

Based on the Book *Building Bounce: How to Grow Emotional Resilience* by Warner & Hinman

# *Building Resiliency*

*in Yourself & Your NeuroDiverse Marriage*



## **WORKBOOK**

*for Individual or Group Coaching*

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*Master Life Coaches*



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# Introduction: Welcome to Building Resiliency!

Before we get started in the workbook, whether in one-on-one coaching or doing this as a group, it is important to note that you will only get out of the book/workbook and class what you are willing to put into it.

## Class Expectations/ 1 on 1 Expectations:

If your coach uses this material for you one-on-one or in the group, you are expected to be prepared for focused discussion before your session. First, read the chapter assigned. Second, do the assigned pages in the workbook, and third, watch the video that goes with the session. There may be extra recommended podcasts, but those are not required.

This class is about you. We hope and believe that each spouse/partner is working on themselves and building resiliency, which can positively impact your marriage. The focus of this time and reading/workbook is your own emotional and spiritual resiliency.

The book *Bounce* lists Joy Workouts, which you can do no matter what your spouse is willing or not willing to do for themselves or “the marriage.” We know that NeuroDiverse marriages are unique and in different stages of crisis, repair, rebuilding, or maintenance.

*Before Session 1: Overview of Bounce*

## Building Emotional Resilience: Insights from *Bounce* by Marcus Warner

Rev. Dan Holmes, MS

Emotional resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, to face challenges with strength and clarity, and to thrive in the face of hardship. In their book *Bounce: Building Emotional Resilience*, Marcus Warner & Stefanie Hinman dive into what it means to be emotionally resilient, exploring both the psychological and spiritual aspects of this crucial skill. Warner offers readers practical tools for developing resilience, as well as a framework for understanding how emotional resilience works in our everyday lives.

In this introduction, we will explore the key themes from *Bounce*, focusing on how emotional resilience is developed, the role of emotional maturity, the importance of community and relationships, and how we can grow through adversity. Warner & Hinman’s insights provide a roadmap for anyone seeking to build emotional resilience and live a more fulfilling, resilient life.

## Understanding Emotional Resilience: What Is It?

Before we can learn how to build emotional resilience, it's important to understand what it is. According to Warner & Hinman, emotional resilience is not about avoiding pain or hardship. It's about developing the strength to navigate difficult circumstances and emerge from them stronger, wiser, and more compassionate. It is also not to deny your pain or trials and live in fake or toxic positivity.

Warner & Hinman emphasize that resilience is not a fixed trait but rather a set of skills and attitudes that can be developed over time. These include emotional regulation, a positive mindset, strong relationships, and a reliance on one's faith. Resilience doesn't mean that we don't feel pain; rather, it means that we know how to deal with it in a healthy, constructive way.

## **The Bounce Model**

Warner & Hinman introduces the "Bounce" model as a way to think about emotional resilience. Like a rubber ball that bounces back after being thrown to the ground, resilient people are able to recover after being knocked down by life's difficulties. The key to resilience, according to Warner & Hinman, lies in building emotional maturity, relying on a strong support network, and finding ways to turn hardship into growth.

## **Emotional Maturity: The Foundation of Resilience**

One of the central themes of *Bounce* is the importance of emotional maturity in building resilience. Warner argues that emotional maturity is the foundation upon which resilience is built, and without it, we are more likely to be overwhelmed by life's challenges.

## **What is Emotional Maturity?**

Emotional maturity, as Warner & Hinman explain, is the ability to manage and understand one's own emotions, as well as the ability to navigate relationships in a healthy way. Emotionally mature individuals can recognize their feelings without being controlled by them. They can respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, even in stressful or painful situations.

Warner/Hinman outline several key characteristics of emotional maturity:

- **Self-Awareness:** Understanding your emotions, triggers, and patterns of behavior.
- **Self-Regulation:** The ability to manage your emotions and reactions in a healthy and constructive way.
- **Empathy:** The capacity to understand and share the feelings of others.

- Responsibility: Taking ownership of your actions, decisions, and the way you impact others.

Warner & Hinman argue that emotional maturity is developed through intentional practice and reflection. It requires us to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge areas where we need growth, and to commit to developing the skills necessary for resilience.

## **The Role of Faith in Emotional Maturity**

For Warner & Hinman, emotional maturity is also deeply connected to spiritual maturity. He explains that faith can provide a foundation for emotional growth by giving us a sense of purpose, meaning, and hope. In difficult times, faith can serve as an anchor that helps us stay grounded, even when we feel overwhelmed by life's challenges.

Warner & Hinman encourage readers to cultivate a relationship with God as part of their emotional growth. He explains that prayer, meditation, and engaging with Scripture can all help build emotional resilience by fostering a deeper sense of peace, trust, and emotional stability.

## **Building Strong Relationships: The Importance of Community**

In *Bounce*, Warner & Hinman emphasize that emotional resilience is not something we build in isolation. Instead, it is developed and strengthened through our relationships with others. They explain that humans are inherently relational beings, and our ability to connect with others plays a significant role in our emotional well-being.

## **The Power of Supportive Relationships**

The authors of *Bounce* explain that having a strong support system is essential to emotional resilience. These relationships provide us with emotional support, encouragement, and perspective during difficult times. Whether it's a close friend, family member, or a faith community, having people who care about us and can offer guidance helps us navigate the challenges of life with greater resilience.

Supportive relationships also help us process our emotions. Warner & Hinman highlight the importance of being able to share our feelings with others, especially in times of difficulty. Bottling up emotions can lead to isolation, which weakens our resilience. Conversely, when we feel supported and understood, we are better able to handle stress and recover from setbacks.

## **Building Emotional Capacity Together**

Warner & Hinman introduce the concept of “building emotional capacity” within relationships. Emotional capacity is our ability to handle stress, disappointment, or hardship without feeling overwhelmed. By investing in our relationships and surrounding ourselves with emotionally mature individuals, we can collectively build greater emotional capacity.

Warner suggests that couples, families, and communities should focus on creating environments where emotional resilience is nurtured. This includes open communication, the practice of forgiveness, and a commitment to mutual support. When individuals work together to build emotional capacity, they strengthen not only themselves but also their relationships and communities.

## **The Role of Self-Care in Emotional Resilience**

Another key theme in *Bounce* is the importance of self-care in building resilience. Warner & Hinman explain that self-care is not a selfish act but a necessary component of emotional resilience. Taking care of ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually helps us maintain the strength we need to face life’s challenges.

### **Physical Self-Care**

Our emotional resilience is deeply connected to our physical health. Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and sufficient sleep all contribute to our ability to handle stress and recover from adversity. When we neglect our physical health, we are more likely to feel overwhelmed by emotional challenges.

Warner & Hinman encourage readers to prioritize physical self-care as part of their resilience-building routine. He explains that even small changes, such as taking a daily walk or incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your diet, can have a significant impact on your emotional well-being.

### **Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care**

In addition to physical self-care, the authors highlight the importance of emotional and spiritual self-care. This involves setting aside time for reflection, prayer, or engaging in activities that bring joy and peace. Warner suggests that readers make time each day to

nurture their emotional and spiritual health, whether through journaling, meditation, or spending time in nature.

Warner & Hinman also emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries as part of self-care. Emotionally resilient people know when to say no and when to take a step back from situations that drain their emotional energy. Learning to set healthy boundaries protects our emotional reserves and prevents burnout.

## **Learning from Adversity: Turning Hardship into Growth**

One of the central messages of *Bounce* is that adversity, while painful, can be a powerful teacher. Warner & Hinman explain that resilient individuals are not defined by their hardships but by how they respond to them. They encourage readers to view difficulties as opportunities for growth and transformation.

## **Adversity as a Catalyst for Change**

Adversity often forces us to confront aspects of ourselves that we might otherwise avoid. Whether it's fear, insecurity, or unresolved emotional pain, hardship brings these issues to the surface. While this process can be uncomfortable, it also presents an opportunity for growth and healing.

Warner & Hinman encourage readers to embrace adversity with a mindset of curiosity rather than resistance. Instead of asking, "Why is this happening to me?" a resilient person might ask, "What can I learn from this?" By shifting our perspective, we can begin to see challenges as opportunities to strengthen our character and deepen our emotional resilience.

## **Developing a Growth Mindset**

Another key concept that Warner & Hinman introduce is the idea of a "growth mindset." A growth mindset is the belief that our abilities and qualities can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. People with a growth mindset see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as threats to their self-worth or value.

Warner & Hinman explains that developing a growth mindset is essential for building emotional resilience. When we believe that we can grow and improve, we are more likely to persevere through difficult times. On the other hand, if we believe that our abilities are fixed or that failure is a reflection of our worth, we are more likely to give up when faced with adversity.

Readers are encouraged to adopt a growth mindset by viewing failure as a learning opportunity and by being open to feedback and self-improvement.

## **Faith and Resilience: Trusting God in the Midst of Hardship**

For Marcus Warner, faith is a cornerstone of emotional resilience. He explains that trusting in God’s goodness, even in the midst of suffering, provides a foundation for emotional stability. Faith offers hope, perspective, and the assurance that we are not alone in our struggles.

## **The Role of Prayer and Reflection**

Warner & Hinman encourages readers to turn to prayer as a source of comfort and strength in difficult times. Prayer allows us to connect with God, express our emotions, and find peace in His presence. Warner also suggests that reflection—whether through journaling or meditating on Scripture—can help us gain insight into our challenges and find meaning in our experiences.

## **Surrendering Control**

One of the spiritual lessons that the authors emphasize is the importance of surrendering control. In times of adversity, it’s natural to want to control the outcome or fix the situation ourselves. However, Warner explains that resilience often comes from surrendering to God’s plan and trusting that He is at work, even when we don’t understand the full picture. By surrendering control and placing our trust in God, we can find peace in the midst of uncertainty. Warner encourages readers to lean into their faith as a source of strength, knowing that God is with them every day, Immanuel: God is with us!



### **Reflection Moment:**

What is one point from this introduction that seems important or relevant for you as you are in this class and reading this material?

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Each lesson will suggest Scripture(s) to meditate on and give you the opportunity to use the SOAP method, as well as additional information to reflect on for possible discussion.

## **For Those of You in a Group: Things to Remember**

1. Attendance is important. Perhaps you may not think that your presence is valuable to the group; however, as the group(s) form (s) your presence is important not only for yourself but for the group. Your insights or new actions may be the thing that encourages, inspires or helps another member.
2. Confidentiality & Privacy: While this is not a therapy group, it happens from time to time some may know each other or have a shared circle, please respect the privacy and confidentiality of the group.
3. Group fees are non-refundable. Taking a spot means someone else did not get a spot in the group.
4. Preparation: Life gets busy but building resiliency is an active and intentional activity. Please do the assignments and be prepared to share with the camera on if possible.
5. In Consideration of the Group: Sometimes it happens you may not be able to be in a private place in your home, however walking or driving, or being in a noisy space is a distraction for the group. If you are driving, please focus on your driving and be prepared to listen only with the camera off (although we do not recommend being the driver and attending class). If you are walking on a treadmill or outdoors, please do not have a camera on. Also, some group members struggle with vertigo, and having a ceiling fan on can trigger vertigo, please turn your ceiling fan off. We recommend a quiet, private space with a good Wi-Fi or hotspot connection for a better experience for you and the group.
6. Refrain from giving advice: It is okay to talk about things that have worked or not worked for you or things you have tried, but please refrain from giving advice to other members.
7. No judgment zone: There are group members in various places in marriage from in-home separation, out of home separation and those considering the next steps perhaps even divorce. Every situation is different and we welcome those in various stages or phases of their relationship accepting them where they are in their relationship at the moment.

# Transformation Can Happen in Groups! Building Group Identity and Healthy Course Correction

Rev. Dr. Stephanie Holmes

As you may have heard on our podcasts, we follow Dr. Wilder and have talked about Christian transformation happening with joy, hesed (attachment), group identity and healthy correction. This is why we provide options and opportunities through us and other coaches.

