire to withdraw altogether or seek comfort to alleviate the sense of loss. It is considered a softer emotion and can underlie other, more obvious approach emotions. The different shades of sadness include downhearted, unhappy, disappointed, discouraged, rejected, feelings of loss.

Ways to deal with sadness:

- Name the emotion and accept it. Don't fight it.
- Defuse it by using the three-step defusion process or other defusion strategies that work for

you. If the emotion has you immobilized, then you might start by asking yourself, "What was the trigger?"

- SIFT the moment to get in tune with your body's response to this emotion and discover if there are other emotions present. There may also be past experiences influencing the level of emotion you are experiencing.
- List any other emotions that are present.
- What is your typical response or action in this situation? What thoughts swirl around in your head, and what are your typical actions as a response? Is your response helpful or unhelpful?
- What needs or sources of comfort are these emotions guiding you towards?
- How does your emotional style impact how you deal with sadness and the other more subtle emotions present in this situation? (Example: A person with low resilience will sit in sadness and not act to alleviate the negative emotion. A person with low attention will be distracted by the unhappy feelings and lose their ability concentrate on activities that could give them comfort.)
- If your reaction to sadness is unhelpful (perhaps sadness causes you to withdraw, isolate yourself, or use supernormal stimuli for comfort), then how can you change your response? What are some alternative actions or responses that would be more productive?

Try this plan. Celebrate what works and modify responses that do not work.

Fear

Fear is an avoidant emotion that drives us to defend ourselves by fighting, running away, or freezing. Different shades of fear include distrust, feeling scared, stressed, overwhelmed, nervous, and anxious.

Ways to deal with fear:

- We typically begin to breathe faster and increase muscle tension. So, an initial step in dealing with the core emotion of fear is to slow your breathing and focus on sequential muscle relaxation from head to toe. Healthy distractions may be necessary before you can defuse and guide your emotional response. You can also try some of the more light-hearted defusion techniques, such as changing the voice in your head to sound like Mickey Mouse, S-L-O-W-I-T-D-O-W-N, say “Thanks, Mind!” or put that scared voice in your head to a favorite song.
- Name the emotion and accept it. Don’t fight it. What was the trigger?
- SIFT the moment to get in tune with your body’s response to this emotion and discover if there are other emotions present. There may also be past experiences influencing the level of emotion you are experiencing.
- List any other emotions that are present.
- What is your typical response or action in this situation? What thoughts swirl around in your head, and what are your typical actions as a response? Is your response helpful or unhelpful?
- Are there any imbalances within the polarities of experience that are driving your fear? Refer to chapter six for the list of polarities. (Example: Do you have a significant fear of not knowing and, therefore, have a sharp ramping up of anxiety leading into meetings?)
- How does your emotional style impact how you deal with fear and the other, more subtle, emotions present in this situation? (Example: A person who is low on the self-awareness scale may not notice anxiety until it is so strong, they can no longer ignore it. And now it’s so strong that it is really difficult to regulate.)
- If your reaction to fear is unhelpful, then how can you change your response? What are some

alternative actions or responses that would be more productive?

Try this plan. Celebrate what works and modify responses that do not work.

Shame

Shame is an avoidant emotion that makes us want to withdraw from others and hide some aspect of ourselves. Different shades of shame include humiliation, disgust, guilt, embarrassment, revulsion, disgrace, self-doubt, or feelings of worthlessness.



Ways to deal with shame:

- Name the emotion and accept it. Don’t fight it. What was the trigger?
- SIFT the moment to get in tune with your body’s response to this emotion and discover if there are other emotions present. You may also discover past experiences influencing the level of emotion you are experiencing.
- List any other emotions that are present.
- What is your typical response to this situation? What thoughts swirl around in your head? Is your response helpful or unhelpful?
- What needs or sources of comfort are these emotions guiding you towards? Although shame

makes us want to withdraw and hide, the solution is to connect with our go-to people. Shame cannot survive in the face of someone who will give us authentic empathy and love.

- How does your emotional style impact how you deal with shame and the other more subtle emotions present in this situation?
- Because the productive reaction to shame involves connecting with a go-to person, attachment styles can impact our ability to make shame productive. Avoidant attachment tendencies are particularly detrimental in this situation. If you have a tendency towards an avoidant attachment style, deliberately plan how you will connect and reward yourself for your efforts.
- If your reaction to shame is unhelpful, then how can you change your response? What are some alternative actions or responses that would be more productive? Who are the go-to people you will plan to reach out to and with whom can you connect for empathy?



Try this plan. Celebrate what works and modify responses that do not work.

Special Issue Impacting the Ratio: Forgiveness

Marriage can't always be perfect. Hurt feelings will happen, but holding grudges can be a huge source of gratuitous negativity. Forgiveness is an essential and huge part of a thriving marriage. If you have trouble with forgiveness (it's number 23 on my strengths list), then you may find the following actions helpful:

- **Clearly define what the person did to hurt you and why it wasn't acceptable.**
- **Understand that forgiving doesn't mean you are saying that what the other person did is okay.** Forgiving is simply letting go of the angry

and hurt feelings in the here and now. By letting go of the hurt and anger from past events, you gain control over your happiness and well-being in the present.

- **When you start to feel angry or hurt because of something in your past, practice some stress relief techniques that we have talked about:**

- ◇ Hand over your heart and gut
- ◇ Focus on breathing
- ◇ SIFTing exercise
- ◇ Defusion techniques

- **Accept that we cannot change the past.** Instead, we can only control how much time we devote to it in the present! Wishing the past was different is a dead weight on our happiness when we spend a lot of time looping it in our mind. We cannot control or change the fact that another person did not treat us the way we deserved. We can, however, affect how much pain we experience by controlling how much time and energy we spend on it in the here and now.

- **Remind yourself and accept that you cannot control what other people do, how they treat you, or how it makes you feel.** Trying to change something that cannot be changed just makes us feel even worse! We can (and we should) use good communication skills to ask the people we love for what we need and want, but we can't force them to do it.

- **Look at the ten positive emotions, and try to feel joy, inspiration, gratitude, peace, awe, pride in your own accomplishments, hope, amusement, interest, and love when you find yourself feeling hurt or angry.**

3. Dial Up the Positive

The other half of establishing a productive positivity ratio is to boost the amount of time you spend experiencing positive emotion. All the topics we have covered up to this point enable you to increase your level of integration and, therefore, can evoke positive emotion.

The leveraging and accomplishment of **goals** on your life list can equal pride in your success. **Self-regulation** and dialing down on supernormal stimuli will allow your brain to experience the good feeling of dopamine associated with natural rewards. **Mental strengthening** exercises can give you greater serenity and optimism. **Physical health** is associated with more happiness and less stress. **Meaning** and purpose gives you a sense of joy, elevation, inspiration, and hope. **Positive relationships** can evoke love, joy, connection, appreciation, trust, and gratitude.

Scan the following list of positive emotions and choose a few that you feel could be increased easily in your daily life. We will use this list to put a plan in place to shift your ratio.

The Positive Emotions

- Joy
- Inspiration
- Gratitude
- Serenity
- Awe
- Pride
- Hope
- Amusement
- Interest
- Love

Whenever I have a long list I want to remember, I need some kind of acronym to recall it. Here is my acronym:

- ◇ Do a little **JIG**- joy, inspiration, gratitude
- ◇ Be a **SAP**- serenity, awe, pride
- ◇ All **HAIL** to your happy life- hope, amusement, interest, love

If you want to explore these emotions and really get to know them, you can consider the following for each emotion:

- How does it feel?
- What's the button to turn it on (circumstances and pattern of thought that cause it)?
- What are the consequences of tapping this emotion?
- Name a song or movie that inspires this emotion.



Ideas to Boost the Positive

The following are some specific ideas on boosting positive emotion, modified from Barbara Frederickson's book *Positivity* (2009):

- Consider starting a scrapbook, memento box or digital file of things recalling moments when you felt one of the ten shades of positive emotion. The following pages give you many more tips on boosting positive emotion throughout the day.
- Find more positive meaning. Most life circumstances are neither 100% good nor 100% bad. You can look for the good or the bad in everything. Sometimes it's 95% bad, and you can't see any way around it. This is when the idea that "time heals" or "good can come from bad in the long run" is helpful. This attitude produces hope, which is one of the ten positive emotions. This type of reframing to increase meaning is the process we covered in the meaning map exercise.
- Remember that eliminating the negative or even blocking it out isn't the goal. The aim is to simply balance it. This is where your overarching mission to your life can come in handy. It can help you put negative things into perspective. Balance that with the achievement of goals, the positive emotion of interest, and hope in making a difference in the world. Creating value-guided, strength-fueled goals is an example of this strategy. The ability to reframe is impacted by the emotional style facets of resilience and outlook.
- Savoring the positive boosts your mood. Accentuate the positive. This is essential for increasing your positivity ratio. Make the positive even more positive, and you will keep spiraling around and up the staircase!
- Count your blessings. Jot down what you are grateful for a couple days each week. Put a reminder in your phone that asks you what you are grateful for.



- New research has shown that focusing on gratitude a couple times per week is ideal (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Journaling is a great way to do this. Fostering gratitude will help us with sensitivity to context and social intuition because we are usually grateful to someone who helped us.
- Increase your kindness. Recognizing when other people do something kind for you and ramping up your kindness to others increases positivity. How do you work on this? Pick a *kindness day* to intentionally do something for a friend, loved one, or even people in the community. On this day perform five acts of kindness. Be creative and thoughtful. Do them all in one day and take note of how you feel at the end of the day. Interestingly, Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) found that doing several acts of intentional kindness in a single day is more effective than doing something every day. Doing loving kindness meditation on a regular basis also increases your natural inclination for kindness in your relationships (Fredrickson, 2013). Looking for ways to be kind will increase both your social intuition and sensitivity to context because it shifts your focus to others and the world around you.



- Be passionate! What puts you in a state of flow? What grabs your attention, and makes you lose track of time? Don't forget there is a difference between flow (natural rewards) and junk flow (supernormal stimuli)! Look for activities that really engage you. These are productive activities that use your talents and strengths and absorb (help you integrate) your mind. This increases focus and self-awareness.
- Dream—and dream big—about the future! In the goal setting and willpower chapters, we covered a technique called *mental contrasting and implementation intentions*. This exercise is meant to help someone trying to change a habit. Visualizing your goals as accomplished and how good it will feel (mental contrasting) can create positive emotion. People with a positivity ratio that is higher than the 3:1 threshold generally have the resilience, creativity, and broad-minded outlook to go after and achieve their dreams.
- Strengths in action- discover your signature strengths and put them to use. Regularly reflecting on your top five strengths and putting them into action is a source of increasing positivity. Don't forget to come up with new ways to use your strengths in daily life.
- Connect with others. Relationships marked with secure attachment and positivity resonance will undoubtedly be a major source of positive emotion. These are relationships in which you feel known and have empathy for the other person, so they feel known as well. Use reflective listening, positive framing, and motivational interviewing to promote empathy and understanding. Find cheerleaders to connect with and avoid black holes. If you are an introvert, it will be more difficult for you to make the effort, but it's worth it!



- In your conversations with others, be sure to:
 - ◇ be attentive. Put your phone aside and mute it so it doesn't distract you. Make eye contact and use reflective listening.
 - ◇ be supportive. Be encouraging or connect and redirect if the other person is in a negative slump.
 - ◇ express trust. Let the person know you count on him or her as a friend and that they can count on you as well.
 - ◇ set aside time to goof off together!
- Practice living in the moment. Direct your attention to the experience of the now. When thoughts about the future or past successes or failures creep in, push them away and focus on the present moment. This is a mental exercise called openness. Keep yourself in the director's chair of your mind—so you can control the camera angle of your attention.
- Get outside and enjoy nature. Twenty minutes outside can do wonders for your positivity!

Identify a few strategies you would like to use to increase positive emotion; we will apply these in the final step to boosting your positivity ratio.

4. Analyze Your Day with the Emotion Storyboard

Let's take what we've learned and apply it directly to making emotion work for us, rather than against us.

The Emotion Storyboard

Let's start by analyzing a typical day, similar to what we did with the willpower storyboard:

- Identify your zones of depletion. Self-regulation and the willpower fuel tank influence your ability to manage and guide your emotions towards productive action. If you notice there is more negative emotion during times of depletion, you can plan some activity to evoke positive emotion during this zone of your day. This will help in two ways. First, positive emotion refuels the willpower fuel tank. Second, it will increase your positivity ratio.
- Go through yesterday and identify sources or zones of positive and negative emotion. Who did you encounter? What activities did you perform? Where did you go?
- Draw from the following list of emotions and label each event, person, or place with the emotion that you experienced. Use a blue pen for negative emotions. Use a red pen for positive emotion. Examples: Wake up, make coffee, and



meditate—serenity (write it in red). Commute to work/heavy traffic—frustrating and stressful (write it in blue).

- You can draw from the following lists of emotion in order to label each event during the day:

The Positive Emotions:

Surprise—Amusement, fun, silliness, inspiration, elevated, awe

Joy—Gratitude, appreciation, hope, optimism, interest, curiosity, happiness, love, trust, closeness, pride, confidence, serenity, contentment, peacefulness

The Negative Emotions

Anger—Irritation, frustration, annoyance, contempt, scorn, disdain, hate

Shame—Ashamed, guilt, humiliation, disgust, revulsion, embarrassment, disgrace, self-doubt, worthlessness

Fear—Distrust, scared, stressed, overwhelmed, nervous, anxious

Sadness—Downhearted, unhappy, discouraged, rejection, feeling of loss

- Add up your ratio of red to blue events that happened yesterday. You can compare the ratio you calculate with an online positivity ratio quiz from Barbara Frederickson's website: www.positivityratio.com.



Next let's plan tomorrow:

Go through your possible schedule for tomorrow and predict positive and negative events.

- What are the activities you will perform, people you will meet and places you will go? The goal is to plan your day to establish a productive positivity ratio.
- Label each with an emotion from the list above, using a blue pen for negative emotion and a red pen for positive emotional cues.

List the positive emotions you find it easy to experience and where you plan to experience these in your day (I cannot evoke gratitude easily when I am upset, but interest is always accessible to me). How, when, and where will you proactively evoke these positive emotions in your day?

Identify negative emotions you will experience.

(Example: I am typically bored in our weekly planning meeting.) Can you use negative emotion as a trigger for you to pursue one of the positive emotions? Record your plan (I will shift to curiosity to offset boredom). Research has shown that using a productive emotion to replace an unproductive one is the best and most effective way to emotionally regulate (Johnson, 2019). Emotion can most effectively modify another emotion. Use the SIFT it to shift it technique with an emphasis on emotion—I will shift from discouraged to interested. I will shift from frustrated to confident and hopeful.

The final step is to plan some positive emotion boosters into your day.

Ideas are listed above. If you have a really rough day ahead—make it a “kindness day” or plan to go outside for a walk several times. Reach out to people who elevate you.



Discussion Questions

- What are your go-to positive emotions? Refer back to the ten shades of positive emotion list.
- Share your emotional style scores with each other.
- How will you help each other be more self-aware?
- How will you help each other have a good level of resilience?
- How will you help each other maintain a positive outlook?
- How will you balance your social intuition, meaning a healthy consideration of others and a productive independence from the opinions and feelings of others?
- How will you help each other balance your sensitivity to context so that you can foster friendships and be a positive force for good in society?
- What are some ways you can help your spouse effectively argue with self-doubt?
- What is the positivity ratio of your relationship?
- How will you maintain a positivity ratio of at least 3:1?
- What are some sources of gratuitous negativity in your relationship? How can you eliminate or minimize these sources of gratuitous negativity?
- How will you savor your wins together on a regular basis?

Discussion Notes:



Savoring Exercise

On your own, write a letter to your spouse about a time the two of you were “at your best” as a couple. Consider these questions to help you write your letter:

- How do your signature strengths bring out the best in each other?
- What is the best part of the two of you as a couple?
- How are you stronger together than as individuals?
- What do you love about being together?



Set aside some time to exchange letters and discuss. Consider discussing over dinner or out at your favorite restaurant.

Conclusion: Start Climbing, and Never Stop!

Happiness is not a product, but rather a process. We THRIVE! not when we are stuck or standing still but when we are moving forward (and upward). To stop growing means we stop thriving, both as an individual and in our relationships.

And a thriving love is a balanced one. Aspire to be that older couple at their 50th wedding anniversary. Remember them? They have a secure, intimate friendship and passion that has matured (rather than fizzled out) over time.

