



Preparing for an Emotionally Healthy Relationship: Renewing of Your Mind

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“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.” Mark 2:22(NIV)

What is Emotional Armor?

Many times we form a façade of ourselves to present to others as a way to prevent potential hurt and heartbreak. It is exactly that shield which inhibits the love you seek. Many times childhood events become magnified through relationships - which can lead to a mindset of equating openness with a feeling of being exposed to emotional hurt. Negative experiences can also dictate that revealing innermost emotions, thoughts and fears eventually leads to their misuse. Only when you are vulnerable in relationships and willing to show your true, authentic self can you experience the love God intends for your life.

Why Do People Avoid Being Vulnerable?

- Self-survival
- Insecurity and lack of self-confidence
- Lack of trust in self and others
- Lack of forgiveness and inability to forget past hurts and pain.
- Unwillingness to show true emotions or reactions to life situations.

Signs of Vulnerability Avoidance

- Always on the offensive, attacking, blaming or correcting others.
- Displaying a façade of strength, togetherness and always looking good.
- Pleasing others to keep true emotions, moods or pain from exposure and/or self-reflection.
- Shutting others out and keeping true feelings hidden.

Beliefs Held by Vulnerability Avoiders

- Never let anyone know how you feel.
- I'm never going to let my guard down again.
- I'll never let people hurt me again.
- Revealing my emotions is very risky.
- Dragging up the past serves no purpose.
- I have no problems, and if I did, I'd never tell.
- No one respects a weak person.

Julie's Story

Many people form negative core beliefs about future relationships before the journey begins and effectively set the stage for failure or disappointment. Take for example my friend Julie. She is a very bright, accomplished and polished young woman in her early 30's. Most people would say she has it all. Julie has a strong desire to marry and have children. She would not be “okay” if she did not have children, unlike other professional women she knows. Her greatest fear is she will run out of time to have biological children and/or marrying a man just to have children. This is a thought she not only says out loud, but also is an ever present mindset.

If Julie does not become proactive and stop cursing her future relationship experiences, she will attract exactly what she most fears. Each thought, statement and personal belief about relationships is vital. You will attract the type of relationship experience you place your focus on.

How Do I Stop Repeating My Pattern?

- 1) You've heard that what we focus on, our mind will magnify and in time as we nurture that thought, it will manifest. Even though core beliefs can become ingrained in our psyche, it is paramount that we take those negative affirmations and beliefs and do our part to reverse their stronghold on our lives. For many, this can be a daily challenge, but with practice and perseverance, you can change the way you view relationships, change your beliefs about yourself and the types of individuals you attract. The first step I suggest you do is keep a written account of what you say and think that is negative about the opposite sex, about love, relationships and yourself. You may be astonished how often you speak curses over your love life as well as yourself!
- 2) The next step is to examine what you have written and see why you have formed this particular belief and trace it back to its origin. The idea is to go back to the initial incident that became a turning point in your life and view that experience from an adult perspective. Once you can see that you are not that wounded child anymore, you can make a decision to replace that negative belief with a positive one. When you find yourself thinking or saying these old thoughts, you can immediately stop yourself and speak your new, positive blessing over your life. Perhaps you cannot see the connection between finding a great person to date and the thoughts and beliefs you have, but by reading any of the amazing stories of the Bible, you will discover that those people who trusted, feared and loved God experienced the desires of their heart when they believed that God had only good intentions for their lives. You also will find that He could not work in their lives while they were negative and felt unworthy of the blessings. You must start believing you can receive the gift of love from a person who will treat you with the respect, honor and love you deserve in a committed relationship.
- 3) Even when you discover your relationship pattern and the origins of your negative core beliefs, you still will need to be cognizant of manipulating an otherwise healthy relationship into a dysfunctional one. In the beginning it will seem a bit strange to you and if you are not careful, your mind will start telling you that it's not really love or that you're bored or any number of excuses to throw drama and chaos into the relationship. You will need to be vigilant even after you have met someone and allow this new relationship to mature and grow.

Conclusion

An emotionally healthy relationship is possible at any stage of life, no matter what experiences you have had as a child. By guarding your thoughts, mind and speech, and declaring your relationship inheritance, you are standing strong on the promises of God and not giving into old relationship patterns and defeat. Remember that God wants to give you the desire of your heart so you can experience an emotionally healthy, loving and long lasting relationship with someone who loves you for the special person God made you to be!

Exercise

For next week, journal past significant relationships focusing on the feelings that each relationship produced while you were together. In addition, look for specific patterns as you review the individuals you attract into your life.