## Why Groups?

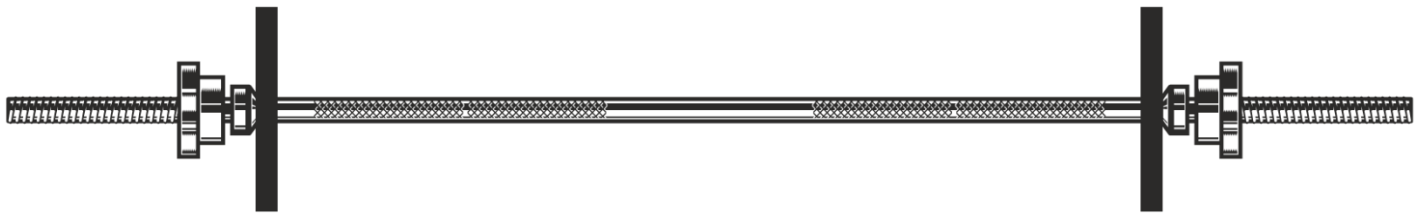
In today's fast-paced and competitive world, personal and professional development has become crucial for individuals seeking growth and success. While individual coaching is a popular approach, group coaching offers a unique and effective alternative. Group coaching brings together a small group of individuals with similar goals, led by a skilled coach in that area.

### *Group Coaching and Group Identity:*

- 1. Building Group Identity with Hesed (Attachment and Peer Support):** One of the significant advantages of group coaching is the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar aspirations and challenges in a unique situation. Being part of a supportive community offers a sense of belonging, encouragement, and shared accountability. The diverse perspectives and experiences within the group can provide fresh insights, novel approaches, and innovative solutions to the problems faced by individuals. Groups combine aspects of neurodiversity and faith, which is hard to come by combination for many!
- 2. Enhanced Self-Awareness:** Group coaching provides a reflective and introspective space for self-exploration. Through active participation in group discussions and activities, individuals gain insights into their own strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. Hearing others share their experiences and challenges can serve as a mirror, enabling individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves. The collective wisdom and feedback from the group facilitate personal growth and self-awareness, leading to improved decision-making, self-confidence, and self-acceptance.
- 3. Multiple Perspectives and Learning Opportunities:** The diverse composition of a coaching group offers a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences. Each individual brings unique insights and knowledge, which creates a valuable learning environment. The group dynamics encourage active listening, empathy, and open-

mindedness, fostering an environment conducive to personal and professional growth. Members can learn from each other's successes, failures, and lessons learned. This multifaceted learning experience broadens horizons, expands perspectives, and enhances problem-solving skills.

4. **Cost-Effective and Time-Efficient:** Group coaching often proves to be a more cost-effective option compared to individual coaching sessions. By sharing the coach's time and expertise with others, the cost per participant is significantly reduced. Additionally, group coaching allows individuals to benefit from collective wisdom and support without compromising the quality of the coaching experience. This affordability makes group coaching accessible to a wider range of individuals, ensuring that personal and professional development is not restricted to those with substantial financial resources. Furthermore, group coaching sessions are scheduled at regular intervals, which can be more manageable and time-efficient than arranging individual coaching sessions.



# Lesson/Session 1: From *Bounce: The Secret to Emotional Resilience*

Read: Chapter 1 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.



After Reading Chapter 1, what is a takeaway point for you?

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Did you Try the Joy Work-Out on page 27? Yes or No

Why or Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_

If you tried the Work-Out what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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## Reflection Question:

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter?

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## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a

prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### *Possible Scriptures: Managing your Emotions*

#### **1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV**

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

#### **Proverbs 16:32 ESV**

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

#### **Galatians 5:22-23 ESV**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

#### **Ephesians 4:26-27 ESV**

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

#### **Proverbs 25:28 ESV**

A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

#### **James 1:19-20 ESV**

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.



**Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?**

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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A (Application, how does this apply to you?)

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Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)

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### **Personal Reflection:**

Identify a Recent Challenge. How did you respond? What emotions did you experience? Were you able to “bounce back”? What do you identify as a growth point in building resiliency? How do you handle the big 6 emotions?

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### **Possible Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Does anyone want to share an action point they came up with after doing the SOAP method?
2. What do you think “bouncing back” means?
3. What has your faith tradition taught you about emotions and adversity?
4. Would a few of you share a brief story (under 3 min.) about overcoming a challenge, learning from adversity or having a “bounce back” experience?
5. What have you learned in the past about joy/happiness?
6. What stood out to you in the chapter?
7. What role does mindset and emotions play in bouncing back?
8. What is a tool you will plan to use or tried this past week?
9. How do you view setbacks and failed plans?



## After the Group Reflection

After group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone's perspective for consideration:

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Joy Work-Out (page 27) is for anyone.



## (Growth tip) Suggestions for Couples

This is for couples who are ready to engage together, and one should not pressure the other to participate. Couples' Skills are only beneficial if both want to engage, and it is a safe environment to do so. It is important when trying something new not to be critical and impatient trying something new.

### 1. Building Joy Together

**Goal:** Strengthen joy bonds and create positive shared experiences.

- **Gratitude Swap:** Each partner shares one to three things they appreciate about the other from the past week.
- **Shared Hobby:** Choose a simple, enjoyable activity like cooking a meal, painting, or gardening. Focus on enjoying the process rather than achieving a perfect result.
- **Photo Share:** Share a photo from your phone that brought you joy (it may not include the spouse that is okay) but share why this moment brought you joy and share joy together or learn about what brings joy.

### 2. Connection Through Play

**Goal:** Foster connection and lighten the mood through fun activities.

- **Board or Card Games:** Choose games that cater to both partners' preferences, ensuring they're low-stress and collaborative rather than competitive.

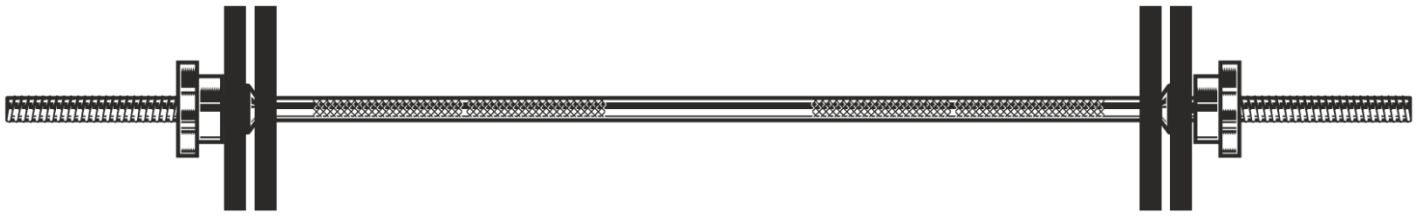


- **Outdoor Walk-and-Talk:** Go for a walk in nature, holding hands or simply enjoying the surroundings. Use the time to talk about positive memories or future plans not conflict
- **Music:** If you both enjoy music, play instruments, sing, or even create a playlist of your favorite songs together. Enjoy a song or two together. Take turns each play for your favorite song for the other on your device and share why this is favorite song. No judgment about the song choice only curious questions about why the song evokes positive feelings.

### 3. Developing a Resilience Plan

**Goal:** Plan how to support each other during challenges.

- **What Helps You?** Take turns sharing what helps you bounce back when you're stressed (e.g., quiet time, encouragement, practical help). Create a list of these for future reference.
- **Comfort Toolkit:** Assemble a shared "comfort kit" with items that help calm and comfort each of you. Make a list when you are overwhelmed what helps? When sensory overloaded what helps? When anxious or angry, what helps?



## Lesson/Session 2: From Bounce: How Much Weight Can You Handle?

Read: Chapter 2 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 2, what is a takeaway point for you?

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Did you Try the Quieting Exercise(s) on page 41? Yes or No

Why or Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_

If you tried the exercise what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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### Reflection Question:

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter?

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### SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a

prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

## Scripture on Strength or Maturity

1 Corinthians 14:20 ESV

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

Ephesians 4:13-15 ESV

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...

Romans 5:3-4 ESV

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...

2 Timothy 2:22-25 a ESV

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Psalms 28:7-8a ESV

The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people....:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Philippians 4:12-13 ESV

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?



**Applying the SOAP Method**

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A (Application, How does this apply to you?)**

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**Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)**

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**Reflection Questions: How do you quiet yourself when you are upset? Do you need help from the Holy Spirit to build your capacity?**

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## **Additional Insights: Maturity and Character**

# **Renovating Your Heart and Mind: Character Maturity and Identity Formation Based on *Renovated* by Dr. Wilder**

**Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes**

Renovating a home involves tearing down walls, exposing hidden foundations, and rebuilding to create something stronger and more beautiful. In *Renovated*, Dr. Jim Wilder likens personal growth and spiritual transformation to this process of renovation. Wilder explores how true maturity and identity formation stem from character growth, particularly through relationships rooted in love, truth, and grace.

Key themes of *Renovated*, discusses how character maturity and identity formation are central to our spiritual journeys. Through our autism research and discussed further in *Uniquely US*, research shows that the autistic brain shows an underdevelopment of the orbital prefrontal cortex (OFC); and research shows that trauma can stunt or arrest development of the OFC. Why is this important? Because identity, character and maturity are located in the OFC!

These two aspects are interconnected, shaping not only how we see ourselves but also how we interact with others and, most importantly, how we relate to God. Dr. Wilder's insights help us understand that renovation is an ongoing process, and by embracing it, we can live lives of integrity and wholeness.

## **Understanding Character Maturity: A Journey, Not a Destination**

Dr. Wilder defines character maturity not as a state of perfection, but as a continuous journey of growth. Maturity is often confused with mere age or experience, but Wilder argues that true maturity comes from a deeper place—our ability to love others, maintain healthy relationships, and live in alignment with our God-given identity.

Dr. Wilder's work shows us that we become who and how we love others!

## **Stages of Character Maturity**

Wilder outlines several stages of character maturity, which correspond to different phases of life and development. Each stage involves specific relational tasks and challenges that help form our character. These stages are:

**1. Infant Stage:** In this earliest stage, the focus is on receiving care and learning trust. A person at the infant stage of character maturity seeks comfort and protection, developing a sense of security based on being loved and cared for.

**2. Child Stage:** As a person grows, the next stage is learning to express needs, explore independence, and interact with the world in new ways. A person in this stage focuses on their own needs and desires, seeking to have them met in appropriate ways. The development of trust and the ability to ask for help is crucial here.

**3. Adult Stage:** In adulthood, the focus shifts toward responsibility. A mature adult is able to care for others, not just themselves, and begins to make sacrifices for the benefit of others. Character formation at this stage involves learning to give without expecting anything in return. Loving someone well may involve sacrifice at times!

**4. Parent Stage:** At the parent stage, character maturity involves nurturing others' growth. Just as parents care for their children, mature individuals at this stage invest in the development of others, offering guidance and support.

**5. Elder Stage:** The highest level of character maturity is found in elders, who have learned to lead and guide others with wisdom and grace. Elders are those who can hold space for others to grow, offering counsel and wisdom based on their own life experiences.

Wilder emphasizes that true maturity involves moving through these stages and continuing to grow in each one. While life circumstances and relationships may challenge us, character maturity is about learning how to navigate these challenges with grace, compassion, and a sense of responsibility.

## **Identity Formation: Discovering Who We Are in Christ**

Identity formation is another central theme in *Renovated*. Wilder argues that our identity is not something we create for ourselves but something we discover through our relationships, especially our relationship with God. He points out that identity is not static; it evolves as we grow in maturity and understanding of who we are in Christ.

## **Identity and Relationships**

Dr. Wilder stresses the importance of relationships in shaping our identity. From infancy, we are influenced by our families, communities, and social environments. These relationships teach us who we are and how we should interact with the world. Positive, loving relationships help form a secure sense of identity, while dysfunctional or unhealthy relationships can distort our understanding of ourselves.

In the Christian context, our identity is rooted in being children of God. Wilder explains that true identity is discovered when we learn to see ourselves as God sees us—beloved, valuable, and created with a unique purpose. This understanding of identity is not something we earn or achieve but something we receive by grace. As we grow in character maturity, we also deepen our understanding of our identity in Christ. This process involves shedding false identities that are based on fear, shame, or societal expectations and embracing the truth of who God says we are.