The steps in the spiral staircase contain information and skills we must continually develop and refine. As we round each turn, we revisit previous steps but at a higher level. We become the best version of ourselves and establish a love with grit and staying power along the way.

We should periodically revamp our Life List to reflect our current hopes, goals and big-picture dreams. Maintaining a mutual trajectory (even if it changes, curves or jumps the track sometimes) is essential to a thriving lifelong romance!

Our success in every aspect of life is proportional to the amount of willpower (or self-regulation) we have—so we can never have too much! A dopamine-driven relationship is a sure path to disillusionment. Willpower keeps us off the hedonic treadmill.

Thankfully, you can proactively build this fundamental skill as you become an empowered couple!

The mind is our central control. The more powerful our minds, the more empowered our relationship becomes! Incorporating the “brain work” of mental strengthening exercises is necessary in today’s world.

Satisfaction results from infusing meaning and purpose into our lives and love! Using our signature character strengths to impact the world in a positive way is a continual source of inspiration and satisfaction. An established mission provides mutual interest, fuels passion, and encourages an oxytocin-rich relationship—promoting the balanced love we all want.

Maintaining or earning a secure attachment style is also foundational to a balanced relationship. Avoiding pitfalls like pornography and dopamine-driven sexual hedonic treadmills is an important component of staying securely attached.

When a secure attachment is in place, oxytocin flows more easily and abundantly.

Powering up positive emotions and dialing down gratuitous negativity makes us more productive, resilient, and open-minded. This is an ideal state because a happy brain can produce even more oxytocin.



Part Two

Continuing Up the Spiral Staircase

**Marriage is a Call
to Become Something Greater
Together**

A scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills under a bright, cloudy sky. A dirt road winds through the valley, and a sunburst effect is visible in the upper right corner. The overall tone is bright and hopeful.

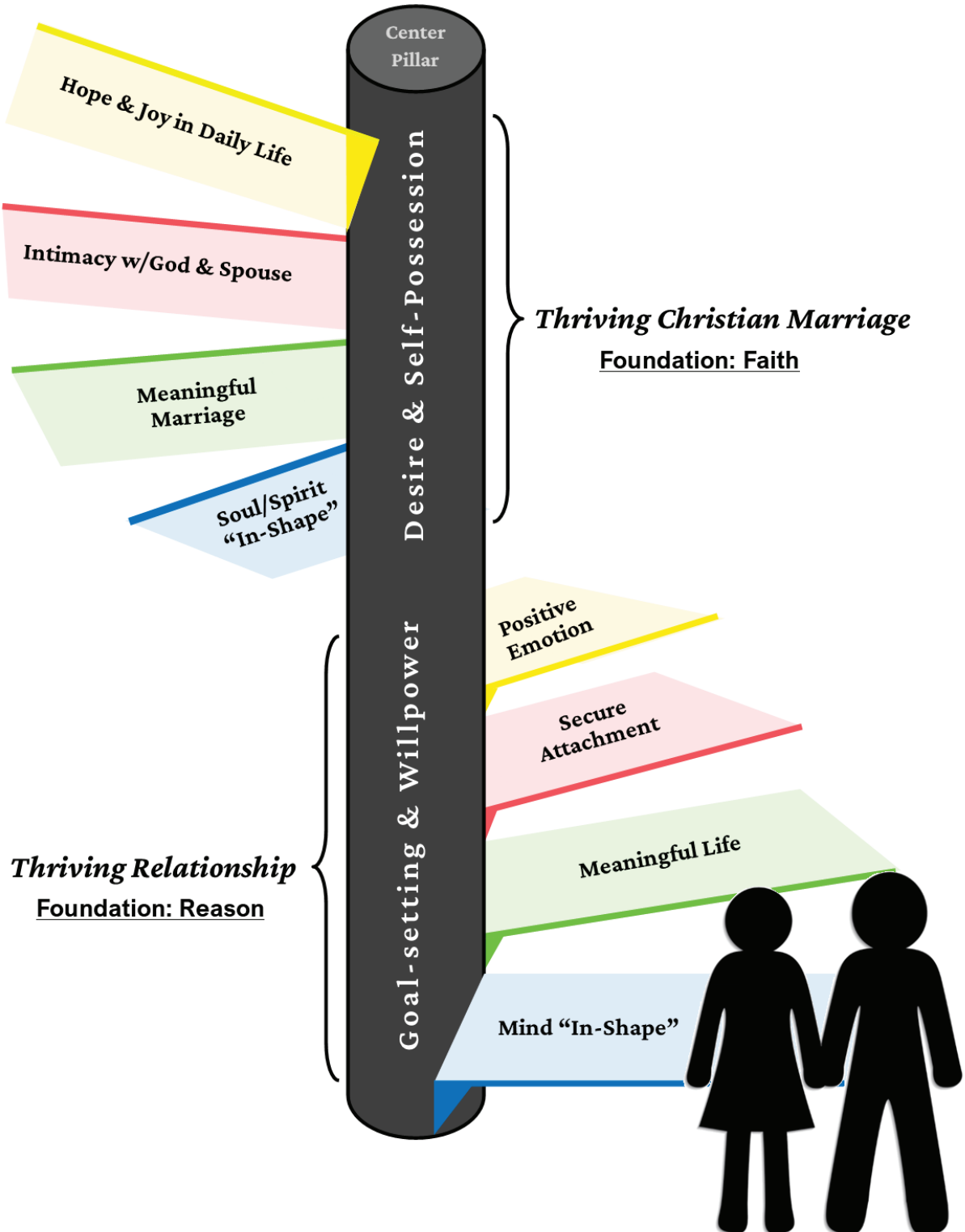
Chapter 9

Vocation: Called to More

Marriage is a call to love and serve one another.



Spiral Staircase to a Thriving Marriage



The Spiral Staircase of Thriving

Imagine the possibilities when we are aiming for the same goal and have God's help!

We continue to ascend our spiral staircase of thriving by building upon what you have already learned about your own desires and the goals you think will best help you achieve them.

Your desires for fulfillment and happiness - for a thriving life together - are all directed towards being able to become a good gift to each other. In fact, God has written this into the hearts of every man and woman. Being a gift- to God and other people- is the essence of spiritual development for the Christian. Today is a day for you to consider ways that you can make more intentional decisions about your spiritual life and your marriage planning.

If we are not satisfied by the results of the ordinary way of doing things... physically, mentally, emotionally... then we make intentional decisions to do things differently. The same is true for your marriage. You plan for your wedding, right? So, doesn't it make sense to be just as intentional as you plan for your marriage and your spiritual life?

To continue rising on the spiral staircase we have some very deep and important questions to consider and discuss.

So, we begin with an invitation. We invite you to ask the most important question there is...



What does God want for you?

Asked another way, is it possible that God has a plan for your life? For your marriage? And, if He does, how do you find out what it is and how do you know when you've found it?

Jeremiah 29:11-14

I alone know my purpose for you, says the Lord: prosperity and not misfortune, and a long line of children after you. If you invoke me and pray to me, I will listen to you: when you seek me you shall find me; if you search with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations.

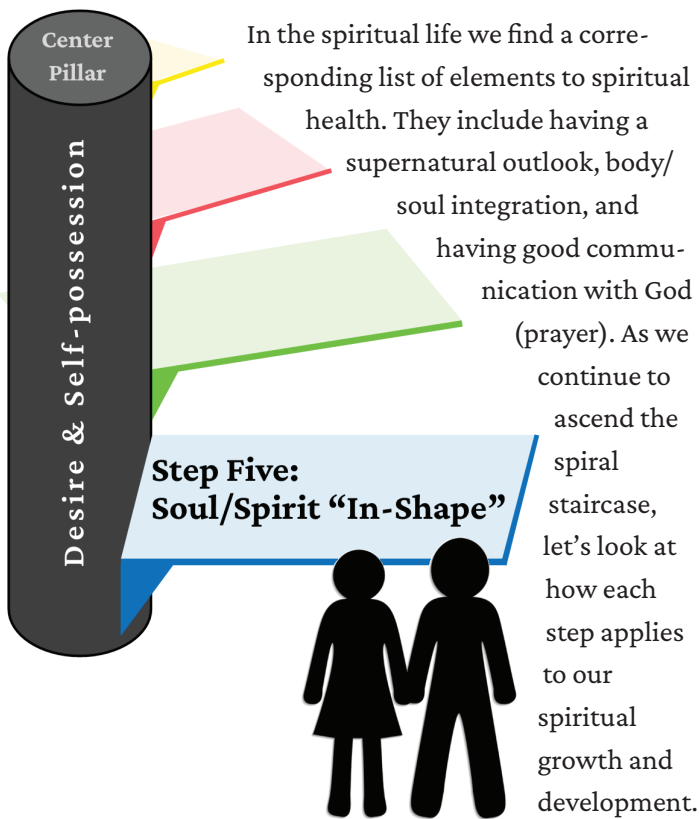
-New English Bible, Oxford Study Edition



A Mind, Body, Soul, and Spirit “In Shape”

Creating an Atmosphere for Spiritual Health and Lasting Happiness Together

Earlier we learned about the various elements that can help us to attain a healthy mind. They include focus/mission, linking our upstairs and downstairs brain, having good communication, etc.



Supernatural Outlook

Having a supernatural outlook is nothing more than looking at the world and the events of our life through the eyes of faith. **Ordinary things in our life become charged with meaning when we consider that God is a loving father, who is interested in everything we do and in every decision that we make.** It also means that all of our joys, sufferings, efforts, etc. have infinite value when they are done in reference to God. Two of the best

ways to foster this is being more conscious of God's presence in every moment and being thankful for the good things that He gives us.

Body/Soul Balance: Working Towards Greater Integration

In marriage it is easy to see that we express love through our bodies. A great insight into Christianity is that God came to save not only our soul, but He has also redeemed our bodies. In fact, it is not possible for human beings to express love without the use of our bodies. Love is expressed in words and actions, both of which require our bodies. Of course we express love in the marital act, but this is not the only way we share married love. This is the great insight of St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, that, “the human body... contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is, the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and - through this gift - fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” (TOB, 15.1)

Finding a balance in this area is similar to the way that we make better connections between our upstairs and downstairs brain. We work to make decisions using our upstairs brain because then they are made more with our reason and our decisions are more free. Having a greater body/soul balance involves integrating the way we think and act (use our body) according to spiritual principles. If we do this well, we love better, are more inclined to serve others and to think of them first. We also put a proper emphasis on how our relationship with God affects our daily decisions and actions.

Communication with God: Prayer

We will cover the subject of prayer in detail in chapter 12, *Covenantal Love and Prayer*.

What Is Holiness?

Having a Supernatural Outlook

Holiness, like well-being, is what results when we are constantly growing and developing towards the “ultimate meaningful life” that God desires for us.

This holiness is first given as a gift. We call this gift grace, and it is God’s life and strength shared with us. It is pure gift because none of us deserve it and none of us can ever do anything to earn it. This gift is also called salvation and it is offered to each and every one of us by Jesus because He loves us! In fact, He loves us so much that He died on the cross and rose from the dead to give us this gift.

Once we receive this gift (the ordinary way is baptism) we are called to live as children of God. We have learned already that self-regulation is the foundation of human love because we must be able to be self-possessed in order to offer ourselves as a gift to our beloved. It is also the cornerstone of the loving relationship between children of God and their Father in Heaven.

Love is an emotion and it is also the choice to do what is good for the one we love, no matter what it may cost. Sometimes this is easy. Other times this is difficult and requires self-sacrifice, but it is always worth it!

If we search our hearts we would all admit that life is meaningless if we spend it only looking out for ourselves. Being strong together as a couple requires that we love each other enough to make sacrifices for each other and to think of the other’s needs first; however, this is very difficult for us to do consistently if we don’t first make progress in the area of self-regulation.



There is a simple aspect of Christianity that helps us with this. We make small voluntary sacrifices throughout each day and offer them to God out of love. If we orient these small sacrifices toward little expressions of love for our spouse (and for children) and offer them up to God, we receive grace to help us love God and our family, neighbor, co-worker, enemy... everyone! If we do this right we can “kill three birds” with one stone by loving our spouse well, obtaining grace from God, and building our willpower fuel tank. It’s a win, win, win!

Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.

-St. Josemaria Escriva



Integrated Life

Working Towards Body/Soul Integration

As human beings, we are created with a body and soul. Our life experiences and our choices can cause disintegration between our body and soul. We can be wounded by other's mistreatment of us and may experience suffering as a result of our own self-destructive behavior.

We can find help to heal our wounds from a variety of sources. We can invite God to heal us through prayer. We can also encounter Jesus through other people like counselors, clergy, friends, and even our spouse. Integration also involves making decisions (and creating habits) that benefit both the health of our soul and body.

Here are some ways to foster greater integration of who we are as a person.

Counseling - No one should be afraid of counseling. Some spouses think that getting counseling means that their relationship will end badly. In reality, people who are willing to receive help from a counselor have a much high chance of working things out and fighting for the survival and health of their marriage.

Regular Communication - sharing our feelings, frustrations, and needs with each other openly and honestly can help both spouses to have greater individual integration of life and a closer relationship in their marriage.

Confession - when we aren't right with God many other things won't go right. This sacrament brings great healing to those who turn to God for mercy and help.

Good Friendships - It is unwise to continue relationships that don't build up our marriage and it is very



Christ Healing a Bleeding Woman, as depicted in the Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter

helpful to develop friendships with people who can help us become more integrated. Perhaps there is a couple at your church whom you can ask for advice or simply share your struggles with?

Luke 8:43-48

And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and could not be healed by any one, came up behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased.

And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the multitudes surround you and press upon you!"

But Jesus said, "Some one touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me."

And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Developing Greater Spiritual Health Together

For Couple Discussion

- Please discuss with your fiance any other ideas you have about how you can acheive greater personal integration.
- Is there a married couple in your life that you admire because they have an attractive spiritual life? What is it that you admire and how do you think they may be able to help you develop your spiritual health?
- Is there something that you have heard God inviting you to consider during this course that has surprised you?
- Is there something you want to share with your fiancé(e) about your desires and your spiritual life?
- Is there anything that concerns you that may be missing in your spiritual life or that may need to be on your list of spiritual goals?





Are Religious People Happier?

Research shows that people who are religious (experience transcendent value) are, in general, significantly happier than those who are not.

The Gospel of Happiness

Scientists discovered that those who practice a religious faith report less depression and more positive emotion. In his book *The Pursuit of Happiness*, the psychologist David Myers notes, “Survey after survey across North America and Europe reveals that religious people more often than non-religious people report being happy and satisfied with life” (Myers is not a friend of orthodox traditional Christian views on marriage).

People who strongly believe in God are more than twice as likely to report being happy as those who do not believe in God. When researchers examined religious practices, such as attending church, they found a link between worship and reported happiness. Eighty-six percent of people who attend church services weekly report being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with life. Notice these trends are about those who practice religious faith, not merely have religious faith.

-Kaczor, p.23



etc. As fellow Christians we share in this way of receiving grace with Protestants and Evangelicals (in the case of sacraments, we at least share baptism and marriage in most cases).

If the research is correct, why do you think that people who practice their religious faith are happier?

Of course, being religious is not a guarantee of happiness in this life. Many religious people experience times of sadness, difficulties, dissatisfaction in their marriage, even depression. Nor is this research an assertion that non-religious people or even atheists or agnostics cannot be happy. What this research does show is that religious practice does greatly increase the happiness of most individuals.

Catholics experience this through their relationship with Jesus and His Church. This is expressed by sincere practice of the faith, regular participation in the sacraments, a life of prayer, acts of charity and service,

God Has a Plan For Married Love

God's identity (and ours) provides the key to understanding married love.

Let's consider this passage from the Bible to learn about who God is and what His plan for you is all about.

God is Love

1 John 4: 7-14

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

God is love and He has a plan for love. This is why everything we have learned about up to this point reveals that we are made- intellectually, emotionally, even physically (re: brain science)- to live in the context of love. This love is both emotion and choice, and it often costs us something.

This brings us to a decision point. Is there an even higher form of love that we are made for? If there is, how do we live it?