## **The Role of Joy in Maturity and Identity Formation**

One of the most fascinating aspects of Dr. Wilder’s work is his focus on joy as a key element in both character maturity and identity formation. Wilder defines joy not merely as happiness or pleasure but as the deep, relational experience of being glad to be together with others. Joy is the fuel that propels us forward in our growth journey.

Wilder points out that joy is essential for building strong, healthy relationships. Joy enables us to endure hardships, forgive others, and remain connected even when relationships are challenging. A person who is rooted in joy is more resilient in the face of adversity because they are sustained by the knowledge that they are loved and valued by others.

In the process of character formation, joy helps us stay grounded in our identity. When we experience joy in our relationships—with God and others—we are more likely to grow in maturity. We learn that even when we face trials or make mistakes, we are still loved and accepted.

A key takeaway from *Renovated* is the idea that joy is contagious. When we cultivate joy in our own lives, we contribute to the joy of those around us. Wilder encourages readers to build joyful communities where people can experience the joy of being loved and accepted for who they are. These communities provide the fertile ground for both character growth and identity formation. We do not wait for things to be better to have joy, like Paul and Silas we have joy even in the trials and difficult situations.

For Christian communities, this means creating environments where people feel safe to grow, ask questions, and make mistakes. It means fostering relationships based on grace and truth, where each person is seen as valuable and worthy of love. In such communities, joy flourishes, and maturity and identity are nurtured.





## Reflection Question:

What is the difference between maturity and character? Why can we only mature in relationships and not on our own?

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## Possible Group Discussion Questions:

- Does anyone want to share an action point they came up with after doing the SOAP method?
- How much weight do you think you carry? How much weight do you think have capacity for? Is your reaction proportional to the situation? Do you react or respond?
- Would a few of you share a brief story (under 3 min.) having a big emotion or overwhelming and your ability to quiet and regulate?
- Do you struggle with quieting your mind?
- What stood out to you in the chapter?
- What role does mindset and emotions play in bouncing back?
- What is a tool you will plan to use or tried this past week?
- Briefly share or journal privately a situation when emotions escalated between you and your spouse? What could you do differently to regulate yourself? How quickly do you notice when you are dysregulated?
- If you're neurodivergent consider discussing sensory triggers or communication preferences with your partner. These insights can transform how you handle emotional challenges.
- If you struggle with anxiety what are your triggers?
- Maturity: Where are you?



## After the Group Reflection

After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone's perspective for consideration: Where do you think you are in the Stages of

Maturity:

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Quieting Work Out (page 41) is for Everyone.



## Growth Tip: Couples

**Goal:** Learn to manage stress and return to a calm state together.

### 1. Quieting Together

- **Deep Breathing Exercise:** Sit back-to-back and practice taking slow, deep breaths together. Match each other's rhythm to build connection and calmness. No talking is required.
- **Grounding Exercise:** Take turns guiding each other through a grounding exercise, like naming five things you see, four things you can touch, etc., to focus on the present moment. Talk about what helps you get grounded when dysregulated or anxious or overwhelmed.

### 2. Examining the Weight

**Goal:** Sharing the Weight or Redistributing the Weight

**Reflect together:** What are our shared weights, and how can we support each other to expand our capacity? Do we need to shift some roles and responsibilities to lower the weight for another?

3. **Create a Quieting Playlist Together:** Put together a song list that you both contribute to for songs that are quieting and restful and reflecting.



# Lesson/Session 3: From Bounce: Basic Brain Model

Read: Chapter 3 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 3, what is a takeaway point for you?

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Did you Try the Joy Work-Out on pages 65-66? Yes or No

Why or Why Not?

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If you tried the exercise what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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### Reflection Question

What is something you learned for the first time or was an a-ha moment on understanding the basic brain model?

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## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this for each lesson.

### Power of our Thoughts

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is.

2. Timothy 1:7

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ESV

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...

Philippians 4:8-9 ESV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Proverbs 23:7a KJV

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?



## Applying the SOAP Method

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A** (Application, How does this apply to you?)

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Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)

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**Additional Insights:**

# Unlocking Emotional Health: A Journey Through Relational Circuits and Brain Chemistry

By Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes

In the realm of mental health and relational well-being, the pioneering work of Dr. Jim Wilder, Chris Coursey, Dr. Marcus Warner and others have opened up a new understanding of how our brains and relationships intertwine to shape our emotional lives. As someone deeply fascinated by the intricate dance of neuroscience and human connection, I've embarked on a journey to explore how relational circuits and the quartet of brain chemicals—dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin—play pivotal roles in our emotional well-being. If you have listened to our podcast, you hear about joy, hesed, group identity and healthy correction. Today's blog looks at more of the biochemistry that is involved in this intertwining of relational and emotional health. The following is based on the work of the authors mentioned above.

## The Symphony of Brain Chemistry

At the heart of our emotional experiences are four key players: dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin. Each of these neurotransmitters orchestrates a unique aspect of our emotional and physical health, influencing everything from our mood and motivation to pain relief and social bonding.

**Dopamine** rewards us with feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, acting as a motivator for pursuing goals and desires. It's the spark that ignites when we anticipate and achieve something rewarding. Coursey reminds us that dopamine alone is non-relational. Many addictions stem from seeking reward and pleasure alone outside of relationships. Maturity is about seeking balance and Wilder reminds us joy cannot be built alone or in solitary activities.

**Endorphins** are our natural painkillers, providing relief and pleasure, often described as the runner's high. They play a critical role in stress and pain management. They create a “natural high.” Again endorphin release when alone is not relational building.

**Serotonin** regulates mood, happiness, and anxiety. It's a key player in maintaining mood balance and fostering a sense of well-being and contentment. Serotonin paired with oxytocin, according to Coursey, can build quieting our brains together and bring a sense of calm.

**Oxytocin**, known as the love hormone, is essential for social bonding, trust, and relationship building. It deepens connections with others and is crucial for creating strong social bonds.

## Relational Circuits: The Connection Highway

Jim Wilder and Chris Coursey, along with insights from Marcus Warner, have brought to light the concept of relational circuits (RCs) — the neural pathways that enable us to remain relationally connected and engaged with others, even in times of stress or disagreement. These circuits are like the highways of our brain that regulate how we process and respond to relational information and experiences.

When our RCs are “on,” we're more capable of remaining open, empathetic, and connected to others. We navigate conflicts more smoothly and maintain a sense of closeness even when faced with challenges. Conversely, when these circuits are “off,” our capacity for emotional connection and understanding diminishes. We become more reactive, less empathetic, and struggle to maintain healthy relationships.

## The Interplay: Brain Chemistry and Relational Circuits

The fascinating interplay between our brain chemistry and relational circuits underscores a crucial aspect of emotional health: the balance between internal neurochemistry and external relational dynamics. Wilder, Coursey, and Warner emphasize that while our brain chemicals play a significant role in shaping our emotional experiences, the quality and

health of our relationships significantly impact the functioning of our relational circuits and, by extension, our overall well-being.

For instance, positive social interactions can boost levels of oxytocin, enhancing our sense of connection and trust in relationships. Similarly, engaging in activities that bring us joy or accomplishment can increase dopamine levels, contributing to a positive mood and motivation. On the other hand, isolation or relational conflict can disrupt these chemical balances, leading to feelings of loneliness, depression, or anxiety.

## **Beyond Brain Chemistry: The Role of Relationships**

What becomes evident through the work of Wilder, Coursey, and Warner is that our emotional well-being cannot be solely attributed to the internal workings of our brain chemistry. The external dynamics of our relationships play an equally vital role. Healthy, supportive relationships can enhance our emotional resilience, acting as a buffer against stress and contributing to a more balanced and fulfilling life.

## **Embracing the Journey**

As I delve deeper into the complexities of how our brains and relationships interlace, I'm reminded of the beauty and resilience of the human spirit. The work of Wilder, Coursey, and Warner not only enlightens us about the scientific underpinnings of our emotional lives but also offers a hopeful message: by nurturing our relationships and understanding the science behind our emotions, we can cultivate a life of greater connection, happiness, and emotional health.

In embracing this journey, we unlock the potential to transform not only our own lives but also the lives of those around us, fostering a world where emotional well-being and relational health are at the forefront of our group identity.

This exploration into the work of Jim Wilder, Chris Coursey, and Marcus Warner serves as a testament to the power of integrating scientific knowledge with the art of relationship-building. By understanding the role of brain chemicals and relational circuits in our emotional lives, we're equipped with valuable insights to enhance our well-being and nurture deeper connections with others. To end with a quote from *4 Habits of a Joy-Filled Person*, “The right prefrontal cortex we call the ‘joy center’; it grows with the experience of relational joy. A poorly developed joy center [which Dr. Stephanie points out in her research, the OFC or joy center is smaller in the autistic brain] can make it very difficult to live with joy, remain relational under stress and act like ourselves when we get upset (pg. 39).” This is why we love their work, there is hope to grow joy and better brain chemistry throughout our lifetime, if we choose to do so!





## Reflection Question:

What is something you gleaned from Dr. Stephanie's additional insight into brain science? How does knowing this about your brain empower you?

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## Possible Group Discussion Questions:

Take a moment to think about which quadrant you rely on most when you're calm. Now consider which one you default to under stress. Write it down.

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Do you think your marriage relationship has more fear or joy bonds?

Think about a relationship in your life. Identify one joy bond and one fear bond. How can you strengthen the joy bond and begin healing the fear bond?

What does attunement feel like? Who in your life do you have attunement? How well do you attune to others, especially when they're struggling? What's one step you can take to improve?

Your challenge this week: Focus on one quadrant, one bond, or one pain pathway. Reflect, discuss, and take one step toward growth.



## After the Group Reflection

After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone's perspective for consideration: Where do you think you are in the Stages of Maturity:

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Joy Work-Out (Page 65-66) for Everyone.



## Growth Tip: Couples

**Goal:** Learning without Judging: Curious Questions:

1. Reflect together: How do our quadrant tendencies impact our relationship? What can we do to support each other?
2. Are there any current fear bonds?
3. What are we doing now that builds joy bonds? What triggers fear bonds?
4. What is one small thing we can do to reduce fear bonds?



## Lesson/Session 4: From Bounce: Quieting

Read: Chapter 4 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 4, what is a takeaway point for you?

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Did you Try the Quieting Exercise(s) on page 73-80? Yes or No

Did you Try the Joy Work-Out pages 80-81?

Why or Why Not?

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If you tried the exercise(s) what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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### Reflection Question

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter?

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## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### Scripture on Quieting or Being Still

Psalm 37:7 ESV

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!"

1 Kings 19:11-12 ESV

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore 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 the sound of a low whisper."

Psalm 62:5 ESV

"For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him."

Psalm 23:2 ESV

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."

Matthew 11:28-29 ESV

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?

## Applying the SOAP Method

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A** (Application, How does this apply to you?)

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**Prayer** (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)

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## Reflection Question

How do you quiet yourself when you are upset? How often do you sit in silence and solitude before the Lord?

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# Breathing for Balance: Harnessing the Power of Breath for Autism & Anxiety

By Rev. Dan Holmes, MS

## Introduction

Breathing – it's a fundamental process, yet its profound impact on our wellbeing, particularly for those on the Autism spectrum or anyone who struggles with emotional regulation or anxiety, is often underestimated. Let's explore how simple breathing techniques can be transformative, offering tools for stress management, focus enhancement, and overall life quality improvement for individuals with Autism or Anxiety.

## The Science Behind Breathing and Stress Relief

Breathing exercises do more than just relax the mind; they engage the body's parasympathetic nervous system, often referred to as the "rest and digest" system. This contrasts with the sympathetic nervous system, which governs our "fight or flight" response. When we practice deep, controlled breathing, we signal our body to shift from a state of stress to one of calm, activating the parasympathetic response. This shift lowers the heart rate, reduces blood pressure, and slows the breathing rate, creating a sense of calm and stability.