From Pope St. John Paul II - Theology of the Body

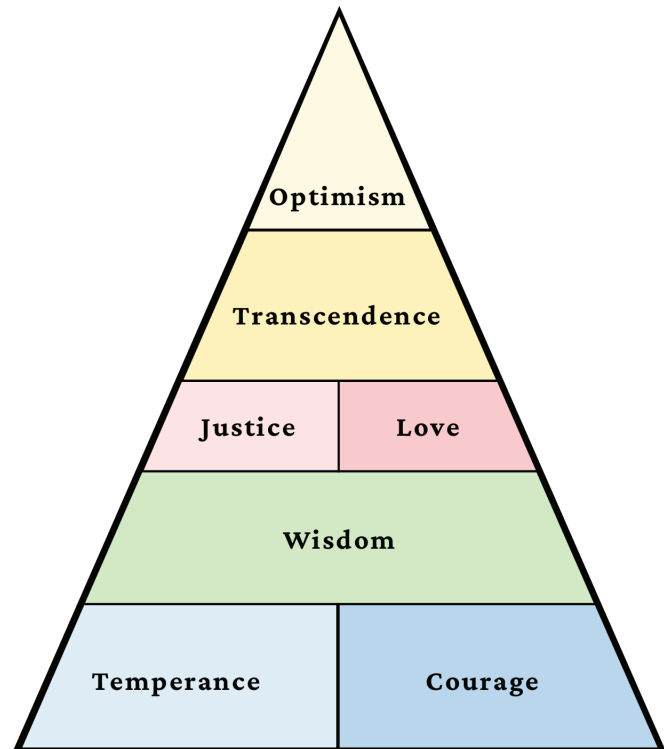
Love makes the other 'I' in a certain sense one's own 'I.' Through love, the wife's 'I' becomes, so to speak, the husband's 'I'... The union of husband and wife also expresses itself through the body, through the mutual relationship. Love not only unites the two subjects, but it allows them to penetrate each other so mutually, thereby belonging spiritually to each other, the author of Ephesians can affirm, 'the one who loves his wife love himself' (Eph. 5:28). The 'I' becomes in a certain sense 'you' and the 'you' becomes 'I. (Theology of the Body 117a.4)

How Can We Experience Transcendence In Marriage?

Discuss:

- What is your view of God? Did He create and then stand back and watch, or is He interested and involved in what you do each day?
- What do you think God has in mind for your life together? What does He desire for you?

The Happiness Pyramid



What Does God Really Think About You?

What is your picture of God? What do you think He thinks about you? Have you ever encountered Him “face-to-face?”

Much of our idea of who God is and what He thinks of us is marked by **implicit and explicit memories from our childhood**. As Dr. Thompson writes:



Elijah Fed by Ravens, Lanfranco

The way you understand and try to make sense of Jesus will be filtered through your memory and your story. That's because God generally works through the system that he created and called good, our mind/brain matrix. He

uses our implicit and explicit memory functions, not only to draw us closer to him, but also to heal, renew, and vitalize those very function... I think we are often surprised at the ways we don't trust Jesus, simply because he frequently contends with those shards of ourselves that are either too wounded or too asleep to trust him... The question is whether we will encounter Jesus as he is rather than the way our implicit and explicit memories filter him to be. Becoming more aware of the effect our memories have on our relationship with God can help us to have a more authentic experience of His love and grace. Like the Prophet Elijah from the Old Testament, we sometimes focus on more pessimistic outcomes for our lives, unaware that

our implicit memory is taking charge of how we consider our future.

*When Elijah admitted his fears, God did not dismiss, minimize, or ridicule him. And while he promised to pass by Elijah, he didn't reveal himself to his prophet in the mighty wind, earthquake or fire that Elijah saw. All these fierce acts of nature would likely have driven Elijah back into the deep recesses of the cave – both in the mountain and in his mind and memory. Rather, God called to him in a gentle whisper. He did not overwhelm him but answered Elijah's terror and hopelessness with a quiet voice that transformed Elijah's experience. As a result, Elijah's **remembered future was changed.**"*

-Anatomy of the Soul, Curt Thompson (pp. 84, 86)

1 Kings 19: 9, 11

The word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Eli'jah?”

He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

... And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.



Memory and Forgiveness

Brain science informs us that our implicit memories from a variety of experiences from our first years of life can shape how you view who God is and what you think he thinks of you. This can greatly help if you have clear or significant experiences of God's love and forgiveness to draw upon.

But what if you have few experiences – and thus few neural correlates – to help you understand how it feels to be truly loved, forgiven, or comforted? What if most of your experiences have taught you that you need to keep your emotional distance from others? Or what if you tend to become impulsively and wholly absorbed by relationships, only to find that you have no sense of yourself or what you want?

You won't necessarily feel Jesus' compassion and forgiveness just because someone tells you about them. While they might make logical sense, and you might even occasionally experience what it means to forgive or be forgiven, your experiences may have been so infrequent that they aren't easily transferred to other situations requiring

forgiveness. Likewise, you probably believe in patience, kindness, and forgiveness, yet you might find them hard to embody...

For forgiveness to be established within you so that it flows as effortlessly as your breathing, you may need to have some mental model of what forgiveness feels like in your memory. Otherwise, your life will feel dry as dust even if your theology is razor sharp. Despite what you assent to ideologically, you will lose your patience when your twelve-year-old spills his drink all over the keyboard, even though you've told him over and over not to eat or drink near the computer. When he apologizes for destroying the keyboard, forgiveness will not be your default response. If forgiveness hasn't been modeled for you, it will also be quite difficult for you to anticipate a future in which you will readily forgive.

-Anatomy of the Soul, Curt Thompson (pp. 84-85)



God Asks: What Are You Doing Here?

Can God really deliver us from our memories with a question? Well, it is not quite as simple as a single question with a single answer. However, God does desire to meet us where we really are, now, in our woundedness and troubles. He wants to meet us where we hurt and where we are lonely. Part of how he does this in our present is by re-writing our past and creating a new future.

God does this with all of us. First, he comes to our deserts and lonely mountains. He asks us questions, sometimes difficult ones that may initially drive us deep into the caves of our own minds, into the recesses of old neural pathways and ancient, repetitive memories. His probing may leave us exhausted, famished, and terrified. His queries may even elicit the very feelings we try so hard to avoid. Often the question is simply, What are you doing here? He never asks with scorn or derision but always with hope and anticipation. He asks with the tone of a God who is eager for us to retrace our neural pathways, to eventually take a different route and create a new end to our story. To 'remember' our future differently.

Sometimes we are not paying attention, but God does not cease his pursuit. He whispers again, inviting us to meet with him, to wrestle, to complain, and to weep. When we are finished, he gently asks again, What are you doing here? Each time he asks, we tell our story differently, for now it must include the experience of hearing a Voice telling us that we are not alone. And hearing that voice will change our memories and the way we live our futures.



Christ in the Wilderness, Kramskoy

And we have even more reason to hope. While it's true that established neural networks are most likely to fire, it's equally true that recent research demonstrates that our brains were created with beautiful and mysterious plasticity. That means our neurons can be redirected in ways that correlate with joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Instead of automatically following the wired sequence of our old memory, with reflection, we can choose to create new pathways. There is one requirement: we must pay attention to how our memory is manifesting itself by answering questions like, "What are you doing here?"

-Anatomy of the Soul, Curt Thompson (p. 87)



Discussion Questions

- Have you ever considered what happens when people believe in God? Does belief (and the consequences to how one lives differently because of faith) make one more human or less? Does it make a person more alive and more what they are made for, or less?

- For each of you, right now, is your relationship with God based on **avoidant goals** or **approach goals**? Remember avoidant goals are designed to avoid a negative outcome (rules that tell us what “not” to do) and approach goals are idealistic and directed toward a positive outcome (virtues to live to become the best version of yourself and go to heaven). More on these types of goals can be found in Chapter 1.

- Is your relationship with God based on **intrinsic** or **extrinsic** goals? Perhaps a combination of both? Intrinsic goals are ones you set for yourself and they arise from your own genuine desires, values and interests. Extrinsic goal are set for you by others and typically come from a sense of duty.

- Brainstorm some ideas you have for spiritual goals that you can set and accomplish before your wedding day and some longer term spiritual goals you might have for your marriage. Pay attention to what kind of goals you are setting. **You are much more likely to accomplish goals that are both approach and intrinsic.**

Discussion Notes:

A scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills under a bright, cloudy sky. A sunburst effect is visible on the right side, with rays of light extending across the scene. A winding dirt road or path leads through the valley, and a small stream flows alongside it in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and hopeful.

Chapter 10

Your Marriage Mission

A Mission for a Meaningful Marriage



Vocation: Marriage is a Call to Become Something Greater Together

If marriage is a calling, to what are we called?

Catholics call marriage a vocation because it is a calling from God to a specific and new way of life. It is a natural vocation because God made us man and woman and calls us to form a family. It is built into the way we were made. In his public ministry, Jesus took the natural meaning of marriage and made it a sacrament. This supernatural calling, or vocation, is a call to a lasting and unbreakable covenant through which the spouses are given grace to enable them to love and serve one another and any children they are given.

Marriage has this general mission to love and serve and help one another to live in such a way that their life together corresponds to the gift and calling they have received from God. The creation of a personalized marriage mission is a way to establish a particular and meaningful description of your own decisions about how you will live your vocation in the details. The details matter. As you look to make

decisions about goals and principles that you want to live in your marriage, you will arrive at the creation of your own, personal, marriage mission.

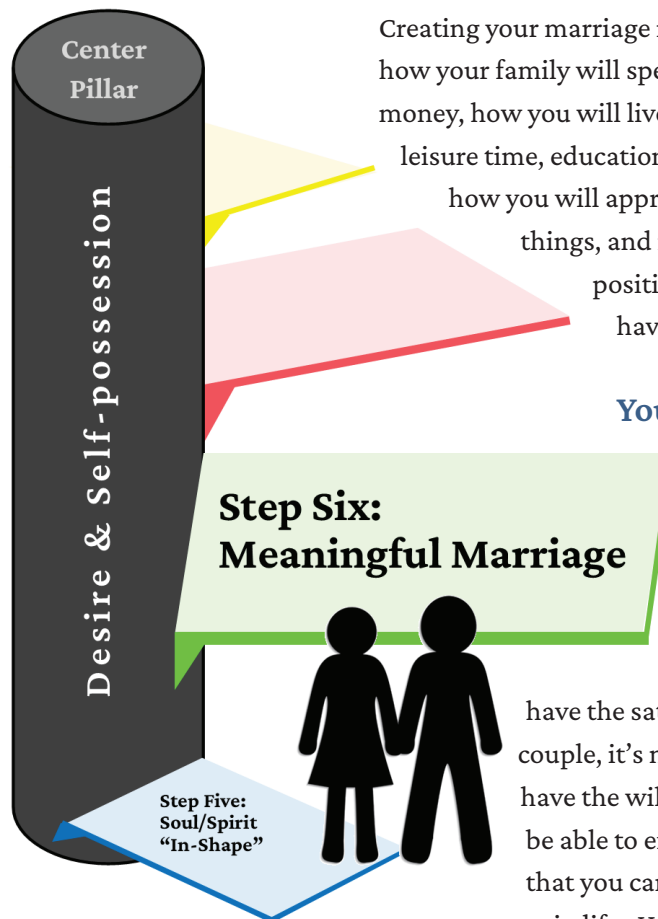
Creating your marriage mission involves deciding how your family will spend its precious time and money, how you will live faith in your home, spend leisure time, education options for children, even how you will approach disagreements; these things, and many others, will add to the positive impact your marriage can have in the world!

Your Marriage Mission

Recall the discussion earlier in this course about goal setting and creating a Life List.

We learned that in order to have the satisfaction you want as a couple, it's necessary to set mutual goals, have the willpower to achieve them, and be able to effectively communicate, so that you can be equal and cooperative partners in life. However, all goals are not created equal!

You may wish to take a few moments to review the mutual Life List you created on page 18 of your workbook. We provide space below for you to summarize the main elements of your Life List and list a few of the goals you developed together.



The Spiral Staircase of Thriving: Marriage Mission

Building More Into Your Personal Marriage Mission statement

Having reviewed your goals let's consider some additional questions. With all that you have learned so far in this course...

- What do you think about the things you've heard?
- Were there things that have challenged your own "conventional wisdom"?
- Of all the things you learned what surprised you the most?

Review the mission statement you created and rework it according to some of the new insights you may have discovered here.

Our Marriage Mission:



The call of marriage is a call to love as God loves.

God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. (see Genesis 1:27; 1 John 4: 8, 16)

Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. and this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "and God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"

Genesis 1:28

-Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1604



The Story of God’s People is a Love Affair

Jesus is the full revelation of God’s love.

The most beautiful thing God made – so the Bible tells us – was the family. He created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: “Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow.” All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family... A family is truly a family when it is capable of opening its arms to receive all that love. The garden of Eden is long gone; life has its problems; men and women – through the wiles of the devil – experienced division... God’s love, beauty and truth, and on the other hand the destructiveness of war: we are poised between those two realities even today. It is up to us to choose, to decide which way to go.



The Sermon on the Mount, Bloch

When the man and his wife went astray and walked away from God, God did not leave them alone. Such was his love. So great was his love that he began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family.



The Flight into Egypt, Murillo

God came into the world in a family. And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open.

-Pope Francis, Speech at the Festival of Families in Philadelphia, September 26, 2015

You did not choose me, but I chose you...

-John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.

What is Love?

Love: Wanting and Choosing What is Good for the Beloved

There are several ways to define love. Generally modern culture defines love as a feeling or emotion, as something that happens to us. The ancient Greeks had a word for this kind of love: *eros*, which “somehow imposes itself upon human beings.” (Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 3)

There is another way to define love: willing or choosing the good of the other. This aspect of love is principally defined as a choice.

The Christian view of love is taken from the revelation given to us by Jesus Christ. He tells us that God is love. This is such an all-encompassing reality that it contains both the notions of love as emotion and love as choice... and even more.

The writers of the New Testament used another Greek word, *agape*, to define the highest form of love; self-sacrificing, self-donating love. This is the love shown to us by Jesus. He died on the cross to redeem us and to reveal the love of the Trinity.

Trinitarian Love

Just as there are three persons, there are 3 movements of love in the Trinity. The *Father* wills the good for the Son expressing his fatherly love. The *Son* receives this love and comes to know that he is loved. In response, he entrusts himself completely to the Father. This is the essence of sonship. The *Holy Spirit* is the fruitfulness of their love.

This amazing love which is the very life of the Holy

Trinity is revealed by Jesus on the cross in which he offers his life, choosing to die for his bride, the Church. Every person is invited to respond with the Church by entrusting oneself to God. The Holy Spirit makes this possible as he comes to dwell in us and makes it possible for us to cry out “Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)



The Crucifixion, Giotto

In Christian Marriage, we seek to integrate these aspects of love. *Eros* (desire) is elevated by *agape* (self-sacrificing love) to become an icon, or image, of the love that Jesus Christ has for the Church and the world. This is only possible with the help of grace following the example of Christ. In this, the man entrusts himself, “I promise to...” and the woman entrusts herself, “I promise to...” and the fruitfulness of their love is so real that it may result in a new person, a baby.

We need to remember “that authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one’s own vulnerability and needs, and to welcome with sincere and joyful gratitude the physical expressions of love found in a caress, an embrace, a kiss and sexual union.” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of Love*, 157)

We discover love in a family.

The family is the place where the theology of the body and the theology of love intersect... It is in the family that man discovers his relationality, not as a self-actualized, autonomous individual, but as a child, a spouse, a parent, whose identity is founded on being called to love, to receive himself from others and to give himself to others.

-Pope Benedict XVI

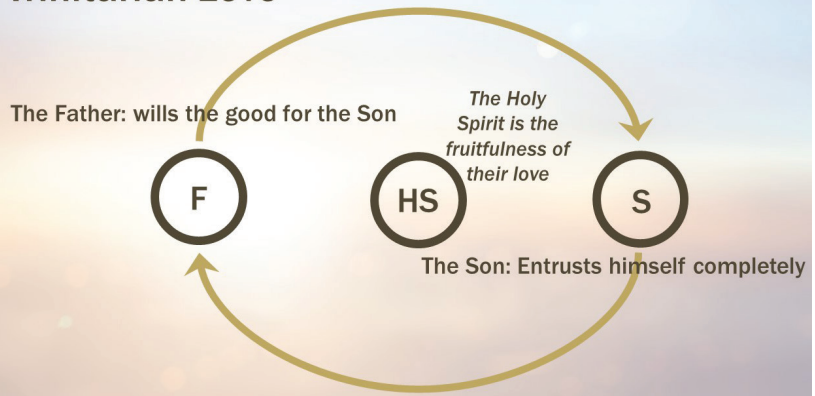
God is Love: What does Love Look Like in the Trinity?