## The Benefits of Breathing Techniques

- **Reducing Stress and Anxiety:** By activating the parasympathetic response, breathing exercises help reduce anxiety, mitigating the often overwhelming stress experienced by individuals with Autism.
- **Enhancing Focus and Concentration:** Regular breathing practice can lead to improved concentration, aiding learning and social interactions.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Techniques like deep breathing provide strategies for handling overwhelming emotional states.
- **Self-Regulation Skills:** These exercises promote control over physical and emotional states, fostering self-awareness.
- **Improved Sleep Patterns:** The calming effect of controlled breathing can encourage better sleep.

- **Sensory Integration Support:** Breathing exercises can serve as a therapeutic tool for sensory processing.
- **Social and Communication Skill Enhancement:** Lowering stress and anxiety barriers can lead to more comfortable social interactions.

## Breathing Exercises to Try

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Focuses on deep belly breaths, calming the nervous system.
- **4-7-8 Breathing:** A stress-relief tool involving specific counts for inhaling, holding, and exhaling.
- **Box Breathing:** A method of equal breaths in, hold, out, and hold, excellent for focus.
- **Balloon Breathing:** A fun, child-friendly approach to deep breathing.
- **Alternate Nostril Breathing:** Balances brain hemispheres, fostering calm and focus.
- **Counted Breath:** Simple breathing to a count, aiding in mindfulness.
- **Visualization Breathing:** Combines breathing with mental imagery for a deeper calming effect.

A web search on each those will yield more details about each one.

## Conclusion

Integrating breathing exercises into the daily life of those with Autism or Anxiety can have a substantial impact. These techniques offer a natural, accessible way to manage the challenges associated with Autism, empowering individuals with lifelong skills. Consistency and practice are key to unlocking these benefits.

## Encouragement for Practice

For those on the Autism spectrum, these breathing techniques can be a valuable addition to your daily routine. Start gently, be patient, and observe the positive changes they bring. Here's to a more focused, calm, and joyful life through the power of breath!

**Action Point:** Which one can you try for 30 days?

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## Possible Discussion Questions:

Do you have a rule of life or Sabbath?

What do you do to quiet or recreate or rejuvenate?

How often do you intentionally pause to rest and quiet your mind or body?

Choose one element of the DREAM framework that resonates with you. How can you incorporate it into your daily routine?

Think about a time when you felt stuck in negative emotions. How might quieting your mind or body have helped? How often do you find yourself stuck in a pain pathway? Do you rehearse wounds or pain moments in your mind?

Which part of the DREAM framework resonates with you the most? How can you start practicing it today?



## DREAM Framework Reflection:

**D – Distract Yourself**

**R – Replace Your Thoughts**

**E – Engage Relationally**

**A – Appreciate for 5 Minutes**

**M – Make a Plan**



## After the Group Reflection

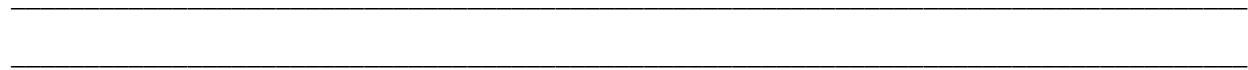
After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone’s perspective for consideration: Where do you think you are in the Stages of Maturity:

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**Joy and Quieting Exercises:** if you didn't do them why? Try again? Pages 73-80



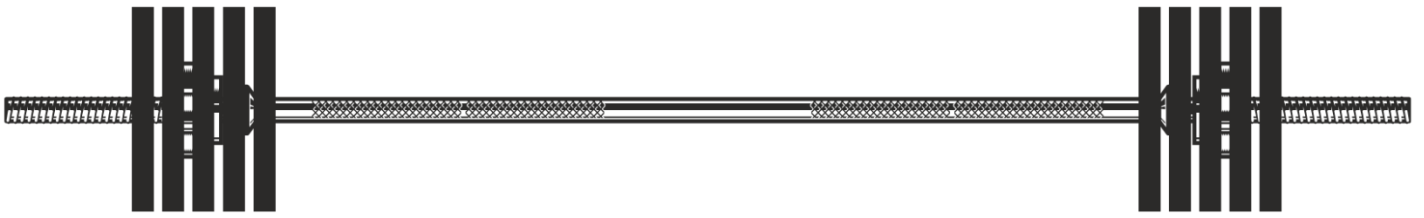
## **Growth Tip: Couples**

**Goal:** Quieting Together: Being Still

From the book *30 days of Joy* from the Courseys: Heart to Heart Holding

Set a timer for 5 minutes. Embrace each other in a hug (not full on frontal hug) where your hearts are touching each other, embrace comfortable and close your eyes and just be- no talking- just be. Breathe deeply but naturally and just be.

What was this like? Could you do a heart to heart hold weekly?



## Lesson/Session 5: From Bounce: Appreciation

Read: Chapter 5 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 5, what is a takeaway point for you?

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Did you Try the Appreciating God pages 90-91? Yes or No

Did you Try the Joy Work-Out pages 91-92?

Can you try an appreciation or gratitude journal for 30 days?

Why or Why Not?

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If you tried the exercise(s) what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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### Reflection Questions

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter?

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## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### Appreciating God

Romans 1:20 ESV

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Isaiah 43:1 ESV

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Isaiah 30:18 ESV

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Psalms 33:20 ESV

Our soul waits on the Lord; He is our help and our shield.

Psalms 23- any version- any verse that resonates with you about your Good Shepherd

Isaiah 61 ESV- pick any verse that speaks to what the Lord wants to do for you



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?

## Applying the SOAP Method

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A** (Application, How does this apply to you?)

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**Prayer** (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.) The Lord our God is a good God and loving Heavenly Father. Do you tell Him this often?

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### **Reflection Question**

How do you show appreciation to those important to you? Do you think people have to do something extra to deserve appreciation or gratitude? Do you like to be shown gratitude?

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## Additional Insights

# Delving Deeper: The Impact of Soul-Level Gratitude on Our Lives and Relationships

Rev. Dan Holmes, MS

In a world rife with material pursuits and relentless pace, embracing the essence of soul-level gratitude can be a transformative venture. This narrative unravels the profound concept of 'soul-level gratitude', its reflections in religious scriptures like the Psalms, its scientific substantiation, and its enriching impact on our relationships.

## Unveiling Soul-Level Gratitude

Soul-level gratitude transcends superficial acknowledgment of life's blessings. It embodies an intrinsic, unconditional appreciation of life itself, fostering a deeper connection with the essence of existence. Unlike transient thankfulness for life's comforts, soul-level gratitude is enduring and often cultivated through mindfulness, self-realization, and a deep-seated appreciation for the transient nature of life.

## Biblical Resonance: Reflections from the Psalms

The Book of Psalms echoes expressions of profound gratitude, epitomizing a deep appreciation for divine grace, guidance, and enduring love. Psalms like 106, 136, and 23 resonate with the essence of 'soul level gratitude', reflecting an intrinsic, unconditional, and often communal form of thankfulness.

## Scientific Backing: The Wholesome Impact of Gratitude

Scientific discourse sheds light on the myriad benefits of a life anchored in gratitude. Research highlights include enhanced well-being, positive mood, better physical health, and resilience in managing stress and uncertainty ([positivepsychology.com](http://positivepsychology.com); HBR). Gratitude encourages mindfulness, reduces materialism, and fosters a positive outlook, even amidst challenges ([research.com](http://research.com) ; UCHealth).

## Enriching Relationships: The Ripple Effect of Gratitude

Soul-level gratitude significantly enhances personal and interpersonal experiences. It fosters enhanced connection, improved communication, empathy, and understanding in relationships. Moreover, it promotes resilience, encourages positive behaviors, reduces materialism, and cultivates a spirit of reciprocity and generosity. On a broader scale, it contributes to community building and, for those inclined, spiritual growth.

### Concluding Thoughts

Embracing soul-level gratitude is akin to embarking on a journey towards deeper understanding and appreciation of life and relationships. It's a pathway that promises not only personal enrichment but also the potential for building harmonious and fulfilling relationships and communities. As we navigate the intricacies of life, anchoring ourselves in a profound sense of gratitude can serve as a beacon of hope, joy, and enduring satisfaction.



### Possible Discussion Questions:

Warner defines appreciation as intentionally focusing on the good things in your life, big or small. The same author or 5 love languages also talks about languages of apology and appreciation. What do you need or what helps you feel appreciated? Do you know your spouse's appreciation language? Do you share appreciations with them?

Try this and let's discuss: Take a moment to think of one thing you're genuinely grateful for—something specific, like a beautiful sunset or a kind word someone shared. Hold that thought and really focus on the feeling of gratitude. (If you struggle with imagination- find one of your favorite pictures or scenery or google some nature photos).

Do you wrong spot or right spot you day more?

Thoughts or insights from the chapter, Dan's insight or any able to try this with a spouse or working 1 on 1 on this right now? If you are your spouse are not sharing space right now how can you be grateful or appreciative?





## After the Group Reflection

After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone's perspective for consideration: How are you doing in gratitude and appreciation?

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Try the Joy Work-Out pages 91-92. Are you taking this course actively or passively?



## Growth Tip: Couples

**Goal:** Appreciation

First, set a time for yourself to really think about your spouse and think of three things that bring to the relationship or the family system? What are things they did that if they did not do you might have to do? Do you accept your spouse for who they are right now? Do you provide a safe space for them to be vulnerable and open?

Second, set up a time to tell your spouse things you appreciate them for or things they do you have gratitude for.

What if once a week, you try to right spot and randomly tell them- hey I noticed this or your effort or appreciate this or that? How might that change the atmosphere in your house? If you still have kids at home perhaps invite them at dinner to express a gratitude of the day.

# Lesson/Session 6: From Bounce: Beliefs

Read: Chapter 6 of Bounce before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 6, what is a takeaway point for you? What do you need to examine about your beliefs of self, spouse or your marital relationship?

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Did you Try the Joy Work-Out on page 116? Yes or No

Why or Why Not?

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If you tried the exercise what did you notice or how did it work for you?

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## Reflection Question

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter?

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## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### Scriptures About Belief or the Mind (Some may be from other lessons)

Romans 12:2-6a ESV

Do not be conformed to this world,] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members,[e] and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them

Mark 12:30 ESV

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Proverbs 4:23-25 ESV

Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech,

and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward,  
and your gaze be straight before you.

#### 2 Corinthians 2:4-5 ESV

For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you.

#### 2 Timothy 1:7 ESV

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

#### Romans 7:15-20 ESV

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

#### Romans 8:7 ESV

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

#### 1 Peter 5:11 ESV

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering







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*Additional Insights:*

## **Steering Our Lives: The Power of Focus and the Path We Follow**

Rev. Dan Holmes, MS

In the world of motorcycling, there's a phenomenon known as "target fixation." It's a simple yet profound reality: as a rider, you'll naturally steer toward whatever you're focusing on. This can lead to skillful, sweeping turns if you focus on where you want to go. But if you fixate on an obstacle—say a pothole or a guardrail—you might end up heading straight toward it, no matter how much you wish to avoid it.

This principle doesn't just apply to motorcycles; it speaks volumes about the way we approach life, relationships, and even our personal growth. What we focus on holds incredible power over us, guiding our decisions, shaping our identity, and ultimately directing our lives. Dr. Curt Thompson, a Christian psychiatrist and author, delves deeply into this concept, shedding light on how our focus and attention shape our minds and souls.

### **The Power of Focus: A Lesson from Motorcycling**

On a motorcycle, your gaze determines your path. The same is true in life. Where we direct our attention, our thoughts, and our time shapes the direction of our hearts and ultimately, our destiny. Dr. Thompson explains that our minds and relationships are deeply interconnected. Whatever we're focusing on—whether it's our fears, our ambitions, or our shortcomings—has the power to mold who we are becoming.

Consider, for example, how a person focusing on past mistakes and regrets might steer their life in a loop of shame and insecurity. Conversely, someone who sets their sights on God's love, grace, and purpose for them may find themselves more grounded and hopeful. Our mental "target fixation" can either steer us toward flourishing or toward harm, depending on what we choose to focus on.



## Rewiring Our Focus

Dr. Thompson talks extensively about the power of attention in reshaping our neural pathways. This isn't a mere self-help theory; it's grounded in neuroscience. He explains that the brain is designed to change and adapt based on what we intentionally focus on. By consciously shifting our attention to what is true, beautiful, and hopeful, we can gradually redirect the pathways of our minds. Just as a motorcyclist learns to focus on where they want to go, we, too, can train our minds to focus on what brings life and healing.

For example, if we fixate on a particular problem in our relationship, our focus might become the problem itself, spiraling into frustration or resentment. But if we make a conscious effort to focus on our partner's strengths, or on the shared goals that brought us together, we might start to see solutions rather than obstacles. It's a powerful shift, one that invites us to steer our relationships toward restoration rather than conflict.

## Practicing Healthy Target Fixation

Motorcyclists are trained to focus on the path ahead, especially when navigating sharp turns or challenging terrain. The same principle can guide us through life's trials and uncertainties. By setting our sights on what we value and desire—faith, connection, resilience—we can steer our lives accordingly.

Dr. Thompson encourages us to orient ourselves toward God's truths about us rather than the lies or fears that can dominate our thoughts. By "fixating" on truths like "I am loved," "I am chosen," and "I have purpose," we train our minds to follow paths of peace and hope.

To apply this practically, consider creating daily reminders of what you want to focus on. This might look like a short prayer, a moment of gratitude, or simply pausing to reframe a challenging thought. When we do this, we're not just redirecting our thoughts but also rewiring our brains, shaping new pathways toward joy and fulfillment.

## What's Your Focus?

The reality of target fixation teaches us that where we set our gaze is where we'll likely end up. So, the question becomes: What are you focusing on? Are you fixating on fears, obstacles, and insecurities? Or are you steering toward hope, grace, and purpose?

In the end, as Dr. Thompson reminds us, "We become what we pay attention to." By choosing our focus wisely, we're not only directing our lives but shaping our very souls, guiding ourselves toward the life we truly desire and the person God calls us to be.

Let us learn from the motorcyclist's wisdom. Let's fix our gaze on what is good and let that focus be the guide that leads us home.



## Reflection Question

What is an insight about focus or target fixation that seems pertinent to your focus in life right now?

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## Thought Question

What is your faith tradition or teaching about interactions or interferences of wicked spirits? What is your belief about “dividing spirits” and an enemy that is actively trying to bring division in your marriage and relationships and tell you lies about yourself?

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## Possible Discussion Questions

Thoughts or Takeaways about the Five Engines (pgs. 94-96) Body, Beliefs, Bonding, The Holy Spirit & Wicked Spirits?

The left side of your brain is responsible for applying narrative, do you see a pattern in how you apply narrative? Right spotting, wrong spotting, difference spotting? Blaming, Deflecting or Shame/Blame? Do you take responsibility for your contribution of negative relational cycles?

What is a narrative that needs challenging about God? Self?

What conclusions have you generalized about your marriage or neurodiversity that needs challenging in how you apply meaning?

Beliefs drive emotion and meaning- where are you stuck? Are you stuck?

What is a challenge in examining principle 2 where emotions or pain may be clouding a belief/narrative?

How do your current attachments inform your beliefs/emotions? Who is in your outer, middle and inner circle? How do define or experience attachment?

How are you doing at taking captive your thoughts and replacing thoughts? What do you replace these thoughts with or do you reinforce them or ruminate on them? ANTS and ANT-eater (p.112). "Taking" is intentional and action oriented not passive.



## After the Group Reflection

After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone's perspective for consideration? Takeaways about beliefs?

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Joy Workout Page 116-117 for everyone.



## Reflection and Homework Concerning Your Spouse/Marriage

You or May Not have the Emotional Safety or Capacity to Share This With Them—Yet.  
Challenges Beliefs/Narratives

**Journaling Prompt:** What is one belief about your partner that has shifted during these exercises? How does this change the way you see them? Make a list of everything positive about them and things they do for you or the family that are helpful for positive? What are things you hear other spouses do/have done that your spouse does not that you are thankful for?

**Identify:** Practice identifying beliefs and reframing them daily. Use the exercises that resonated most with you to deepen your connection and resilience as a couple.

**Strength Training:** Write down one belief you want to strengthen in your relationship (e.g., “We are a team, not opponents”). Share this with your spouse, what is a belief they would like to strengthen as a couple?

### **Belief-Emotion Tracker:**

Over the next week, track moments of intense emotion (positive or negative).

Note the belief behind the emotion (e.g., “I’m upset because I believe they’re ignoring me”).

*For Couples Who Have Been Working on the Marriage/Neurodiversity Challenges over a year and seen some progress.*

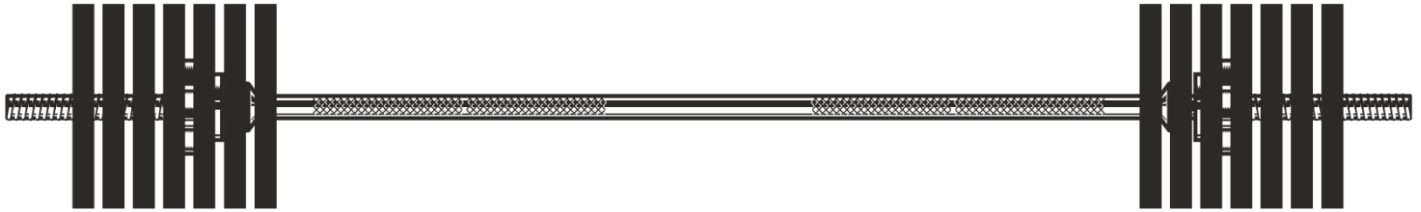
**Goal:** Reframe the story you tell about your marriage and your partner.

## Rewriting Your Relationship Story

**Instructions:** Individually, write a short narrative describing your marriage from your current perspective.

**Reflect:** Is this story focused on struggles or strengths?

- Rewrite the story, focusing on growth, shared victories, and hope for the future.
- Share your rewritten stories and discuss how they change your view of your marriage.
- Rewrite the narrative of your spouse.
- Write a narrative of your own growth.



## Lesson/Session 7: From Bounce: Connecting with People

Read: Chapter 7 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 7, what is a takeaway point for you? ND and NT spouses have differing needs to connect but where are you connected?

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Did you Try the Joy Work-Out pages 137-138?

Why or Why Not?

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### Reflection Questionn

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter? Four relational skill sets, what is your biggest challenge with your spouse and/or kids? Where do you think you are doing well?



## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### Scripture about Love or Forgiveness or How we Treat Others

#### 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ESV

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

#### Philippians 2:3 ESV

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

#### Matthew 5:43-48 ESV

“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your

brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Romans 13:8-10 ESV

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Matthew 6:14-15 ESV

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

1 Peter 4:7-10 ESV

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you?

## Applying the SOAP Method

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A** (Application, How does this apply to you?)

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**Prayer** (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.) The Lord our God is a good God and loving Heavenly Father. Do you tell Him this often?

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## Reflection Questions

Do you get stuck in negative thoughts about yourself (shame) or about your spouse (criticism or condemnation or contempt)? Or all of the above?

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### Additional Insights

## Exploring Dr. Wilder's Work on Heseḏ and Its Impact on Marriage

By Rev. Dan Holmes, MS

Marriage, often referred to as the union of two souls, is a journey that demands understanding, commitment, and compassion. It's a relationship where two individuals come together to build a life filled with love, companionship, and shared experiences. Dr. Wilder's groundbreaking work on "heseḏ" sheds light on the profound impact that this ancient Hebrew concept can have on the dynamics of a marriage.

## Understanding HeseD: The Heart of Dr. Wilder's Work

Dr. Wilder, a renowned psychologist and theologian, delved into the depths of human relationships, drawing inspiration from various cultures and traditions. He found the concept of "heseD" particularly captivating due to its rich meaning and potential to transform relationships. "HeseD" is a Hebrew word that is often translated as "loving-kindness" or "steadfast love." It encompasses qualities such as compassion, loyalty, mercy, and faithfulness, making it a powerful framework for examining and nurturing relationships.

## The Application of HeseD in Marriage

In the context of marriage, Dr. Wilder's exploration of heseD takes on a profound significance. Let's delve into how the principles of heseD can be applied to create a strong, harmonious, and fulfilling marital bond.

1. **Compassion and Empathy:** HeseD calls for a deep sense of compassion and empathy. In a marriage, partners can practice heseD by actively listening to each other's feelings, concerns, and joys. By understanding each other's perspectives and emotions, couples can build an environment of emotional safety and connection.
2. **Loyalty and Commitment:** HeseD emphasizes loyalty and commitment even during challenging times. When couples demonstrate unwavering support and dedication to one another, they create a foundation of trust that can weather any storm. This commitment is a reflection of the heseD principle and helps in nurturing a lasting bond.
3. **Mercy and Forgiveness:** Marriage is not without its ups and downs, and conflicts are inevitable. HeseD encourages partners to approach conflicts with a sense of mercy and forgiveness. By extending grace and understanding, couples can resolve conflicts in a healthier and more productive manner.
4. **Faithfulness and Trust:** Trust is the cornerstone of any successful marriage. The concept of heseD emphasizes faithfulness and trustworthiness, which are essential for building a strong and resilient marital relationship. When partners prioritize each other's emotional and physical well-being, they create an atmosphere of security.
5. **Generosity and Selflessness:** HeseD encourages a spirit of generosity and selflessness. Partners who embody these qualities in their marriage willingly prioritize each other's needs and well-being. This spirit of giving without expecting something in return fosters a deeper sense of intimacy and connection.

## What HeseD Looks Like in Real-Life Marriages

Practicing heseD in a marriage involves intentional efforts and ongoing growth. Couples who incorporate the principles of heseD into their relationship often experience:

- **Deeper Emotional Intimacy:** By practicing compassion, empathy, and understanding, couples create an environment where they can share their innermost thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment.
- **Enhanced Communication:** The commitment to actively listening and valuing each other's perspectives leads to improved communication. This, in turn, helps in resolving conflicts more constructively.
- **Resilience in Challenges:** The loyalty and commitment inherent in hesed provide couples with the strength to overcome challenges together, fostering a sense of unity even in tough times.
- **Sustainable Love:** The emphasis on mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness contributes to a lasting love that withstands the test of time.

Incorporating the principles of hesed into a marriage transforms it into a space of warmth, understanding, and profound connection. Dr. Wilder's work underscores the transformative power of this ancient concept, breathing new life into the sacred institution of marriage. As couples strive to embody hesed in their relationship, they pave the way for a harmonious and fulfilling marital journey.

This content is based on the book "[The Other Half of Church](#)" by Dr. Jim Wilder.

## Mastering Active Listening and Validating Feelings Even in a NeuroDiverse Relationship

By Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes

James 1:19-20 (NIV)

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*

Several verses tell us to be quick to listen and slow to speech and seek wisdom in our speech and relational communication.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of healthy relationships, whether personal or professional. One of the most powerful tools in communication is active listening, complemented by the ability to validate others' feelings. These skills foster understanding, trust, and emotional connection. Beyond relational skills, Scripture tells us to be careful in our speech and seek to understand.

- Ephesians 4:29- Build others up in speech
- Proverbs 15:1- Soft answer turns away wrath

- Colossians 4:6- Let your speech be gracious
- Psalm 14:13- Set a guard, O Lord over my mouth
- Proverbs 12:18- Rash words are like a sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing
- Ephesians 4:15- Speak the truth in love

## What is Active Listening?

**Proverbs 18:13 (ESV)- “If one gives an answer before he hears; it is folly and shame.**

Active listening is a communication technique that involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what is being said. It goes beyond hearing words to truly grasping the speaker's message, both verbal and non-verbal.