The life of the persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is an eternal exchange of love.

Love in the Trinity

1. The Father wills the good of the Son.
2. The Son receives His love (Sonship) and entrusts himself to the Father.
3. The Holy Spirit is the fruitfulness of their love.

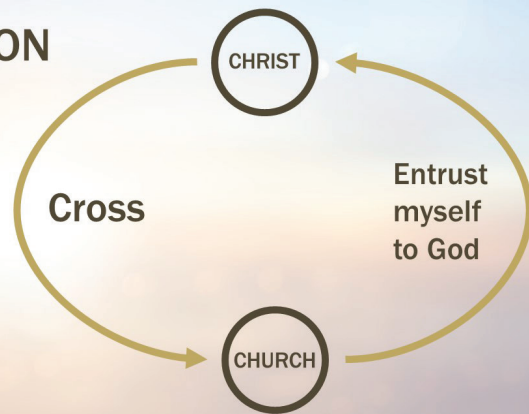
Trinitarian Love



Redeeming Love: The Cross

1. The Son offers his life on the Cross, loving as God does.
2. The Church responds to His love and mercy... "I entrust myself to God."
3. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to call God "Our Father."

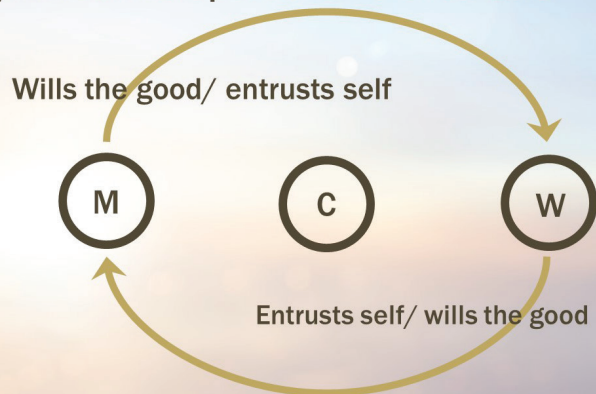
REDEMPTION



Love in the Family

1. The Man entrusts himself, "I promise to..."
2. The Woman entrusts herself, "I promise to..."
3. The fruitfulness of their love is so real that it may become another person.

Original Unity/Redeemed Spousal & Parental Love



Love in Marriage

Pope Francis invites spouses to consider St. Paul's description of love.

What is a marriage, a family without love? Can it be a family at all? Certainly, a family can exist without love, but how could it not be experienced as a poverty and a tragedy? The vision of life that Christianity proposes to all who will listen has at its core the message of love of God and neighbor. The Christian family is certainly no different and so **Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter in his letter on marriage, *Amoris Laetitia*, *The Joy of Love*, to a meditation on the famous passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 13, “Love is patient, love is kind...”** He stresses that it would be “insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love,” (*Amoris Laetitia*, *The Joy of Love*, hereafter AL, 89).

“The word ‘love,’ however, is commonly used and often misused,” (AL, 105). By looking in detail at this brief passage of scripture the pope hopes to dispel misunderstandings about the real meaning of love and present the gospel understanding of this reality that impacts every aspect of the daily life of the family. Love is classically understood as both an emotion and as a choice to benefit the beloved, often phrased as “to will the good of the other.” St. Paul’s poetic description of love does not begin with this definition. Instead, he describes the qualities of real love and provides a starting point for Christians to learn the way of love, especially in the family where “love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples and their children,” (AL, 90).



The passage begins with “love is patient” (verse 4) and the word patient in the original Greek refers “to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense,” (AL, 91). Having the desire to bring good to the ones you love requires that thoughtfulness and care is exercised with every act to ensure that it expresses love. Often rash responses are the ones that cause offense and hurt the ones we love. Additionally, the pope gives this advice about how the ordinary life of the family can become a place where patient love is cultivated. “Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds,” (AL, 92).

Love is patient and kind...

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

-1 Corinthians 13:4-7



The next qualifier, *kind*, places additional requirements upon *patient*. This Greek word for kind, *chrestéuetai*, is only used in this one place “in the entire Bible. It is derived from *chrestós*: a good person, one who shows his goodness by his deeds,” (AL, 93). St. Paul adds “kind” as a complement to “patient” to emphasize that patience “is not a completely passive attitude.” Kind patience involves activity directed towards “dynamic and creative interaction with others,” (AL, 93). He “wants to stress that love is more than a mere feeling. Rather, it should be understood along the lines of the Hebrew verb ‘to love’; it is ‘to do good,’” (AL, 94).

Patience rooted in the truth is not tolerance of any and all behavior, specifically abuse. “Being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us,” (AL, 92). This dispels the common misunderstanding of the permanence of marriage as justification for remaining in harm’s way when abuse of oneself or one’s children is occurring. While the indissolubility of marriage does not mean that one can dissolve a marriage due to this horrible rift in what should be the loving environment of the family, it should never cause hesitation for the abused or the protecting parent to get help and defend their own dignity or that of their child(ren).

Neither is love jealous. The members of the family should give no quarter to envy because “love has no room for discomfiture at another person’s good fortune,” (AL, 95). Love makes room for the other and rejoices when the other members are able to have or accomplish something good. It “makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves,” (AL, 95).



Love is not boastful. The Greek word used by St. Paul here calls us to avoid being haughty and pushy and to avoid speaking too much about ourselves. We should think of the other first, especially in the way we “treat family members who are less knowledgeable about the faith, weak or less sure in their convictions... In family life, the logic of domination and competition about who is the most intelligent or powerful destroys love,” (AL, 98).

Love is also not rude, rather it is “gentle and thoughtful... [and] abhors making others suffer,” (AL, 99). It is generous because “generously serving others is far more noble than loving ourselves,” because, “loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others,” (AL, 101).

Neither is love irritable or resentful. This phrase is connected to the earlier mention of the need for patience so that one “does not immediately react harshly to the weaknesses and faults of others... to nurture such interior hostility helps no one,” (AL, 103).

The Pope emphasizes the merciful nature of love. “The opposite of resentment is forgiveness,” (AL, 105). Experience tells us that it is almost unavoidable that at times the members of a family will fail one another. However, “when we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is possible and desirable, though no one can say that it is easy. The truth is that ‘family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation...’” (AL, 106, quoting from John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*).

“The glory of God is man fully alive.” – St. Irenaeus

God’s call respects our freedom.

God wants more from us than just to be “good” people. God the Father is a loving father and he wants us to realize the full purpose of our lives. He calls us to a new life, to a mission in which we seek to live our life in service to others out of love for Him and one another. Jesus spends most of his public ministry traveling around and calling people to live a new life. To follow Him. To leave behind home and family. What does he call us to, today, in our ordinary lives?

He calls everyone to holiness. This is often misunderstood as something that involves some kind of denial of what is good about our humanity.

Follow me.

Luke 5: 27-34

After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he left everything, and rose and followed him.

And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?”



The Calling of St. Matthew, Caravaggio

The things we may do that are beneath us — self-destructive behaviors — are the part of ourselves that we are called to deny. We are then called to wholeness, completeness as a gift to God and one another. “If you knew the gift of God!” (John 4:10).

This is what happens in Baptism. It makes one an adopted child of God. Having received this gift one is then called to be a good gift to others. This is the Christian understanding of marriage. Be the gift! How can we live this? It is found in freedom understood as self-mastery. With the help of grace (God’s life and help discussed on page 205) building upon self-regulation we really can become a good gift for our spouse and children! As St. John Paul II described it in the *Theology of the Body*, “self-mastery is indispensable in order for man to be able to ‘give himself,’ in order for him to become a gift, in order for him to be able to ‘find himself fully’ through ‘a sincere gift of self,’” (*Theology of the Body* 15.2).

This is a foundational element of what it means to thrive in our marriages... we become a good gift to our spouse and to children received as a gift. This is the real meaning of vocation – God is calling you to something greater than yourself and this is what marriage really is!



The Ultimate Relationship

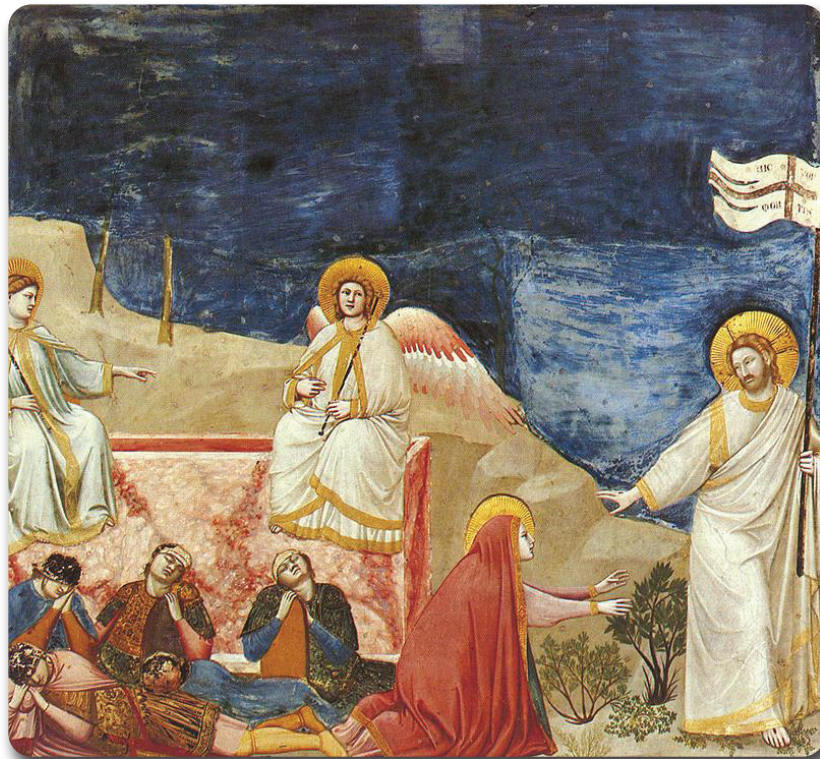
Do you ever wonder...

What is life all about? Does God really exist? What is my purpose? Why am I here?

Jesus came to reveal God's plan of loving goodness. He did this through His life and teachings and He changed the course of human history through His death and resurrection. He calls us to live as God's sons and daughters. This is the ultimate relationship, the relationship we are invited to have with God.

The Good News

1. We are created for relationship.
2. Our relationship is broken (due to sin).
3. Jesus restores our relationship.
4. Am I willing to live in this relationship? Do I wish to entrust myself to God?
5. Sealing our relationship... the Sacraments.

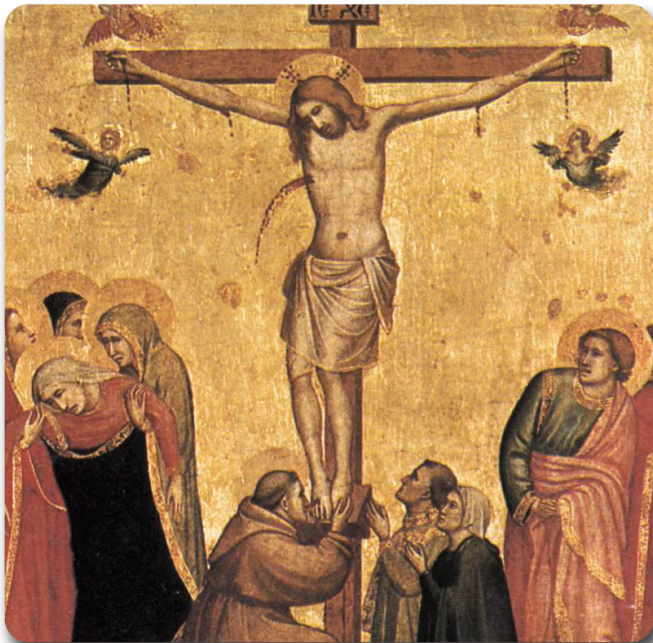


Resurrection, Giotto

Christian Marriage is a “New” Way to Live Marriage

Three ingredients for a healthy, happy, holy, and lasting marriage:

- ◇ To serve and be served.
- ◇ To love and be loved.
- ◇ To forgive and be forgiven.



The Crucifixion, Giotto

By calling on the couple to submit to one another ‘out of reverence for Christ’ (Eph. 5:21) and then by stirring their desire for ‘reverence’ in conjugal relations, Ephesians seems to highlight chastity as a virtue and as a gift... In this way, the reciprocal fascination of masculinity and femininity matures spiritually through the virtue and even more so through the gift (‘life according to the Spirit’). Both the man and the woman, provided they turn away from concupiscent, find the proper dimension of the freedom of the gift, united with femininity and masculinity in the true spousal meaning of the body.

-Theology of the Body 117b.5

The Christian call to mutual submission

Ephesians 5:21-33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.



What is OUR calling? What is OUR mission?

What is God saying through the strengths and gifts He has given each of you?

Earlier in this chapter you worked on your personal marriage mission and to think about the results of your *VIA Character Strengths* survey. You will be reviewing your previous work and adding to it here.

If you are baptized we had you take the *Activate Your Baptism* (Charisms) inventory at www.activateyourbaptism.com. You can learn more about charisms in the **Learn More** tab on this website.

Transfer the top five strengths that you discovered from the VIA questionnaire.



His

Hers

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

If you completed the *Activate Your Baptism* inventory choose the “top” 5 possible gifts/charisms from the results and list them here.

His

Hers

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

What is OUR calling? What is OUR mission?



What is God saying through the strengths and gifts He has given each of you?

- Discussing the results: what do they tell you about how God made you for each other?
- Looking at the results from the *Activate Your Baptism* inventory, review your mission statement work from page 225 and discuss what it would mean to lean on each other's strengths (both natural and supernatural/spiritual) in order to serve one another better and to lift one another up in areas of weakness or difficult times.
- Is there anything that these strengths have in common? Are there ways that they compliment each other?
- Taken together, do your various strengths and gifts help clarify your marriage mission?

Discussion Notes:



Chapter 11

What is Marriage Really For?

The Properties and Nature of Marriage



The Two Meanings of Marriage



**Some questions about marriage:
what do you think?**

Discussion Notes:

- 1) What is the purpose of marriage? What is the point?
- 2) What are the typical results of marriage today?
- 3) What do you see in the Christian marriages around you? Have you seen good examples, or bad, or both?
- 4) What are some principles that you think a Christian marriage should have?
- 5) What atypical results would you expect from a marriage lived according to these principles?
- 6) Can you list at least two (or more) atypical results you might want in your own future marriage?

How does marriage best express love between the spouses?

Sacramental Marriage has a unitive meaning. The Bible describes this unity in marriage as the two become “one flesh.” In this way, the man and woman become united in a bond that is both for their benefit and the benefit of any children they may be gifted with by God.

It is the nature of love to create and to share itself.

The two meanings of marriage are:

-unitive (shared).

-procreative (creative).

We find these two meanings in the definition of marriage provided in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1601:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

The day-to-day living out of marriage is aimed at bringing spouses into closer and closer unity with one another. Marriage is designed for this purpose: to bring spouses closer together, united in purpose, affection, and mission. To speak of Marriage’s procreative meaning in the same breath as the unitive is to repeat what we know about the nature of love. Love does not tear down; it builds up (unitive)... love does not divide; it multiplies (procreative).

It may also be helpful to consider the damage done to the integrity of marriage when one of these meanings

is left out. For example, today it is becoming common to de-emphasize the procreative aspect, leading to marriages focused exclusively on the spouses having fun and perhaps avoiding children altogether. *Time Magazine* has featured this new “child-free” lifestyle as a glamorous and virtuous new ideal. In the other direction, some couples are very committed to their children but fail to maintain a proper emphasis on the importance of the quality and depth of their own relationship. Their unity may be so underdeveloped that when the children are grown, the reason for their marriage to continue may seem absurd, leading to a “loveless” marriage or even divorce.



The solution to these problems is to maintain the proper emphasis on both meanings of marriage throughout the seasons of the relationship. Openness to life and the raising of children is not in opposition to the development of greater unity. In fact, both meanings of marriage serve to build up one another. Children are a visible sign of the creative love of the marriage, and they can provide motivation to deepen the unity of the spouses, while at the same time needing parents who are deeply in love with one another to thrive and prosper in their own development.



The words of the Marriage Rite express the two meanings of marriage.

Sexuality is not a means of gratification or entertainment; it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously, in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity.... It enables us to discover, "the nuptial meaning of the body and the authentic dignity of the gift."

- Pope Francis, *The Joy of Love*, 151

God has given us a great gift in our sexuality. He has shared with us a portion of His tremendous power to create out of love. That is why we speak of human love as pro-creative, or "for" creation. We are cooperating with God in His act of creation.

In the Rite of Marriage (in the green box) the Church requires the man and woman to pledge to "accept children lovingly from God."

With the words of the conjugal consent they bring into being... a sign that looks toward the future and produces a lasting effect, namely, the conjugal bond, one and indissoluble... [and] in a future-related perspective, the procreative meaning of the body, that is fatherhood and motherhood.

-*Theology of the Body* 105.6

In fact, **a marriage in which children are not welcomed as precious gifts from God cannot be a valid marriage**, because it cannot reflect the fullness of God's love for us. When a man and woman become one flesh in marital union they reflect the creative power of God and the great love He has for His

creation, especially human beings, who are made in His image. Even those who experience infertility still participate in this reality because they *would* welcome children.

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..."

-Genesis 1:26-28

From the Marriage Ceremony

The bride and groom are asked the following questions during the Rite of Marriage:

Have you come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?

Are you prepared, as you follow the path of marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?

Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

What Makes Marriage Christian?

Free, Total, Faithful, Fruitful

In his teachings on marriage, Jesus provides us with 4 marks, or characteristics, of a Christian marriage.

1. Free: “What God has joined, let no man separate.” (Matthew 19:6)

For love to be love it must be the free gift of one self to another. If there is any form of coercion or deceit in their relationship or in their decision to marry, they need to speak to someone about it right away. If these are present, it may be a serious problem in their contracting and building a lasting marriage. This requirement of freedom also applies in the sexual life of the spouses.

Pope Francis on the requirement of freedom:

We also know that, within marriage itself, sex can become a source of suffering and manipulation. Hence it must be clearly reaffirmed that “a conjugal act imposed on one’s spouse without regard to his or her condition, or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love, and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife”... even though Paul was writing in the context of a patriarchal culture in which women were considered completely subordinate to men, he nonetheless taught that sex must involve communication between the spouses: he brings up the possibility of postponing sexual relations for a period, but “by agreement,” (1 Cor 7:5, AL, 154).

2. Total: “The two become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31)

Our gift of self to our spouse and children must be total, holding nothing back, including every facet of ourselves: our thoughts, our emotions, our strengths, our weaknesses, our fertility, our time, our attention, our money. Just as the persons of the Blessed Trinity pour themselves out in perfect love to one another, and just as Christ emptied himself for us on the cross, we are to give all of ourselves for our spouse and children. If we enter into marriage freely, there is no option for divorce as Jesus said, “in the beginning it was not so,” (Matthew 19:8).

Pope Francis on the total gift:

In our own day, sexuality risks being poisoned by the mentality of “use and discard”. The body of the other is often viewed as an object to be used as long as it offers satisfaction, and rejected once it is no longer appealing. (AL, 153)

In the course of every marriage physical appearances change, but this hardly means that love and attraction need fade. We love the other person for who they are, not simply for their body. Although the body ages, it still expresses that personal identity that first won our heart. Even if others can no longer see the beauty of that identity, a spouse continues to see it with the eyes of love and so his or her affection does not diminish (AL, 164).





3. Faithful: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” -Ephesians 5:21

“By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouse.” (Catechism, 1646) The faithfulness spouses are called to is both not violating one’s promise, and being faith-filled. We are to lift our spouse and children up and encourage in them a love of God and a life of faith. A Christian Marriage must be rooted in trust, so that we can come to trust our spouse in the same way we trust God always to want the best for us.

Pope Francis on mutual submission:

Every form of sexual submission must be clearly rejected... As Saint John Paul II wisely observed: “Love excludes every kind of subjection whereby the wife might become a servant or a slave of the husband... The community or unity which they should establish through marriage is constituted by a reciprocal donation of self, which is also a mutual subjection”... In marriage, this reciprocal “submission” takes on a special meaning, and is seen as a freely chosen mutual belonging marked by fidelity, respect and care. Sexuality is inseparably at the service of this conjugal friendship, for it is meant to aid the fulfilment of the other (AL, 156).

4. Fruitful: “God blessed them, saying: ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’” -Genesis 1:28

God’s first command to human beings, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Creating is essential to the nature of love. A Christian Marriage is called to reflect this reality of God’s love. Spouses are called to open themselves and their relationship generously to the gifts (and responsibilities) of the God who created us, saved us, and loves us.



Pope Francis on fruitfulness:

Love always gives life. Conjugal love “does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother”... The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life (AL, 165-166).

Large families are a joy for the Church. They are an expression of the fruitfulness of love. At the same time, Saint John Paul II rightly explained that responsible parenthood does not mean “unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities, as well as their own situation and legitimate desires” (AL, 167).

Free, Total, Faithful, Fruitful in the Rite of Marriage

Recall the three questions from the Rite of Marriage:

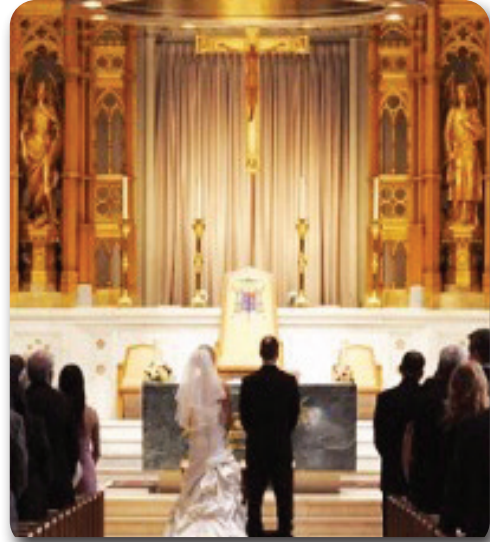
- Have you come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?
- Are you prepared, as you follow the path of marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?
- Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

You will express these vows in words at your wedding and with your bodies on your wedding night.

Consummation in which “the two become one flesh” makes visible the promise of love. “The body, in fact, only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine” (*Theology of the Body*, 19.4).

Some Questions to Consider Together:

- What is the sweetest thing your fiancé(e) could ever say to you? What would be the most romantic thing you could ever say to him/her?
- Do we expect our marriage to be permanent?
- How will we give ourselves to each other totally in the day-to-day of our married life?
- What sort of things would be unthinkable in a truly faithful relationship?
- Do we expect our marriage to be fruitful? In what ways?



Discussion Notes:



Covenant and God’s Plan for Married Love

“I will take you for my people, and I will be your God.” -Exodus 6:7

God made covenants with people throughout our history as He laid out His plan for our salvation.

- He made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and others.
- In each he developed his familial ties with the people of Israel.
- He was to be their God. They were to be His people.
- The final covenant that God made with His people was the New Covenant of Jesus.



Moses, Monaco

What is a covenant?

Covenant is an often misunderstood term. It is not just a contractual agreement between a greater and lesser party (i.e. God and man) but a fundamental reordering of one person to another. It is the term that is used in the Bible to describe family relationships. Marriage is a covenant relationship because in the “I do” of the vows the man and woman form a new, permanent relationship called a family.

Characteristics of covenant:

- **In the covenant exchange each one becomes part of the other.**
- **It is in no way related to convenience or profit.**

- **It is a matter of identity.** There are many examples of covenant identity change. When God makes a covenant with Abram, Abram ceases to be just Abram, a member of a family and tribe.

Abram becomes God’s Abram, Abraham, God’s chosen patriarch for His family on earth. He is now the God of Abraham, and later, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The thing that is special about a **covenant**, as opposed to a **contract**, is this change in identity. Because a person has changed who he or she is when entering the covenant, one can never go back and undo the new identity.

- **Entering a covenant is an irreversible decision.** This is what is

meant by the Church’s language of indissolubility. Jesus said, “What God has joined, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

- One of you may violate the covenant, but **it can never be broken**, except by death. **Only** if your spouse dies can you ever be “not his” or “not hers” if you are in a valid marriage.

Consider

- Is this vision of the marriage covenant similar to the typical way marriage is defined in our culture today?
- If not, would you consider this vision of marriage *atypical*?
- Do you think you will get *typical* or *atypical* results if you do your best to live marriage in this way?

Grace-Filled Marriage Makes Fidelity Possible

Grace gives us the power to love like Jesus.

In Matthew 19: 3-9 we read:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."

Along with the "demand" of permanence Jesus also offers a promise. If Jesus calls spouses to love one another "until death" then He must also make this possible.

This leaves us with some important questions to ask:

- Do we look at fidelity and permanence as avoidance goals [no divorce] or as approach goals [lifelong faithfulness]?
- If you were to phrase this as an approach goal how would you say it?
- Can this really be lived?
- If so, what is necessary?



Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter,
Rubens

Among other things you might have mentioned in your answer, grace is absolutely essential in the quest for a lifelong, faith-filled marriage. Grace is communicated in the expression of love, specifically sacrificial love. How do we unite ourselves to Jesus in order to love the way he does?

Grace is a word that is often used, but rarely defined.

Grace is God's life, God's strength, and he lavishes it

on us everyday. It is a gift given freely by God to us.

The trick with grace is that it requires our cooperation. You have to let God know that you want it, and be prepared to receive it, in order for it to really have its full effect on you.

The Sacraments open us wide to this grace. When we go to Mass or Confession, we are telling God very plainly that we are coming to Him for grace. When we pray, do good works, say charitable things, we are trying to be more like God and He sees that and gives us all the grace needed to effect that change in us. When we treat our spouse with respect and concern, when we sacrifice something for him/her, the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage overflow into our hearts. Grace has the power to change us from the selfish and mostly self-centered people that we tend to be, and turn us into humble and self-sacrificing people like Himself. **It is by being humble and giving that we will find ourselves in a marriage full of faith and happiness.**



The Grace Specific to Marriage

Getting Your Family to Heaven

The grace of the Sacrament of Marriage perfects the love between the spouses and strengthens their unity. This grace helps them to be faithful to their vows and to one another. It also helps them to welcome and educate their child(ren). All of this is directed towards helping the family to become more holy and to attain heaven (see Catechism 1641).



The source of this grace is Jesus Christ. We can draw close to him and receive grace through prayer whether we are at church, at home, or anywhere. Especially important is weekly attendance at Sunday Mass and

regular reception of the sacrament of Confession which ensures that the family will remain a place where Christ is welcome and grace is operating always. In families who respond to this invitation we find that:

Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love (Catechism, 1642).

It is grace that makes this beautiful vision of Catholic family home life possible. As the popular saying goes; the family that prays together, stays together.

Some questions to consider:

- What is the grace offered in Sacramental Marriage?
- How can we receive it?
- What do we do with it?

Faithfulness

Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one's given word. God is faithful. The Sacrament of Matrimony enables man and woman to enter into Christ's fidelity for his Church... St. John Chrysostom suggests that young husbands should say to their wives: I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us... I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.

-Catechism, 2365



Chapter 12

Covenant Love

Forming a Home Together



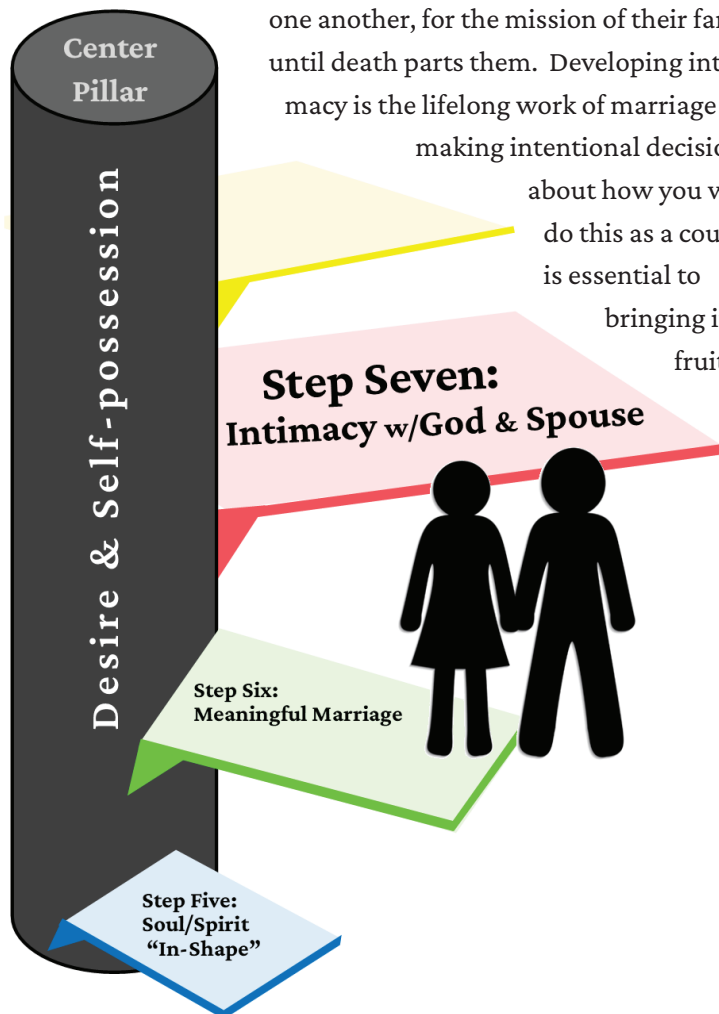
Intimacy with God and Your Spouse

The next step in the Spiral Staircase of a Thriving Love is intimacy. Intimacy is at the heart of a happy, thriving marriage because closeness and vulnerability between spouses is the deepest expression of unity and love between them. The intimacy between husband and wife is part of every aspect of their relationship from the way they speak to each other, the things they share with one another about their inner life, glances of affection, sexual intimacy, even shared prayer.

Self-revealing love is also at the center of a true relationship with God. God reveals himself to us in a variety of ways, but most clearly in the Good News that was presented in chapter 10. The “ultimate relationship” that is offered to us by God begins when we respond to God’s invitation to follow Jesus and allow him to be the Lord of our life. This gives life a new perspective and direction. Everything is seen through the lens of following Jesus as a disciple and our decisions made more and more with him at the center. This decision requires vulnerability because we bring our sins before him so that we can be forgiven and healed. In receiving this love and mercy from God our relationship with him can grow in intimacy. We come to know him more deeply as he comes to know our failures and our good desires through confession and prayer. This dynamic is at the heart of a living faith.

The covenant we have with God through our baptism made us a child of God. Covenant is a family reality. The sacrament of marriage is also a covenant between the spouses, who with God’s help are able to live for

one another, for the mission of their family, until death parts them. Developing intimacy is the lifelong work of marriage and making intentional decisions about how you will do this as a couple is essential to bringing it to fruition.



If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.
-St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta

Some Questions to Start With

- Would you say that you have a high amount of distress and confusion or peace and certainty in your life? Why?
 - Have you ever prayed to ask God to help you make a decision? What was your experience?
 - In daily, practical decision making you often have two (or more) good things to choose from. How do you decide which one to do?
 - What does prayer have to do (or not) with decision making?
 - If you say you believe in God, do you pray regularly? If you don't pray, why not?
 - Right now, if prayer is a desire but not a habit, what do you think you need to be able to create a habit?
- List some of the things you are doing to plan your wedding. For example, what do you plan to wear, how will you decorate the church, guest list, etc.?
 - List some of the ways you prayed growing up and even if you didn't are there ways that you have learned to pray in your life?
 - Are there ways that you would like to pray to prepare for your wedding? What about for the life of your marriage?



Discussion Notes:



What is Christian Prayer?

“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

-St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Insight from the Catechism

Prayer is God’s gift to us

2559 “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”

But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart (Ps. 130:1)?

He who humbles himself will be exalted; (Lk 18:9) **humility** is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” (Rom 8:26) are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer.

“Man is a beggar before God.” -St. Augustine

Prayer is an expression of our covenant with God

2562 Where does prayer come from?

...In naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the **heart** (more than a thousand times).

According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

Prayer is living communion with God

2565 In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit.

...the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.

This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ.

Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body.

Its dimensions are those of Christ’s love.



Saying Grace, Bega

Consider

- Have you ever experienced prayer as a gift? Can you describe your experience?
- Do you struggle when you try to pray? Can you take any comfort from the words of St. Paul that, “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26)?

Forms of Prayer

We want to pray the way Jesus taught us.

Prayer is an expression of our relationship with God. **Christian prayer is specifically Christian when it follows the model of Jesus Christ.** Jesus regularly went away to pray by himself, “In these days he went out into the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God.” (Luke 6:12) Not only did he pray, he also...