## Steps to Active Listening

### 1. Be Present: Physically, Mentally & Emotionally

- **Eliminate Distractions:** Put away your phone, turn off the TV, and avoid multitasking. This is true for both partners. If you are needing to discuss something and need undivided attention, even if you think you can multitask putting a screen or phone away shows you are willing to listen and pay attention.
- **Maintain Eye Contact:** This shows the speaker that you are fully engaged. This may be difficult for the ND/AS partner, so talk about what will work for you both if one is unable to maintain and give full eye contact during the conversation. What other ways of connection may work?
- **Focus on the Speaker:** Give your full attention to the person speaking.

### 2. Show That You’re Listening:

- **Nod Occasionally:** This non-verbal cue indicates that you are following along.
- **Use Small Verbal Acknowledgments:** Phrases like “I see,” “Uh-huh,” and “Go on” encourage the speaker to continue versus interrupt.

### 3. Reflect on What You Hear:

- **Paraphrase:** Summarize what the speaker has said in your own words to show understanding. For example, “So what you’re saying is...”
- **Ask Clarifying Questions:** If something isn’t clear, ask questions to gain a better understanding, such as “What did you mean when you said...?” “I heard this, is this accurate?” Be open to feedback when you ask for clarity. (See Jeremy Rochford’s blog: Dumped Out Not Dumped On [www.christianneurodiversemarriage.com-More- Blog](http://www.christianneurodiversemarriage.com-More- Blog))

### 4. Respond Appropriately:

- **Don't Interrupt:** Allow the speaker to finish their thoughts without interjecting. If you the NT spouse make sure to speak in smaller chunks of time and allow for processing time. If you are the AS/ND speaker, be careful not to monologue when asking clarifying questions.
- **Provide Thoughtful Responses:** Reflect on what has been said before responding. Avoid giving unsolicited advice unless asked. If you are triggered and cannot speak without being harsh or rash or argumentative, create pauses and timeouts. Own what is happening, "I am triggered" or "I am not able to continue" then state the need, "I need to take a 10 or 15 minute break can we meet back here in x amount of time?" If you get the break- respect the other person by taking the time to regulate then keep your word to return.

## What is Validation?

Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences as understandable. It doesn't mean agreeing with them, but rather acknowledging their right to feel that way. Perspective taking and theory of mind can be challenges to the AS/ND person. Black and thinkers ask, "How can I validate their feelings when I disagree that they feel that way or that I did what they say I did?"

## Steps to Validate Feelings

### 1. Listen Without Judgement:

- **Be Open-Minded:** Accept the person's feelings without criticizing or dismissing them or arguing or getting into enemy mode..
- **Avoid Comparisons:** Don't compare their feelings to someone else's or suggest that they shouldn't feel a certain way. Many times I hear from the AS/ND spouse they state, "If I could just explain what I did and how they misunderstood then they wouldn't feel that way". While this sounds logical it is dismissive of the other's experience. Be open to hear the impact of what was said and done before explaining intention. Listen first!

### 2. Acknowledge the Feelings:

- **Verbal Recognition:** Use phrases like "I can see that you're feeling..." or "It sounds like you're really upset about..."
- **Non-Verbal Cues:** Nodding, maintaining eye contact (if possible), and using sympathetic facial expressions can convey understanding. Using facial expressions may not be possible for the AS/ND spouse since there may be a more blunt affect.

### 3. Normalize Their Experience:

- **Relate Without Overpowering:** Share a brief, relevant experience of your own to show empathy, but keep the focus on them. For example, “I’ve felt that way too when...” Be careful with this one. Do not switchtrack to you and your feelings and detract from the feelings they are sharing. Sharing a feeling is more about the feeling, not the story and how you reacted.
- **Express Understanding:** Say things like “It makes sense that you would feel this way because...”

#### 4. Offer Support:

- **Ask How You Can Help:** Instead of assuming what they need, ask “What can I do to support you right now?” “What can I do to repair this?” “What kind of support do you need right now from me?”
- **Be There:** Sometimes, simply being present and offering a listening ear is the best support you can provide. You can be honest and say, “I don’t really know what to say to help.” Ask if a hug or touch could be helpful.

## Putting It All Together

Here’s how you can combine active listening and validation in a conversation:

### 1. Be Present and Listen:

When your friend/spouse starts talking about a stressful day, put your phone away, maintain eye contact, and nod as they speak.

### 2. Reflect and Acknowledge:

Paraphrase their feelings to show understanding, “It sounds like you had a really tough day at work.” If you hear a feeling expressed, use that same word. If they said, “This interaction with me was destructive or caused despair” do not summarize with “You felt bad or sad” this is also dismissing the intensity of the feeling that was expressed.

### 3. Validate Their Experience:

Validate their feelings, “It’s completely understandable to feel overwhelmed with so many deadlines.” Even if you would not feel that way in situation, you are validated they have a right to feel that way and you see how THEY could feel that way.

### 4. Offer Support:

Ask how you can help, “Is there anything I can do to help you relax tonight?” or ask, “What can I do to help/support you?”

By mastering active listening and validating feelings, you create a safe space for open communication. These skills help build stronger relationships, foster trust, and enhance emotional connections. Remember, the goal is to understand and support, not to fix or

solve. Practice these steps regularly, and you'll notice a positive shift in your interactions and relationships. Communication is by far the most difficult issue expressed in our survey. Working on communication is a life-long skill in a neurodiverse marriage. Scripts, code words, taking breaks and continually using tools is essential!

If you want a great, short book on learning this skill set, colleague Barbara Grant told me about "I hear you" by Michael Sorensen. This book is great and gives practical advice on how to listen and validate even if you disagree with the intent or timeline of events.



## Reflection Questions

Does your spouse feel you are for them? Do you show hesed for your spouse? How?

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## Possible Discussion Questions:

- We talked a little about satisfaction vs. connection. What is the difference?
- What does connection mean to you? To your spouse?
- Belonging is about being seen, valued and accepted for you who are now (but we are all called to grow and be transformed into God's image). Where do you struggle to accept yourself? What do you struggle to accept about your spouse? Marriage?
- Does a challenging or complex marriage mean it has to be a bad or unsatisfying marriage?
- When was a time you truly felt accepted or belonging in a group? What did that feel like?
- Are you able to share your feelings or be vulnerable other than anger or disappointment?
- VCR: Do you understand how to validate? What feels validating to you? Are agreement and validation the same thing?
- How are you at comfort or compassionate care?
- What do you do to repair or recover from conflict or do you duck and hide and hope it goes away? How were raised to view conflict?





## Reflection Questions

How much is shame or lack of self acceptance blocking change?

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Try the Joy Work-Out pages 137-138



## Growth Tips

### *Reflection Prompts:*

- When have I felt the most connected in a relationship?
- How can I practice vulnerability and empathy in my interactions?
- What steps can I take to rebuild trust in my relationships?

### *Practical Tools:*

- Journaling exercises to explore vulnerability and shame.
- Role-playing relational skills like validation and comfort.
- Weekly check-ins with a partner or trusted friend to discuss progress.

### *When We Mess UP*

Before we close this out, because our relationship is going well and we have joy and peace in our relationship it does not mean we are perfect or never have issues. We wrote this recently about something that occurred in our relationship and we want to share that with you here.

# A "taste and see" moment - beauty from ashes

*Dan Holmes (and thoughts from Stephanie in bold italics)*

The other night we (Stephanie and I) had a highly volatile argument. It was an explosion that we hadn't experienced in decades. I came unhinged. I went from joyful to stupid enemy mode in seconds. It was highly unusual.

***Stephanie: Dan has erupted in anger less than a handful of times in our 30 years of marriage and 40 years of knowing each other. The shock of the abrasive words and accusations were piercing after I got over the shock and wonderment of "Who is this person right now?" This is not Dan! While over and over in my mind I was saying this is not Dan and Dan would never hurt me, my body went into a trauma response. My arms locked over my chest and ankles bound together like a mummy. My heart racing, my thoughts and my heart were at war with each other. What on earth provoked this and why again is he protecting the "other person" of the story I shared when I wanted him to share concern for a mutual beloved person?***

We went to bed in a mire of shock and sadness and uncertainty. The uncertainty was what could have triggered such an extreme reaction? She said how our interaction hurt her and what it was like for her was emotionally being speared. That was my first awakening. I returned to the relationship with her pain in my mind and worse that it was at my hand. I was the one who had speared her.

I have mentioned in both our groups and in 1/1s the analogy of 'taste and see'. It draws on the scripture Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the Lord is good". That invitation from God also works in relationships with those around us. When the relationship is 'bland' and you put in effort to find a richer experience, you are rewarded (presuming your partner shares the sentiment).

After my volume returned to normal, we had a short but unsatisfying talk about what just happened. The following morning, I left early for an already planned hiking trip with our daughter. To my surprise, Stephanie greeted me before I left (6 am) with reassurance (hesed - loyal love). I now had 2+ hours in the car and plenty of time for contemplation. I used all 2 hours and remained unsatisfied with the outcome. I still did not know what provoked such a reaction. The issue that triggered me was nothing about me, not even about us.

***Stephanie: My body stayed in shock almost that entire night. My brain knew "Dan has never laid a hand on you, you are safe!" but my body said "Stay back" and my heart palpitated most of the night. I wanted to give some reassurance that we would work it***

***out and I was still glad to be with him. I was not in enemy mode, I was in triggered mode and while I wanted to reach out my body was still locked up and could not rest.***

Fast forward to the following afternoon and the car ride home. We talked during my drive exploring the possibilities of causation. The tone was calm and had the feel of two people looking for a common solution. She asked questions. She was vulnerable. I was honest. Though many ideas were explored, again we came to a "I don't know" conclusion. And what that means is that although this episode is over, it doesn't provide confidence we can avoid this going forward.

***Stephanie: We were about to interviewed on what makes our marriage work, yet we had this huge rupture to explore. Neither of us wanted to pretend and be inauthentic so we strived to figure it out. It was over, not settled but we had to move forward. We may not ever know the reason.***

***Dr. Wilder said in a recent email: So, real time skills needed for attachment to be joyful are not going to work at verbal communication (slow) speeds. Most people are looking for verbal solutions that are fairly ineffective and certainly not "safe." That email I had received last week, and it was mulling over in my head that a conversation would not solve this. As much I wanted him to understand how he got there and how he saw me as an enemy so quickly when unprovoked will remain a mystery. I had to go back into my memory on who Dan is, and remind myself and him who he is really is and that one painful moment did not define him or us. But we never know what truly sparked that reaction which can leave me unsettled, but I remember- this is not him and whatever happened he has asked for forgiveness and to return to joy we cannot stay there in that moment. It was addressed and confessed and true repentance, but the mystery remains.***

The following morning, I spent time with pen and paper and mulled over all we talked about. As I wrote I gained clarity. I did come to what is a plausible origin. I called her (it was early - 7am) and we talked through what I discovered (before I lost the lucidity to the day's events). We agreed that what I wrote was likely the cause and put to rest the best we could the weekend.

So how is this 'taste and see'? Many times we (I) think of this as something you get. You tried something and were rewarded. In this case, we started this from a bad place and needed to work through the conflict and in doing so, that conflict yielded healing and intimacy.

***Stephanie: While I would not want to experience that again, I did experience what many women have in neurodiverse marriage and that is a trauma trigger freeze response in their body and inability to process what has just happened and that feeling of "unsafe." What is different for me, is a partner who chose to work through it***

***instead of managing an image, and this behavior is very infrequent. This leads me to another part of Dr. Wilder's most recent email.***

***Dr. Wilder wrote: It is impossible to build joy and attachment with a defense mechanism or sustain joy with a performance/false self. It is spiritually impossible to build a relationship by doing the right thing as that always ends badly. All these elements are present in the problems you mention around building an attachment with a partner. We can only have joy being with someone's true self and if we don't know our own or see the other person's true self it is usually because we cannot handle one or more of the big six emotions and so have developed defense mechanisms. That brings us back to the impossibility of having joy with a defense mechanism.***

***I am thankful Dan chose to be called back to his true Christ-identity self and turn on his relational circuits. He laid the defense reaction down when I shared he had just speared my heart and devastated me to the core. He could have escalated to enemy mode, but he paused and reflected and chose to hear me and said, "I forget that while you are strong and a fighter of all the causes, you are still soft on the inside." While I am a strong willed and fierce defender of others, my heart can hurt and shatter too.***

What I could have been offered was coldness yet what she offered was compassion through her pain. It was a model of loving your 'enemy'; it was a model of hesed. It was also a choice to 'redeem' me and us. There was an opportunity to allow this to create separation and harbor bitterness yet she chose otherwise; she chose us. She picked me - again.