- commanded us to pray always without losing heart (Luke 18:1).
- gave us an example of how to pray (John 11:41-42, Luke 22:31-32).
- frequently taught on prayer (Matthew 6:5-18, Mark 11:24-26, Luke 18:1-8).
- prayed with and for people (Mark 1: 21-34, Matthew 9: 27-31).

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed for all of the faithful that we would be delivered from evil and sanctified in the truth (John 17). He gave us the greatest example of how to pray as a Christian when he abandoned himself to the will of His Father as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “not my will, but yours be done,” (Luke 22:42). He consummated His teaching on prayer when he prayed from the cross for our forgiveness (Luke 23:34). Now, in the glory of heaven, Jesus “lives to make intercession for us,” (Hebrews 7:25).

There are several forms of prayer described by the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in question and answer format.

550. What are the essential forms of Christian prayer?

They are blessing and adoration, the prayer of petition and intercession, thanksgiving and praise. The Eucharist [Mass] contains and expresses all the forms of prayer.



551. What is “blessing”?

The prayer of blessing is man’s response to God’s gifts: we bless the

Almighty who first blesses us and fills us with his gifts.

552. How can adoration be defined?

Adoration is the humble acknowledgement by human beings that they are creatures of the thrice-holy Creator.

553. What are the different forms of the prayer of petition?

It can be a petition for pardon or also a humble and trusting petition for all our needs either spiritual or material. The first thing to ask for, however, is the coming of the Kingdom.

554. In what does the prayer of intercession consist?

Intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. It conforms us and unites us to the prayer of Jesus who intercedes with the Father for all, especially sinners. Intercession must extend even to one’s enemies.

555. When is thanksgiving given to God?

The Church gives thanks to God unceasingly, above all in celebrating the Eucharist in which Christ allows her to participate in his own thanksgiving to the Father. For the Christian every event becomes a reason for giving thanks.

556. What is the prayer of praise?

Praise is that form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It is a completely disinterested prayer: it sings God’s praise for his own sake and gives him glory simply because he is.



Practical Issues

Some Questions We Should Address About Practical Things

- How much time is good for me to devote to prayer? (This is different according to one's state in life, i.e. single, married, priest/religious, mom with young children, etc.)
- Should I value prayer? Is it worth my time? How much do I value prayer?
- Is there anything I can do when I experience distractions in prayer? If so, what?
- Prayer can be part of the development of one's attachment style. We want our relationships to be "Safe and Secure." Does my relationship with my future spouse have the characteristics of a safe and secure, oxytocin rich relationship? Can you describe the characteristics? If not, why?
- How can I have a safe and secure attachment style in my relationship with God?

Making Intentional Decisions about Prayer

In our effort to make our home into a domestic church we must make intentional decisions about how we will pray as individuals, as a family, and with the larger community... the Church.

Even before we have children we can prime the environment of our home to facilitate prayer (remember primes are non-conscious triggers).

Some ways we can do this include:

- ◇ Having a crucifix to remind us how much God loves us and help us say "I want to love like that!"
- ◇ Having a space set aside for prayer in our home.
- ◇ Having specific times when we pray every day.



The Holy Family in Egypt, Poussin

Distractions, Excuses, Misunderstandings

What to do about distractions?

Distractions in mental prayer are inevitable! Do not think you are sinful or that you don't love God enough because you experience distractions.

Distractions require a response of vigilance – as soon as we are aware of them we should gently return our attention to Jesus and the subject of our prayer. The Church calls this the “battle of prayer.”

What are some of the reasons we commonly use to excuse ourselves from mental prayer?

In his book, *Time for God*, (p. 26-38) Fr. Philippe gives advice about how to respond to the temptation not to pray.

Common Excuses To Not Pray

- Not enough time (false activism) – prayer actually multiplies our time and makes our Christian life more fruitful.
- Taking time alone to pray is selfish – prayer makes us better persons and therefore better for others.
- I pray while I work and throughout the day – that's good, but not enough by itself. We all need intimate one-on-one time with God. How would your fiancé(e) feel if you never spoke to him/her face to face?
- I don't feel like praying (false sincerity) – feelings are not always a reliable indicator of what we should do.

- I'm not good enough to seek union with God (false humility) – He'll make you good enough through your union with Him in prayer.



What Prayer Is Not. . .

Prayer is not merely a technique: “The first, basic truth, without which we will not get very far, is that the life of prayer...is not the result of a technique, but a gift we receive.” Techniques (yoga, breathing, repetition of formulas, positions) are human, whereas the successful prayer is a gift graced by God. This is not to deny the exterior focus of praying well: not looking around, not listening to another conversation (or music), perhaps closing your eyes, kneeling. Prayer should be focused, but not merely an emptying of the mind or relaxation technique. Rather it is a conversation with the God who loves us (Philippe, *Time for God*, p. 9).



Making Intentional Decisions

The way your home and marriage develop will be based on your answers to these important questions:

- What do you know about what is most essential to loving relationships?
- How are you going to communicate love in your marriage?
- In what ways will your new home be like/unlike your family of origin?
- What do you want other people to notice about your future marriage?
- How can you nurture friendships that will build up your new family?
- What can you do to keep trust and romance alive in your future marriage?
- Change is inevitable: How well do you deal with it? If you can, list one time when you dealt well with a significant change and one time you did not do so well.
- What are your hopes, dreams and plans for your future home?
- What elements from your upbringing do you hope to make part of your new home?
- What things from your upbringing do you want to avoid in your new home?



Discussion Notes:



Creating Our Home Together

Can we be intentional in our decisions about what kind of home we will have?

Since the first centuries of Christianity the Catholic Church has called the family by a defining title: **the domestic church**. This means that the home is a place where Jesus dwells and the family is nurtured within a haven of Christian charity and unity.

Prayer is a defining characteristic of the domestic church. Participation in the sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist are the highest expressions of the Christian life in the domestic church and its most important source of grace and strength.

During the engagement period it is a good practice to consider ways that each future spouse's **family of origin** may affect the formation of the new family.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-7

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.



Some of these characteristics may be negative and some positive. Identifying them and making a plan for how to benefit from this awareness is important.

Faithfulness in marriage is more than not cheating. It is built on mutual trust and grows along with the growth of our relationship with God. Faithfulness requires that we eliminate things from our life that would be a source of disunity or unfaithfulness in our marriage. One common mistake many couples make is to live a **“married-singles” lifestyle**. They live together, but do most of their activities apart. Many marriages fail precisely because the spouses do not make the transition from being single to being married, nor do they make the necessary changes in lifestyle that come along with this change in their state in life.

Setting Spiritual Goals

- If you could ask God to give you just one thing in your spiritual life what would it be? Is there something that could be a goal for the two of you?

- List three (or more) spiritual things that you would like to share together:



Discerning Openness to Children – Being Open to Life

Is right now a good time for us to have a child? How can we know God’s will for us? What does it mean to discern and how do we do it? How often do we need to discern? How can we know if our reason for not having a child right now is sufficiently serious?



For spouses seeking to live God’s beautiful plan for married love and sexuality these questions can be some of the most agonizing and difficult questions they will face in the fertile years of marriage. In the marriage rite you will promise to “accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church.” Living out our call to be open to life is not a simple matter. It requires discernment and regular communication between spouses.

What is discernment?

Simply put, discernment is the process of making a decision with the help of God’s grace regarding God’s will and how His revelation applies in a specific circumstance. It is the soul’s conversation with God seeking the answer to the question: “God, what is your will for me?” In marriage, discernment also involves the conversation shared by the spouses, “seeking God’s will for us.”

The process of discernment begins with the initial question. Then one gathers any relevant information to help evaluate the circumstances of the question. The circumstances are then evaluated according to revelation and the principles of faith and morality. If

the decision to act in a particular way is sinful then it is definitely not in accord with God’s will. If it is not sinful, and there are several choices one could make, then the decision becomes a matter of prudence.

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it... With the help of this virtue, we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid (CCC 1806).

Practical Guidelines for Discernment

Spouses are given a great deal of latitude when it comes to acting responsibly in their decision making about having children. In the wedding rite spouses promised to “accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church.” Following the guidelines for moral actions, spouses may discern what actions are definitely not in accord with God’s will.

From this certainty spouses are then able to make moral decisions and determine what is best for their family at any particular time or situation. These decisions often involve emotional difficulties and can even lead to conflict and division between spouses.

Ahead you will find some practical guidelines to help in the discernment process. We recommend that you seek help from a trustworthy source to answer your questions about this issue like a priest, religious, or well-formed lay person. If you experience conflict in your marriage due to these questions we suggest that you seek help by speaking with your pastor and consider seeing a recommended Catholic counselor.

Serious Reasons: What Does That Mean?

So, we think we have a serious reason to postpone a new pregnancy— how can we be sure this reason is sufficiently serious?

The most official description of this criteria from the teaching authority of the Church comes from Pope Paul VI's teaching on married love, "On Human Life" (*Humane Vitae*), #16:

Certainly, there may be serious reasons [iustae causae/just cause] for spacing offspring; these may be based on the physical or psychological condition of the spouses or on external factors. The Church teaches that [in such cases] it is morally permissible [for spouses] to calculate [their fertility by observing the] natural rhythms inherent in the generative faculties and to reserve marital intercourse for infertile times. Thus spouses are able to plan their families without violating the moral teachings set forth above.

Serious reasons include the health of the spouses (both physical and psychological) and external factors such as economic hardship, social upheaval (war, unstable living conditions, migration). If the well-being of the family and the new child is under serious threat this can also constitute a serious reason.

There are two very important things to remember when considering this question:

First, the decision to postpone openness to achieving pregnancy is a decision to be made on a more or less monthly basis. The woman's natural fertility cycle allows the spouses to decide each month the proper answer to this question. Granted there may

be circumstances in which the serious reason to postpone is long lasting or persistent, however the question remains one that is open to discussion, prayer and discernment on a regular and perhaps even monthly basis.

Second, the decision to abstain (or not) rests in the free will of the spouses deciding together with mutual respect in accord with their well-formed consciences. This is an area where the spouses alone

(taking advantage of good counsel from trusted sources) have the competency to discern God's will in their particular circumstances. It



is not for outsiders to judge the decision made by the spouses (so long as they are not using contraceptive practices) whether they have one child or many more. It is wise to remember that many couples (about 10%) experience infertility and many others have one or more miscarriages during the course of their married life (meaning some families have more children than you can see in the pew on Sunday). This does not mean that objective criteria for determining the morality of this decision are to be discarded. In fact, spouses are obligated to form their conscience through education and reflection and to seek guidance from a priest or another well informed and trustworthy person who will help guide their decision making. However, at the end of the day, these decisions are the responsibility of the spouses and they should never allow another (even well intentioned) person to make these decisions for them.

Why Doesn't the Church Just Give Us a List?

If the answer on the previous page still seems too vague then perhaps you will find comfort knowing that you are not alone. Many people have expressed the desire for a neat and tidy list of circumstances that would constitute a serious (or just) reason to seek to avoid pregnancy.

In her book, *The Sinners Guide to Natural Family Planning*, Simcha Fisher has an entire chapter devoted to this question. She asks:

“Why not just make a list: on the right, good reasons for postponing a pregnancy; on the left, bad reasons?” (p. 17).

She then quotes the guidelines provided in *Humane Vitae* #16 already cited above and from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #2368.

For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness, but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood...”

She then writes:

But we're still left with those adjectives: well grounded, serious, just. What does that mean? Why doesn't the Church give some specific examples of what qualifies as a just reason? Well, one problem is that my just reason is not necessarily the same as your just reason (p. 18).

Next she outlines several scenarios where the family situation may fit the criteria for just cause (serious reasons) to exist. For the example of the question of money there are four families with very different situations who all have the same current level of income. All four families in the scenario could objectively fit the category of “severe economic instability” yet not all of them are in a scenario where they would obviously fit this category because of the specifics of

their situation. Not all of them would necessarily find their situation “severe” or “serious” and would remain free to make a choice to abstain during fertile days provided they “make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness” (CCC 2368).



I must agree with Mrs. Fischer's conclusion:

...if the Church ever did give a specific, objective list of legitimate reasons for avoiding or achieving pregnancy, it would cause more confusion, not less. People with good reasons to postpone pregnancy would doubt themselves, and people with no good reason would find loopholes. People would judge each other even more than they already do, and it would distract from the soul's conversation with God (p. 21).

Discernment: Making Decisions With God’s Help

In an informative essay on discernment Catholic author Dr. Peter Kreeft provides a list of five general principles for discernment of God’s will.

1. Always begin with data, with what we know for sure. Judge the unknown by the known, the uncertain by the certain. Adam and Eve neglected that principle in Eden and ignored God’s clear command and warning for the devil’s promised pig in a poke.

2. Let your heart educate your mind. Let your love of God educate your reason in discerning his will. Jesus teaches this principle in John 7:17 to the Pharisees. They were asking how they could interpret his words, and he gave them the first principle of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation): “If your will were to do the will of my Father, you would understand my teaching.”

3. Have a soft heart but a hard head. We should be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” sharp as a fox in thought but loyal as a dog in will and deed. Soft-heartedness does not excuse soft-headedness, and hard-headedness does not excuse hard-heartedness. In our hearts we should be “bleeding-heart liberals” and in our heads “stuck-in-the-mud conservatives.”

4. All God’s signs should line up, by a kind of trigonometry. There are at least seven such signs:

- Scripture
- Church teaching
- human reason (which God created)
- the appropriate situation, or circumstances (which he controls by his providence)
- conscience, our innate sense of right and wrong
- our individual personal bent or desire or instincts
- prayer

Test your choice by holding it up before God’s face. If one of these seven voices says no, don’t do it. If none say no, do it.

5. Look for the fruits of the spirit, especially the first three: love, joy, and peace. If we are angry and anxious and worried, loveless and joyless and peaceless, we have no right to say we are sure of being securely in God’s will. Discernment itself should not be a stiff, brittle, anxious thing, but—since it too is part of God’s will for our lives—loving and joyful and peace-filled, more like a game than a war, more like writing love letters than taking final exams.



Career, Children, and Discernment

- When you have children do you plan to live on 2 incomes? One? One and a half?
- If this happens soon after you are married what will it look like in relation to your current job(s)?
- Would one of you like to be able to stay home with a newborn child? How could you make it possible?
- Would one of you like to stay home while the child(ren) are small? For their entire childhood?
- Are you open to having more than one child? Do you have a desire to space their births? If so, how do you plan to do so?
- If God has a plan for your family, how will you discover it? What will you do if you discover that His plan is different in some way from your current plan?



Holy Family, Murillo

Discussion Notes:



Chapter 13

Money Together

Money and Mission



Financial Personality Quiz

We all interact with money in a unique way, but most of the time we can relate to certain qualities more than others. This sheet will help you determine your spot on the **Save It/Spent It** and **Tune Out/Geek Out** spectrums. You will each want to take the quiz separately, writing down your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Answer the following questions quickly; don't overthink your answers.

Section 1

- 1. A courier shows up and hands you a \$20,000 inheritance check from a long-lost relative. Your initial thoughts are closer to...**
 - A) I know just which savings account I'll put this in!
 - B) It's time to go to the mall and have some fun (Daddy's getting a new flatscreen!).
- 2. You're shopping at the mall:**
 - A) and you know exactly what you're there to get (e.g. new blue shirt for work).
 - B) looking around and maybe something will catch your eye will come home with you.
- 3. You're out to eat with your sweetheart. You...**
 - A) look over the menu, taking careful note of the prices.
 - B) are having trouble picking which appetizer will go best with your drink from the bar.
- 4. You have a morning meeting at a coffeeshop. You...**
 - A) order a brewed coffee. Those other drinks are just too expensive.
 - B) order your favorite drink, complete with whipped cream and a drizzle.
- 5. The 'pocket money' you give yourself in the monthly budget...**
 - A) joins that of previous months, building up for a big purchase you're planning.
 - B) rarely makes it past the 20th.
- 6. You're invited out to drinks with some friends and think...**
 - A) "HmMMM, I wonder where I'll pull from in the budget to cover this? Any specials?"
 - B) "HmMMM, I wonder if I should buy the first or the second round?"
- 7. You went out to get a few things from the store,**
 - A) and come back with those few things.
 - B) walk in the house carrying several bags.
- 8. You might say this about a recent purchase:**
 - A) "I did some research and this is exactly what I've been looking for for a while, now."
 - B) It was on sale, an AMAZING DEAL!

Count up your answers:

Her Results A _____ B _____

His Results A _____ B _____

Section 2

1. The idea of a budget meeting...

- A) is an exciting proposition.
- B) sounds like a great sleep-aid.

2. You hope your interaction with your budget looks like

- A) diving into the details, reconciling transactions, checking statements... you're polishing your calculator as we speak!
- B) a little bit of tracking here or there.

3. Your flight is at 11:00am

- A) you arrive at the airport at 8:30am.
- B) you arrive at the airport at 10:20.

4. Which type of vacation sounds better to you:

- A) daily itineraries with activities, local restaurants and entertainment options.
- B) hanging out by on the beach, see what happens.

5. You file your taxes

- A) as soon as you get your W-2.
- B) at 11:59pm on April 15th.

6. It's time to buy a replacement for your vehicle.

You...

- A) create a list of features you'd like and a spreadsheet to compare options.
- B) head out to the car lot to see if anything tickles your fancy.



7. Recipes

- A) should be followed to a T(easpoon).
- B) are suggestions.

8. Let's say you've decided to take up running as your new hobby.

- A) You subscribe to a running magazine, research fitness plans, and visit the local running shop.
- B) You root around in the closet, find some shoes and head out the door.

Count up your answers:

Her Results A _____ B _____

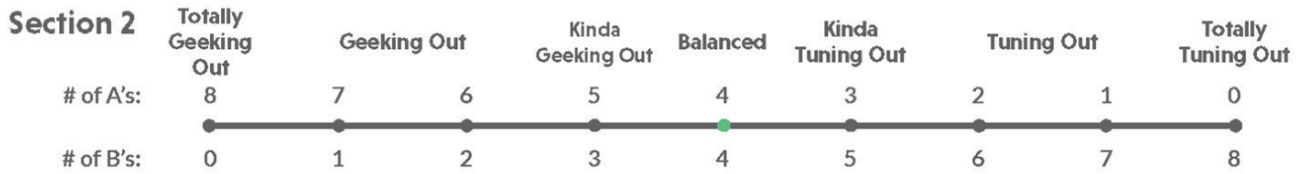
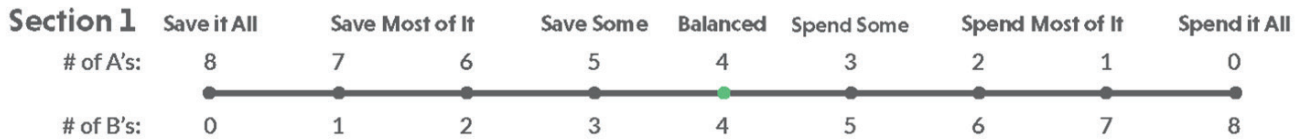
His Results A _____ B _____



Financial Personality Quiz Results

Now, let's see where each of you falls on the spectrum.

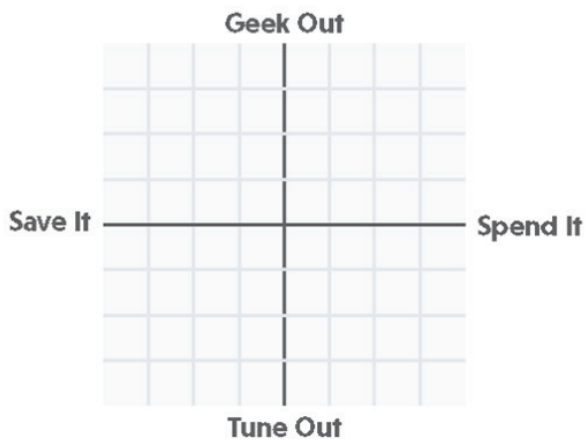
First, find your positions on each spectrum:



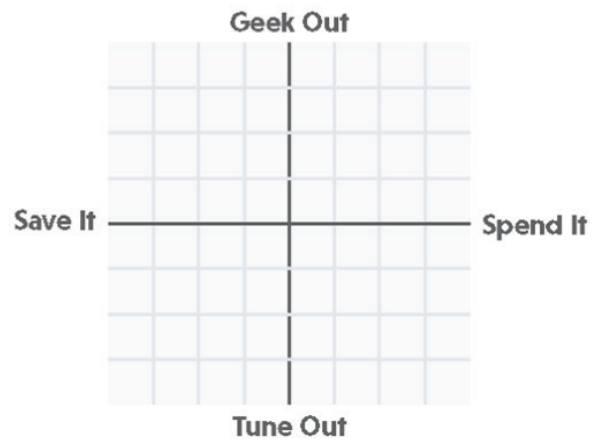
Now, plot yourselves on the grid.

You will start at $-4 / -4$ (bottom left side of the grid).

Her Results



His Results



Discussion Questions:

- How does where you ended up compare to where you thought you would?
- What's the biggest takeaway you'd like to remember from this exercise?



Unpack the Past

Before you get where you're going, you need to know where you've come from.

You should each take some time to answer these questions **separately**. Use a separate sheet if necessary to jot down your answers.

Family History

- How did your family relate with money growing up?
- What was their mindset towards money- were they savers, spenders, or a mix of both?
- What influenced their spending habits?
- How did you handle money you earned growing up?
- What past mistakes have you made with finances?
- Are you more a saver or a spender?

Relationship History

- What's been your biggest financial fight to date?
- What irritates you most about how your significant other handles money?
- What's been your biggest financial victory to date?
- How do you irritate your significant other with your financial decisions?
- How do you feel talking about your finances in your relationships?
- What motivates you to earn money?

Discussion Notes:

Personal History

- When you began to understand what money was, how did you relate with it?

Unpack Your Backpacks

Starting with things you each bring from your past (good, bad, and ugly) that influence how you think, feel, and act about money you decide which you want to put in your together backpack and which should be discarded.







Imagine the Future

HIS Dreamstorming Sheet

RELATIONSHIP

FAMILY

LEGACY

ACTIVITIES/HOBBIES

ADVENTURES

FINANCIAL

CAREER

Imagine the Future

HER Dreamstorming Sheet

RELATIONSHIP	FAMILY	LEGACY
ACTIVITIES/HOBBIES	ADVENTURES	FINANCIAL
CAREER		



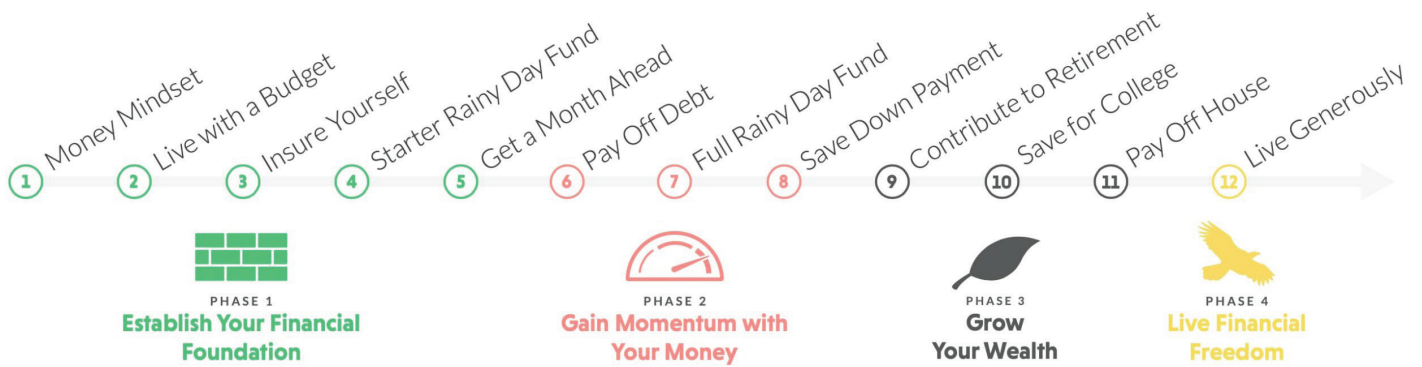
Imagine the Future

Couple Dream Sheet

HIS DREAMS	OUR DREAMS	HER DREAMS

The Financial Phases

... and Money Milestones

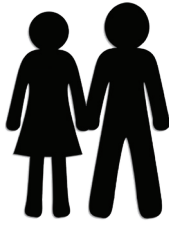


Financial Phase Finder

Use the map on the following pages to discover where you are in your financial journey.



Start Here



Do you ever avoid looking at your bank account?

Y

N

Start Working on
Milestone 1
Money Mindset

Have you examined your relationship with money and why it is the way it is?

N

Start Working on
Milestone 2
Living with a Budget

Do you have a written budget?

N

Y

Y

Do you create a new, unique budget every month *and* keep it up to date as you spend?

N

Y

Start Working on
Milestone 3
Insure Yourself

N

Do you have the right types of insurance coverage?

Start Working on
Milestone 4
Starter Rainy Day Fund

N

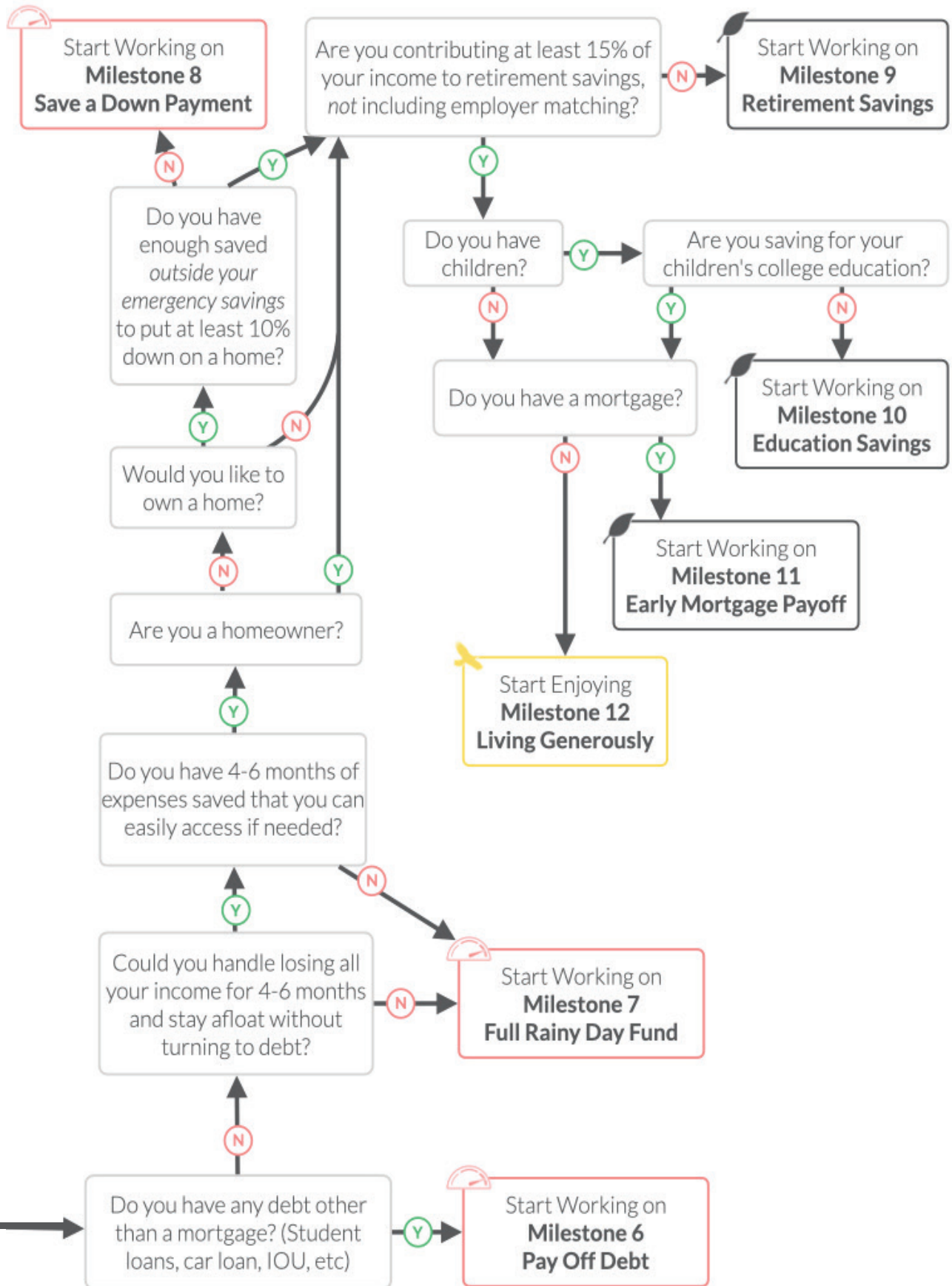
Do you have \$1,000 set aside for emergencies that is easy to access if needed?

Y

Start Working on
Milestone 5
Get a Month Ahead

Are you living paycheck to paycheck?
(Vs. having all the money you need for the month on the 1st)



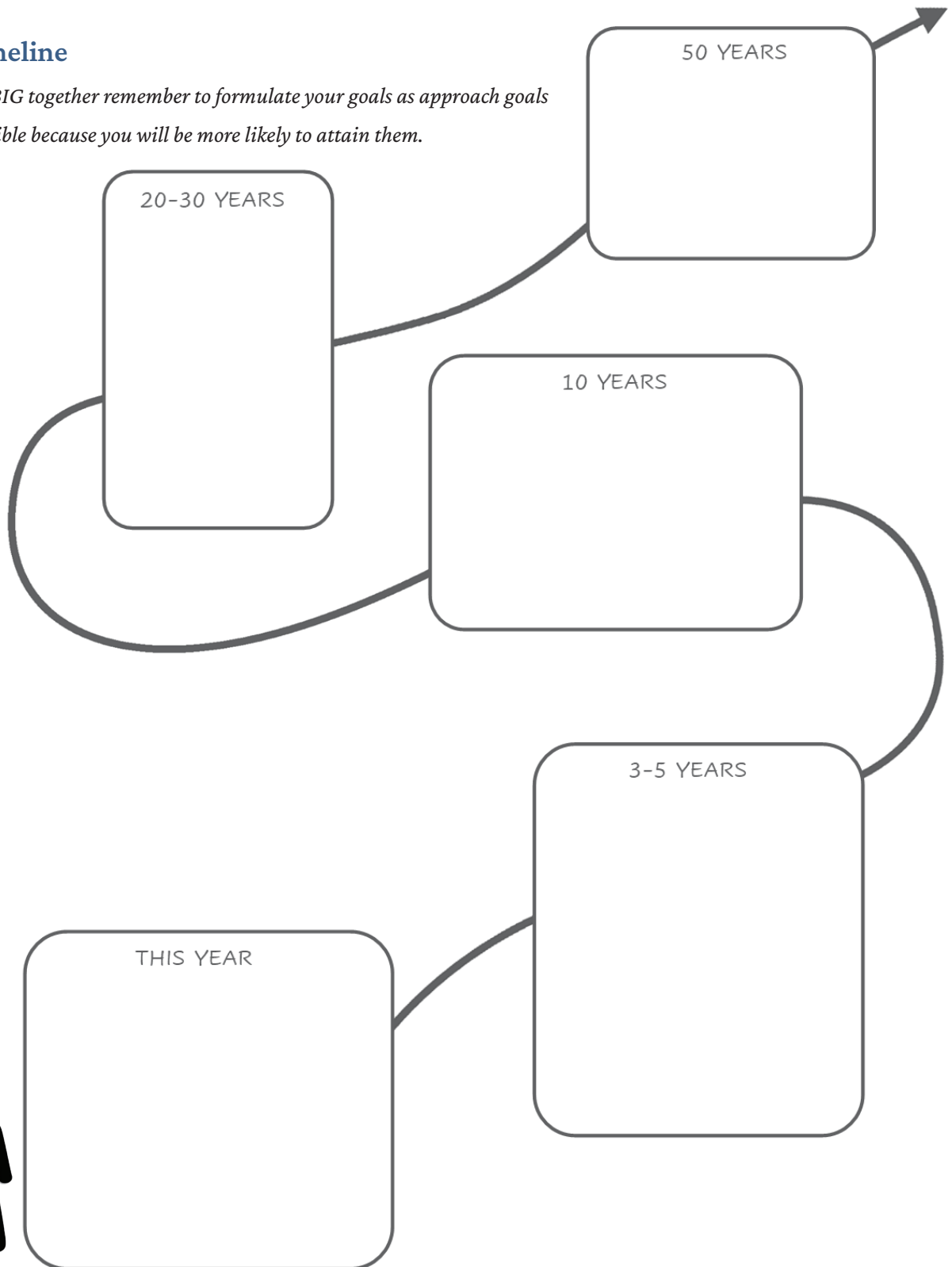




Imagine the Future

Dream Timeline

As you dream BIG together remember to formulate your goals as approach goals whenever possible because you will be more likely to attain them.