***Stephanie: In a recent read of Dr. Wilder's Renovated, a key theme is anyone can love their neighbor or those who do good to them, your true test of maturity is how do you love when you are treated as an enemy or love your enemies. This has been an intentional prayer I had been seeking the Lord about growing in for someone in my circles that has been hard to love; a family member treating me as an enemy. I believe in my letting go of contempt for this person and asking God to show me how to love well and love those who see me as a threat or enemy. I was being prepared in my heart for this moment which came out of the blue. While I had no idea Dan and I would have this huge conflict, my obedience in prayer to another helped me in this current battle of self to remain in hesed/love because I knew who Dan was, but he had forgotten.***

That is 'taste and see'. That calls me to a higher place. That reminds me of who I am and what we do. This was healthy correction in action. She is a treasure and a gift and it creates sadness in me that I tarnished and scarred what I hold so dear and through this sequence of interactions now hold on tighter to who we are. Who has been forgiven much loves much and that attachment will propel me to being more of who I should be.

***Stephanie: With us choosing to grow together, while this was a painful moment, in the end we chose to keep the relationship bigger than the issue and return to joy.***



## Growth Tip: Couples

**Goal:** Belonging and Connection

This is a common issue- Lack of Connection and Communication Misfires.

There is probably already lots of discussion on what goes wrong and what feels disconnecting.

First, think about a time you did feel connected to your spouse. What were you doing and how did it feel? Go there in your mind, think about that love and connection? What is a small act or activity that would help you feel more connected?

Second, meet together first share that positive moment of when I felt connected to you and share what you thought or wrote down. Name one thing that would feel connecting to you and improve your belonging or hesed to each other.

If your relationship has enough trust and safety, when you read Dan and Stephanie's story on messing up, what do you do you when you mess up? How do you keep the relationship bigger than the problem?

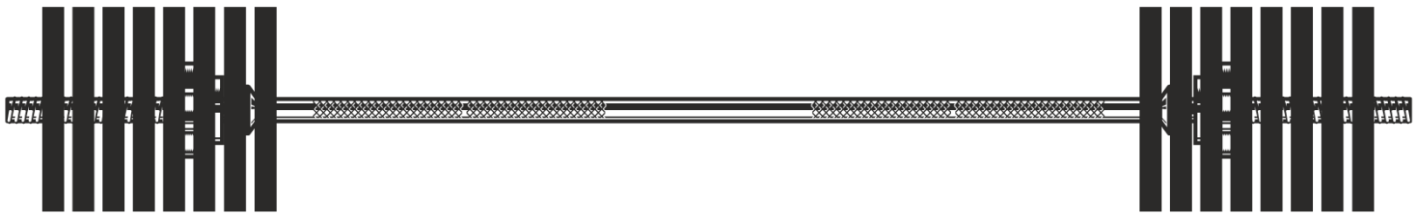
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## Lesson/Session 8: From Bounce: Connecting with God

Read: Chapter 8 of *Bounce* before completing this section of the workbook.

After Reading Chapter 8, what is a takeaway point for you? Ways to connect with God were mentioned. What is your primary way and where can you grow in building connection with God?

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Did you Try the Journaling Exercise(s) on page 150-152/156? Yes or No

Why or Why Not?

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If you tried the exercise what did you notice or how did it work for you? Have you ever tried Immanuel Journal before?

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### Reflection Question

If you are being honest with yourself, what is a challenge for you from the chapter? Do you struggle to connect with God? Is your devotion time about checking the box or doing the right Christian thing? Do you grow in knowledge about God?



## SOAP METHOD

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

### Scripture on Drawing Near to God

James 4:6-8 ESV

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

1 Chronicles 16: 8-12a ESV

Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;  
make known his deeds among the peoples!  
Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wondrous works!  
Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!  
Seek the Lord and his strength;  
seek his presence continually!  
Remember the wondrous works that he has done

Psalms 14:2 ESV

The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man,  
to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

John 17:3 ESV

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you  
have sent.

Psalms 63:1-4 ESV

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.  
2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.  
3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.  
4 So I will bless you as long as I live;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.

Jeremiah 29:11-14a (Yes it is about Israel's captivity but holds truth for us today)

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to  
give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I  
will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will  
be found by you, declares the Lord



Which verse most spoke to you, encouraged you or convicted you? How do you  
seek God?





## SOAP METHOD

### Applying the SOAP Method

**S** (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

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**O** (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

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**A** (Application, How does this apply to you?)

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**Prayer** (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.) Do you want to know God more?

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## Reflection Questions

How do you quiet yourself when you are upset? How often do you sit in silence and solitude before the Lord?

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What is the difference between knowing God and knowing about Him?

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Additional Insights: Today's Insights Are About Hindsight Learning

## **Beyond the Maze: My Path to Understanding and Growth**

Author: Rev. Dan Holmes, MS with chatGPT

This is a summary from a book chapter from Dan and Stephanie's book ***Uniquely Us: Gracefully Navigating the Maze of Neurodiverse Marriage: Faith- autism- Marriage***

### **Introduction: A Different Kind of Journey**

Unlike Stephanie, my journey did not stem from a place of desperation or a feeling of being trapped. My experience was different, characterized more by a sense of contentment and a lack of urgency for change. However, this journey of mine, which I like to think of as "Taste and see," was about opening myself up to experiences and recognizing the value in what was different, and perhaps, better.

### **Learning Through Curiosity**

I have always been a learner at heart, driven by curiosity. I enjoyed acquiring knowledge, understanding how things worked, and finding connections across various domains. Stephanie became another area of interest, another domain to explore. But as I delved deeper, I realized my curiosity had been more about facts and data rather than about her as a person. I missed being genuinely interested in her thoughts, dreams, disappointments, and joys.

### **A Shift in Perspective**

My relationship with Stephanie was always important to me; I cared deeply about her and our family. However, what became clear was that my way of showing this care was not effective. I learned that caring isn't just about being present but about being actively engaged, responsive, and empathetic. This realization was the essence of my "Taste and

See" philosophy - experiencing our relationship in a new, richer way and acknowledging the improvement it brought to our lives.

## **Responding to Life's Challenges**

As we navigated life together, especially during the stressful events like the trees falling on our house, I learned the importance of sharing burdens. In the past, I might have been more dismissive or overly optimistic, failing to see and validate Stephanie's feelings. This time, I strived to be more present, to share the load, and to truly 'see' her. This was not about fixing the situation but about understanding and supporting each other.

## **Embracing Genuine Interest**

I started to shift my focus from gathering information to genuinely understanding Stephanie. I began to validate her needs and perspectives, even when they differed from mine. This was a significant change from my previous approach, where my preferences often took precedence over her feelings.

## **Balancing Preferences and Values**

Letting go of certain preferences did not change who I was at my core. It helped me to refine aspects of myself that were underdeveloped, making me a more well-rounded individual. My quirks and eccentricities remained, but I learned to differentiate between what I do and prefer, and who I am fundamentally.

## **Developing Emotional Intelligence**

The devotionals and group activities we engaged in became tools for growth. Previously, I found such activities uninteresting, but now they held real value. They provided a framework for introspection and self-improvement, allowing me to see myself in a new light.

## **Applying RARE Leadership Principles**

I found Dr. Wilder's RARE leadership principles particularly insightful. They encouraged me to remain relational, act like myself, return to joy, and endure hardship well. These principles guided me in my interactions with Stephanie and others, helping me to stay true to my values while being responsive to the needs of those around me. If you are interested in self-study or study with a coach on RARE leadership, you can find the material under Groups: Iron Sharpening Iron.

## Growing Through Self-Reflection

One of the biggest challenges I faced was learning to endure hardship well. I used to suppress my emotions, thinking it was the 'right' thing to do. But I've learned that acknowledging and expressing emotions is vital for personal growth and for maintaining healthy relationships. Jesus himself lived his emotions in the moment, and this became a model for me to emulate.

## The Value of Growth

I've come to realize that growth is a choice. It's like going to the gym – you only benefit if you actively engage in the process. My "Taste and See" journey taught me the value of trying new things, reflecting on them, and being honest with myself. It's about letting go of what's comfortable and embracing what can lead to a better, more fulfilling life.

## Conclusion: A Journey of Continuous Learning

Looking back, my journey through the maze wasn't about escaping but about growing, understanding, and improving. It was about learning to see not just the world around me, but also the people in it, especially Stephanie, in a new light. I learned that growth is not about changing who you are, but about enhancing your best qualities and being open to the experiences and people around you. This journey has taught me the importance of curiosity, empathy, and genuine interest in others, and I hope my story inspires others to embark on their own paths of personal growth and discovery.



### Reflection Question

How might some of these steps help you grow intimacy with God? Your spouse?

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# Emerging from the Maze: My Journey to Joy and Self-Discovery

Author: Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes with ChatGPT Assistance to Summarize

This is from my perspective delves into my personal journey of overcoming challenges and rediscovering joy and self-identity within the context of marriage and life. It is a story of transformation, resilience, and the power of change and understanding. This is part of my story in an upcoming book with Dan and contributing authors: ***Uniquely Us: Gracefully Navigating the Maze of Neurodiverse Marriage: Faith- Autism- Marriage.***

## Introduction: Trapped in the Maze

As I reflect on my life's journey, particularly the years leading up to 2008, I recall feeling trapped in a labyrinth of societal expectations, roles as a mother and wife, and the challenges of navigating my daughter Sydney's autism diagnosis. I was known merely as "Sydney's mom," a label that brought adversarial relationships rather than support or understanding. My identity was lost in the maze of caregiving and advocacy, and my personal needs were sidelined. The pressures from church and community only added to my sense of entrapment.

## The Strain of Unmet Expectations

The maze became more convoluted as I grappled with the pressures of being a "good enough" Christian mother and wife. I was inundated with parenting books and advice that only served to heighten my sense of failure. My role seemed to be defined by how well I served others, neglecting my own aspirations and desires. The constant message was clear: my holiness mattered, not my happiness. This led to a profound sense of loss, not just of joy but of my very identity.

## The Turning Point: A New Perspective

My journey towards finding a way out of the maze began with a pivotal conversation with a new pastor at that time in my life. This discussion opened my eyes to a different understanding of God and my faith. It was a moment of revelation that my worth and future were not tied to my marriage, family, or career but were rooted in my relationship with the Lord. Embracing this truth was the first step toward rediscovering my identity.

## **Redefining My Role and Relationship**

As Sydney grew older, we realized that Dan might be on the autism spectrum. This understanding necessitated a shift in how we approached our marriage. We moved away from traditional gender roles, choosing instead to focus on our strengths and complement each other's skills. I took the lead in areas where I excelled, like planning and organizing, while Dan found his niche in cooking. This was a significant shift from the shame I felt earlier for not adhering to traditional expectations.

## **Building a New Foundation**

Our marriage transformation wasn't solely about redistributing household responsibilities; it was about rebuilding our relationship on a new foundation of understanding and mutual respect. We started to see each other for who we truly were, appreciating our differences and strengths. We became curious about each other, eager to explore and understand the depths of our personalities.

## **Joy Building and Re-Creation**

The realization that we needed to cultivate joy and rest in our lives led us to adopt new practices. We embraced the concept of Sabbath, setting aside time each week for rest and re-creation. This practice wasn't just about physical rest but about spiritual and emotional renewal. We found joy in shared activities like bike riding and hiking, which not only brought us closer to nature but to each other.

## **Deepening Our Spiritual Connection**

Our spiritual journey as a couple deepened as we sought to connect with God together. We explored various devotional materials, which facilitated deeper conversations and a shared spiritual experience. This practice brought a new dimension to our relationship, strengthening our bond and our faith.

## **Intentional Time Together**

Recognizing the importance of quality time, we established regular "at-home date nights." These evenings were dedicated to enjoying each other's company, free from the distractions of work and responsibilities. We curated a "joy channel" of our life's happy moments, reflecting on them with gratitude and appreciation.

## **Navigating Trials Together**

The years 2020-2022 brought unprecedented challenges, from personal injuries to family health crises. Yet, these trials solidified our bond. Armed with better communication skills

and understanding, we faced these challenges as a united front, supporting each other through thick and thin.

## **A Renewed Intimate Connection**

Our journey also led to a renewed sense of intimacy. Moving away from the mindset that physical intimacy was a duty, we discovered a deeper, more fulfilling connection. This change was rooted in the emotional and spiritual intimacy we had cultivated, leading to a more satisfying and mutually pleasurable aspect of our relationship.

## **A New Outlook on Marriage and Life**

Today, I can confidently say that our neurodiverse Christian marriage is a source of immense joy and fulfillment. We've learned to offer each other healthy feedback and support, fostering growth without shame or condemnation. Our journey taught us the importance of repairing and strengthening our bond, ensuring that we continue to grow together.

## **Conclusion: A Journey of Continuous Growth**

Looking back, I see a woman who emerged from a maze of challenges and expectations to find her true self. This journey was not just about escaping the constraints I felt but about redefining my identity and my relationship with Dan. It's a continuous journey of growth, understanding, and love. As I share this story, I hope it inspires others who may find themselves in similar mazes, to seek their path to joy and fulfillment.



### **Reflection Question**

Stephanie was trapped in a marriage based identity and living a joyless life. What can you glean in taking your own steps to a joyful identity? You're your relationship have to be better before you can have joy in you life?

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## Possible Discussion Questions:

- What are your thoughts about Warner’s point that Christianity is about connection first and foremost?
- What is the main way you try to connect to God? What are avenues and ways you can develop?
- What does hearing from God look/sound like to God? Do you ask God for direction or wisdom or seek His will? When you ask God for something how does He answer you?
- What do your spiritual disciplines look like right now? Are these practices growing your knowledge or transforming you and how you treat/love/connect with others?
- Is there a correlation in your life of how you love God and how you love others? What about those in your home/family? Are you more generous with your time and resources in your home or outside of you home?
- Listening Prayers page 148-150: What have you tried?
- Did you try Interactive Gratitude or Immanuel Journaling?
- Back to the basics Appreciation, Beliefs and Connections? After reading the entire book how do you assess yourself?
- What have you learned about weight, capacity, resilience, and bouncing back? What are actively trying differently?
- Have you read any of the resources on page 159? What have you put into action from them?
- Open discussion or review of any part of the park you want to go over?



## After the Group Reflection

After the group what are thoughts you want to remember or someone’s perspective for consideration: How is your connection TO God?

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Did you Try the Journaling Exercise(s) on page 150-152/156



## **Growth Tip: Couples**

**Goal:** Growing in Spiritual Intimacy Together

**Prayer:** Beside a meal do you pray together or for each other? Some traditions pray out loud and some silently. Do you do either with each other?

**Devotions:** Do you do separate devotions and ever share what the Lord is doing in your life or ask for prayer? Do you do any form of Bible study or spiritual practices together?

**Disciplines:** Do you practice any of the spiritual disciplines or share how you are learning and growing in the Lord together or is your walk with Lord solo or in silo? Can you share with others easier why or why not?

*Final Thoughts:*

## **Lowering Expectations vs. Changing Expectations in a Neurodiverse Marriage**

### **Lowering Expectations vs. Changing Expectations in a Neurodiverse Marriage**

**Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes, Certified Autism Specialist**

I love hydrangeas! A few reasons exist for this, perhaps number one I am not allergic to them, but also I have many memories of my grandmother's curated lawn full of hydrangeas of many colors. I was mesmerized by the beauty of her yard and how she could create the different colors. She would tell me that the colors of hydrangeas can change by the soil. I often thought she was pulling my leg as adults can try to fool children but this is true. Look it up: Acidic soil: A pH below 6.0 produces blue or lavender-blue blooms.

My favorite colors are the blue and purple ones: so as I have tried to care for my hydrangeas I have tried to change the acidic level to achieve purples and blues. In my front yard, I have been able to achieve this and sometimes I put too much acidic additives in the soil and the flower turns a purplish brown. However, this was not the case in my backyard. The thumbnail for the article contrasts the 2 plants. This one plant in the backyard I would get so frustrated with! I called it friar tuck because the outside would bloom but the interior would remain bald. Each year I would fuss about the plant not fully blooming and I would enjoy it much less than the ones in the front that would turn my beautiful shades of blue and purple and "fully bloom" (as long as the deer do not eat them). Dan said, "Hun, I think this one is a different type of hydrangea and it is supposed to look this way." For years I argued that this plant simply was not blooming to its potential. He got a new phone, took a picture and some app showed me indeed it is a different type of hydrangea called the Queen Anne's Lace hydrangea and the interior does not bloom as it appears to be a crown with a lace of flowers surrounding the crown.

Oh, that changes everything! My expectations had to change because it was not the *Hydrangea Arborescens* which were in the front yard. I had to change my expectations not lower them based on the plant that existed, not the one I thought I had. With the expectations and care for the plant, I can appreciate it in an entirely new way instead of expecting it to look like the plants in the front yard.

There is a poem called "Welcome to Holland", and I do not have the author's permission to publish it here but the link is: <https://www.emilyperlkingsley.com/welcome-to-holland>

To summarize the poem, the author has an exquisite trip planned to Italy and has planned meticulously for this trip and consulted guide books and tours, but when the trip occurs and the plane lands the flight attendant says, "Welcome to Holland." The author has a decision to make, does she mourn the trip she lost or enjoy the trip she has now. The reference is to having a child with special needs although planning and expecting a neurotypical child. It was not the planned destination, but the new destination is unique with its own beauty and she will quickly need to understand the landscape of the new destination so she can fully embrace it.

This is a long segway into lowering vs. changing expectations in your neurodiverse marriage, but let's dive into that topic now.

In any marriage, expectations play a significant role in how partners relate to one another and how they experience the relationship. For those in neurodiverse marriages, where one or both partners may be on the autism spectrum or have other neurological differences, the role of expectations becomes even more critical. There's often a temptation to lower expectations to avoid disappointment, but is this truly the best approach? Or is there a more beneficial way to adapt? Can a satisfying marriage be had in a neurodiverse relationship? I believe so with proper care, understanding, each person doing their work and a change in expectations.

When many of us married, we had an expectation of marriage and for our partner. In the Christian world we may have even been promised a certain outcome if you saved yourself for marriage and chose a Christian man you would have a blessed, enriched and satisfying marriage. Then there is a later in life diagnosis and you may be tempted to say, "I guess I have to lower my expectations." If you do, you will always be dissatisfied and disappointed.

***Important note: Autism is not an excuse for abuse! This is not the type of acceptance of which I speak!***

## **The Trap of Lowering Expectations**

When challenges arise in a neurodiverse marriage, it can feel tempting to lower expectations in order to "cope" or avoid conflict. Lowering expectations may involve resigning yourself to the idea that certain things will never improve. In this context, it might look like giving up on a partner ever engaging in long conversations, planning date nights, or contributing to shared emotional responsibilities.

On the surface, lowering expectations might seem like a practical, even compassionate, choice. After all, if you expect less, you won't be disappointed, right? But here's the catch: lowering expectations often leads to settling, which can sow the seeds of resentment, frustration, and emotional distance over time.

Example: Lowering expectations could mean deciding that your partner will never initiate deep, emotional conversations. You might think, "It's just who they are," but this could lead to long-term dissatisfaction and a feeling of unmet emotional needs. Lowering expectations in this way also puts the focus on what isn't happening in the relationship, fostering a sense of defeat. You might believe you're just being realistic, but instead, you're possibly allowing negative assumptions about your partner to build up over time.

## The Power of Changing Expectations

Changing expectations, on the other hand, is a much more empowering approach. Instead of lowering the bar and assuming the worst, changing expectations means\*adapting your perspective to meet the realities of the relationship—without sacrificing your core needs.

In a neurodiverse marriage, this may involve reframing what success and connection look like. It's not about reducing your standards but adjusting how you measure fulfillment. When you change expectations, you create a space for understanding and flexibility that accounts for each partner's unique neurological makeup.

Example: Instead of expecting your neurodiverse partner to express love in long, verbal conversations, you could change your expectation to appreciate non-verbal forms of affection, like small acts of service or physical touch or planned conversations. This way, your emotional needs are still met, but through a different lens. By changing expectations, you acknowledge the uniqueness of both partners and focus on what works for the relationship, rather than clinging to a predefined ideal that might not be realistic for your specific dynamic.

## Why Changing Is Better Than Lowering

The main difference between lowering and changing expectations is that lowering often feels like settling for less, while changing expectations involves\*adaptation and growth. Here's why changing your expectations is more beneficial:

**1. Preserves Respect:** When you change expectations, you respect your partner's differences without compromising your own emotional needs. Lowering expectations, on the other hand, can lead to feelings of disappointment or disrespect over time.

**2. Encourages Flexibility:** Changing expectations allows for flexibility and adaptability, which are essential in a neurodiverse marriage.

**3. Fosters Mutual Understanding:** Adjusting expectations encourages open communication and empathy. Instead of assuming your partner is unwilling or incapable of meeting your needs, you create space for understanding how they can meet those needs in ways that align with who they are.

**4. Creates Growth:** Changing expectations provides opportunities for both partners to grow. By shifting your perspective, you allow the relationship to evolve in ways that may be unexpected, but ultimately fulfilling.

## Practical Steps to Change Expectations

**1. Identify Core Needs:** Reflect on what your essential emotional and relational needs are. Which of these can be adapted without being compromised?

**2. Reframe Your Thinking:** When you notice you're lowering an expectation, ask yourself, "How could I change this instead? How can this need be met in a different way?"

**3. Communicate with Openness:** Have honest conversations with your partner about your needs, while also listening to theirs. This creates a two-way street for mutual adjustment.

**4. Celebrate What Works:** Focus on the unique strengths in your relationship, rather than what might be lacking. Neurodiverse couples often have creative ways of connecting that differ from the norm—embrace those!

## Moving Forward Together

In a neurodiverse marriage, expectations can either make or break the relationship. Rather than lowering your expectations and feeling like you're settling, choose to change them. This shift can lead to a more fulfilling, resilient partnership where both partners feel understood and appreciated for who they truly are. Through adaptation, flexibility, and open communication, your relationship can thrive in ways you might never have expected.

Take a moment to reflect on the expectations you hold in your neurodiverse marriage. Are there any areas where you've lowered the bar that might benefit from a shift in perspective? How can you begin to change your expectations in a way that honors both you and your partner?

Would you like to know more about realistic expectations, what can change and shift? How do I shift expectations to realistic expectations for a satisfying neurodiverse relationship?

We have the book for you: Uniquely Us!

<https://www.christianneurodiversemarriage.com/uniquelyus>

The first research based book along with personal stories of the good, bad and disappointing that may come with a neurodiverse relationship.

Thank you for joining us, and we have our own book *Uniquely Us: Gracefully Navigating the Maze of Neurodiverse Marriage* available where books are sold.

## **Bible Notation:**

ESV from Bible Gateway

## **Reference to Other Books:**

Dr. Jim Wilder (and others)

*Other Half of Church*

*Renovated*

*Enemy Mode*

*Joy Starts Here*

Marcus Warner (and others)

*Rare Leadership & Solution of Choice (Wilder)*

*4 Habits of Joyfilled Person/Marriage (Coursey)*

Dr. Curt Thompson

*Anatomy of the Soul*

*Soul of Shame*

*Soul of Desire*

*Deepest Place: Suffering and Formation of Hope*

Brene Brown

*Daring Greatly*

*Letting go of Imperfection*

Blogs on our site: <https://www.christianneurodiversemarriage.com/blog>