Good Stewards Use Money Well

Matthew 25: 14-30

“For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every



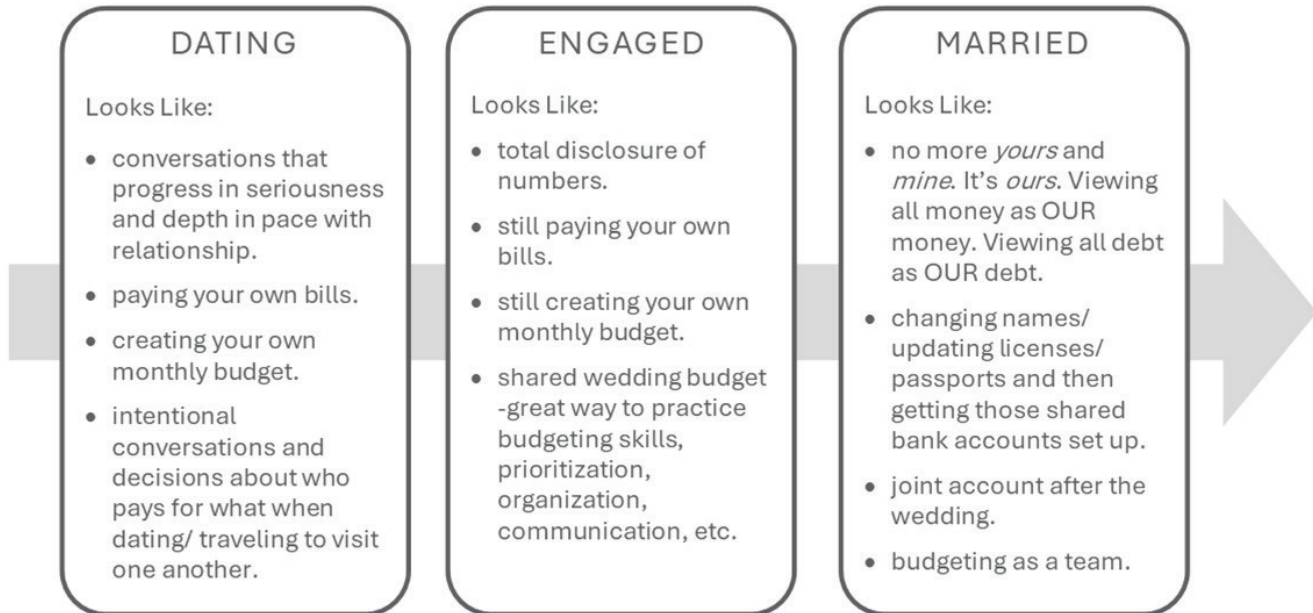
one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.”

From the Catechism

2404- In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.



Merging Your Money



Discussion Questions

- Are we having the right approach and conversations about money for our current relationship?
- Where are we behind?
- Where might we have jumped ahead?
- How might we change our behavior around money to get into a better spot?

Discussion Notes:



Chapter 14

Espoused for Life

**Focusing on God's Vision of Our Relationship:
The Sacraments, Marriage, and Forgiveness**



Hope and Joy in Daily Life

Natural marriage is an institution with the same qualities throughout history among almost all groups of people in the world. In this way it is the normal experience of human beings throughout time.

Christian Marriage, when lived with God's help offers us even more. God wants us to live a life full of hope and joy. Hope is one of the virtues God gives at baptism and it is the desire and expectation of eternal life. It involves trusting that God will provide and that the power of the Cross and resurrection of Christ is more powerful than suffering, trials, and even death. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:13).

Jesus Christ wants to give you the capacity to live a life full of joy. In his words to the apostles at the Last Supper, Jesus told them many things. He gave them final words of encouragement and a vision for their lives in preparation for the trial that his passion and death would demand of them. He was also casting a vision for lives full of joy, knowing that his resurrection would give them the power to live in the Spirit. he summarized much of his message with these words: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full," (John 15:11).

Joy is at the heart of Christian life, and it is the great gift of marriage that is for each of you, any children that God gifts you with, and for the rest of the people in your life who desperately want to discover the good things



that God has for them. Joy is this contagious gift, a fruit of life in the Spirit, and provides spouses with the consolation that is more lasting and powerful than the hardships and difficulties of life. This is why being espoused for life is not a burden for Christian spouses; it is the blessing and promise.

Cooperating with the Holy Spirit leads to the Fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. The Spirit guides us toward good and away from evil. He often comes to us as a quiet internal voice, like we learned about in the story of Elijah and the cave in chapter 9 of this course.

Inspirations from the Holy Spirit can happen many times in an ordinary day. The more we follow these inspirations the more fruitful our lives will be. The best way to know the voice of the Holy Spirit is through consistent prayer and receiving the Sacraments regularly with a good disposition. The more we talk to someone, the more easily we recognize their voice and it works the same way with God. Prayer and intimacy with God leads to joy and peace in our life. It also creates a foundation for hope in our daily life.

Philippians 2:1-2
 If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

We are Not Alone, The Visible Sign of an Invisible Reality



Last Supper, Giotto

Sacraments are signs of God's love.

In Matthew 26: 26-28 we read:

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

The sacraments communicate grace that is signified using matter and form. For example, the grace of baptism is signified by water (matter) and words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...” (form). The grace is salvation by the washing with water and the word, forgiveness of sin, and making us share in the divine nature becoming children of God.

The Sacrament of Marriage

In the Catholic Church the man and woman are the ministers of the sacrament. They “make” the sacrament as they cooperate with God. The form and matter of the sacrament or marriage are the words of

The Model for the Sacrament of Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

consent (freely saying “I do”) and the total and unreserved gift of self in the conjugal love act. This is summarized as vows and consummation.



Consent: Saying “I do”

Saying “Yes” to God’s Loving Plan for Us

From the Rite of Baptism for Children:

Celebrant:

What name do you give your child?

Parents:

N.

Celebrant:

What do you ask of God’s Church for N.?

Parents:

Baptism (they may also respond with, “Faith, “The grace of Christ,” or “Eternal Life.”)

Celebrant:

You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

...

Celebrant:

Is it your will that N. should be baptized in the faith of the Church, which we have all professed with you?

Parents and Godparents:

It is.

He baptizes the child (immersing or pouring three times) saying:

N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Words of Consent

Spouses are asked the following questions during the Rite of Marriage, 61-

Priest or deacon says:

Since it is your intention to enter into the covenant of holy matrimony, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church.

The bridegroom and then the bride say:

I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.

Receiving their consent, the priest or deacon says:

May the Lord in his kindness strengthen the consent you have declared before the Church, and graciously bring to fulfillment his blessing within you. What God joins together, let no one put asunder.

or

May the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, the God of Jacob, the God who joined together our first parents in paradise, strengthen and bless in Christ the consent you have declared before the Church, so that what God joins together, no one may put asunder.

The Grace of the Cross

Participation in the Sacraments and Reception of Grace

Jesus gave his life on the Cross so that we would be forgiven our sins and be reconciled to God. The sacraments are a participation in the grace of the Cross. For example, in the Eucharist (Holy Communion) Jesus gives us himself (Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity). We become spiritually one with Christ by receiving him truly and sacramentally (under the appearances of bread and wine) in Holy Communion. The more we cooperate with the grace received, the more it will change us and make us more like God.

In marriage we share a one-flesh union with our spouse through the marital act and through our entire life of service to each other and any child(ren) God blesses us with. Just as we prepare ourselves through prayer and an examination of conscience to be properly ready to receive and take full advantage of Holy Communion, we should also prepare ourselves to cooperate fully with the Sacrament of Marriage.

There is a principle revealed here: being open to grace is our main participation (listening, being attentive, open to the message/revelation, willingness to change, etc.) all of this is a response of love to the love God has poured out on us. To fully receive the gift God offers we simply are called to receive it with an open heart and spirit of receptivity, humility, and thankfulness.



Icon of Crucifixion, Lampardos

Some ways we can prepare to cooperate with grace:

- Study (what we are doing now)
- Prayer
- Confession (to free us from things that hinder our “yes” to God and one another)
- Living chastity through greater self-mastery
- Developing trust in one another

We are beggars before God.

-St. Augustine, quoted in Catechism, 2560



Some of the effects of Holy Communion:

- You experience communion with Christ and participate in Christ's saving Death and Resurrection.
- It increases your love for others, especially your spouse, helping you to serve one another.
- It reinforces your unity with the Church, Christ's Mystical Body.
- It removes venial sins and preserves you from future mortal sin.
- It diminishes sinful love of self and strengthens you against temptation.

"What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life." (Catechism, 1392)

Unity of Life: Prayer and the Ordinary

The effort to live always as a child of God, the focal point of unity of life, is shown in our work, which we need to direct to God; in our life at home, which we strive to fill with peace and a spirit of service; and in our friendships, by which we can help others to draw closer to God. At every moment of the day or night, we struggle to be, with the help of grace, men and women of integrity who don't bend with the wind and easily set aside their [Christian] principles, or who restrict their conversation with God to moments when in Church or on their knees.

-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, pg. 92



The Last Supper, Fra Angelico

The Effects of Grace in the Sacrament of Marriage

Special grace is given to spouses to help them serve, forgive, and grow in love.

Insight from the Catechism

1641 "... The grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."

1642 Christ is the source of this grace. "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony." Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," (Eph 5:21) and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit. -Tertullian

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Ephesians 4: 1-3, 22-27, 29-32

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil...

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



God Loves Us First... Even When We Mess Up

What does it mean to receive mercy?

Insight from the Catechism

1430 Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the **conversion of the heart**, interior conversion...

1431 Interior repentance is a **radical reorientation of our whole life**, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it **entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.**



The Return of the Prodigal Son, Rembrandt

While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him.

Luke 15: 11-13, 17-24

There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that falls to me." And he divided his living between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living...

But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to make merry.

A Guide to Confession

How to Make a Good Confession

Prepare yourself by making a careful examination of conscience. Ask God for help and try to remember all of your serious sins (and also venial sins) since your last confession. If it has been a while since your last confession or if you are worried you might forget something, don't worry, the priest will help you.

1. *After the priest has greeted you, make the Sign of the Cross. He may choose to recite a reading from Scripture, after which you say: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession. These are my sins."*

2. *Tell your sins simply and honestly. You might even want to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of your sins and ask for advice or direction.*

3. *Listen to the advice and accept the penance from the priest. If you have any questions you may ask them. Then make an Act of Contrition for your sins.*

4. *The priest will then dismiss you with these or similar words: "The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." And you respond by saying, "Thanks be to God."*

5. *Spend some time with Our Lord thanking and praising him for the gift of his mercy. Try to perform your penance as soon as possible.*

More advice (from www.thelightisonforyou.org)

Tell the priest the specific kinds of sins you have committed and, to the best of your ability, how many times you have committed them since your last good confession. Avoid generalizations and inform the priest of any relevant circumstances in which your sins were committed.



You are obliged to confess only mortal sins, since you can obtain forgiveness for your venial sins by sacrifices, acts of charity, prayer and other pious actions. Confession of venial sins, however, is very helpful for avoiding sin and advancing in holiness toward Heaven.

If you are in doubt about whether a sin is mortal or venial, mention your doubt to the priest. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." (CCC 1857)



Forgiveness

God offers spouses special help to forgive.

When those we are closest to fail us we feel the hurt much more sharply than when a stranger does. This fact of family life means that we must learn to see the family as a school of forgiveness if we hope to have a home where peace and happiness dwells.

In giving us His Son, Jesus, God provides a special gift, a grace, to spouses through the “more” of the sacrament of marriage. The Catechism describes it:

1642 *Christ is the source of this grace. “Just as of old God encountered his people covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now enters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony.” Christ dwells with gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to “be to one another out of reverence for Christ,” (Eph 5:21) and to love one another supernatural, tender, and fruitful love.*



*with a
coun-
them,
after
subject
with*

“I’m Sorry” Letter

Consider a time when you hurt your future spouse. Write a letter of apology. Consider how he/she may feel about this hurt and tell him/her what you plan to do to try not to hurt him/her in this way again. When you finish share it with him/her.

Dear,

I’m sorry for...

I know you felt...

I promise...

With Love,

“I Forgive You” Letter

Consider a time when you were hurt by something your future spouse said or did. Write a letter offering your forgiveness and express your love for him/her even though they hurt you. When you finish share it with him/her.

Dear,

I forgive you for...

I know you felt or thought...

I felt...

I still forgive you and love you.

Love,



Review & Revisit

One of the best ways to accomplish what you set out to do is to establish good goals, write them down and review your progress (or lack of it). Remember the best goals are approach oriented and intrinsically motivated. Approach goals are idealistic and directed toward a positive outcome. Intrinsic goals are ones you set for yourself and they arise from your own genuine desires, values, and interests.

You are provided guidance and space below to compile your own list of the most important goals, resolutions, and decisions you have created throughout this course.

Please review and perhaps even rewrite them so that it will be easy to remain focused on them in the coming months as you prepare for your wedding and live out your marriage. We suggest that you review them again periodically, perhaps monthly or at least every 6 months.

1. Your Marriage Mission (found on page 217)

2. Your Spiritual Goals (found on page 248)

3. Review your fidelity and permanence goals. Be sure to write (or rewrite) these goals as *approach* goals. (found on page 237)



4. Daily Prayer - List one or more resolutions you will each make in your prayer efforts. (found on page 241)

5. Intentional decisions about your home: revisit your answers to the questions about elements from your upbringing and capture your decisions about what elements you plan to keep and which ones you hope to eliminate. (found on page 246)

6. General and Financial Goals - Are there any other goals from your couple Life List (found on page 18), your Money Together backpack (page 261), your Dream Timeline (page 268), or that you would like to create now, that you would like to capture here so that you are sure to remember them and review them?

Chapter 14: Developing Spiritual Health in Marriage

Discussion Notes:



Appendix

Cut-Out Worksheets

Life List Cards (2 sets)

Life List Card Shuffle Exercise

(This activity is found on page 15 of this workbook.)

Sometimes the idea of sitting down and brainstorming an entire Life List is overwhelming, and prioritizing goals is difficult. A helpful exercise to narrow your focus and concentrate your efforts towards growth is to do a Life List index card shuffle.

Here's how it works:

1. Cut out the Life List cards on the following pages, one set for each of you. They are double-sided, with corresponding questions on the back of each Life List category card.
2. With your initial Life List brainstorming in mind, organize the Life List cards into three piles:
 - **Pile one:** Areas of life that you feel are going really well! You have some clear goals you are accomplishing and that are bringing you satisfaction.
 - **Pile two:** Areas of life you feel are going ok, but with a little effort and focus have the potential shift to pile one.
 - **Pile three:** Areas of life that are frustrating or that you are neglecting and could use some work or attention.
3. Next choose one area of life from each pile. It is helpful to capitalize on an area that is going well, invest in an area of life with potential to go from ok to great and then address one area that is a void or frustrating to you.
4. Set one short-term goal and one long-term, big-picture goal (that reflects the ideal you are going for in this area of life) for each of the cards you have chosen.
5. Share your cards and goals with each other, discuss how you will support each other's goals, and set some mutual goals in this area.

GENERAL SELF-IMPROVEMENT/HEALTH

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

PROFESSION

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

FAMILY

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

FINANCES

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

LOVE

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

LEARNING/EDUCATION

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

FRIENDS

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

VOLUNTEER WORK/CHARITY

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

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What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

HOBBIES/RECREATION

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

SPIRITUALITY/MEANING

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

OTHER

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

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GENERAL SELF-IMPROVEMENT/HEALTH

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

PROFESSION

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

FAMILY

What is the long-term ideal I am going for?

What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?

What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?

What is my reward for achieving my goal?

FINANCES

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What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?

What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

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LOVE

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LEARNING/EDUCATION

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FRIENDS

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VOLUNTEER WORK/CHARITY

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HOBBIES/RECREATION

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SPIRITUALITY/MEANING

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

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OTHER

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Prayer for the Family

-Pope Saint John Paul II

Lord God, from You every family in Heaven and on earth takes its name. Father, You are love and life.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, the fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that Your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

We ask this of You, Who is life, truth and love with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

