

LOVE IS... MEETING EACH OTHER'S NEEDS

by Karen Holford



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Lori was on the phone to her mother, Rachel. “But Andy should know exactly what I need because he loves me!”

Rachel was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “When Tyrell cries, do you always know what he needs?”

“No, of course not, but he’s just a baby!”

“Maybe, but you love him, so doesn’t that mean you know *exactly* what he needs *all* the time?”

Lori thought for a moment. “OK, I get what you’re saying!” Rachel could sense the unseen smile on Lori’s face as she realized her expectations were unrealistic.

“It would really help if Tyrell could tell me what he needed. My life would be so much easier. Maybe it would help if I explained to Andy what I need from him. And maybe I should ask him what he needs from me?”

Believing that those who love us will automatically *know* what we need, *and* be able to provide it for us whenever we *want* it, is completely unrealistic. The more intimately we know each other, the more we may understand each other’s needs. But it’s much more effective if we can talk to each other about our needs and discover the best ways to meet them.

UNRAVELING MUDDLED MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Understanding what love is really all about was a bit of a mystery during the first few years of our marriage. We loved each other, and we tried to care for each other, but we’d often mess up or find ourselves in a muddle of misunderstandings and disappointed expectations.

So it was a great relief to us when we met Dr. David Ferguson from Intimate Life Ministries and his wife, Teresa, who taught us about relational needs. They gave us a whole new way of looking at our relationship and talking about how we could love each other

in deeper and more practical ways. This perspective has also helped us in our relationships with our children, our colleagues, our church members, and even the strangers we meet in the street.

The Fergusons explained that, just as there are ten important life commandments in Exodus 20, there are at least ten important relationship instructions that Paul mentions in the New Testament. But unfortunately he didn’t put them all in one chapter and explain how important they were for strengthening our relationships! If we re-described Paul’s instructions as relational needs that we all have to some degree, we could name them as needs for acceptance, affection, appreciation, approval, attention, comfort, encouragement, respect, security, and support. We find these described in different ways in different Bibles and languages, but they are all vital for building strong and healthy relationships. Ellen White

also describes these needs and stressed their importance in creating an attractive atmosphere of love and happiness.

These relational needs are also relationship-strengtheners—different actions that help us to feel loved. Without these basic building blocks in a relationship we can soon feel unloved, unappreciated, and uncared for. When we feel safe, respected, and loved, we usually feel much freer to talk

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WHEN WE FEEL SAFE, RESPECTED, AND LOVED, WE USUALLY FEEL FREER TO TALK AND DEVELOP SPIRITUALLY.



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about the things that we really need to talk about as a couple, and even freer to develop spiritually, as we understand more about the way God meets our relational and spiritual needs.

INSIGHTS IN THE KITCHEN

One day, before we understood the concept of relational needs, I was cooking alone in the kitchen. I was feeling emotionally out of sorts after a difficult day. I wanted Bernie to “connect” with me, but I wasn’t sure what I needed or how to ask for it. So I was grumpy and miserable, and as I cooked I banged the pots and pans and cupboard doors and didn’t care how much noise I made. Bernie heard me crashing around and decided, understandably, that it was better to leave me alone. Of course, that didn’t help, because what I really needed was Bernie!

A few weeks after learning about relational needs I was in the kitchen again, feeling tired and discouraged. As I stood at the sink I ran through the list of relational needs, wondering which ones I needed the most. I felt as if I needed all of them, but the ones I needed most were support, encouragement, and comfort. Put into practical terms, I needed Bernie to come and make

INSTEAD, WE ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION, “WHICH RELATIONAL NEEDS AREN’T BEING MET, AND WHAT CAN I DO TO MEET THEM?”

supper with me, talk together about how our day had been, say one encouraging thing, and give me a hug.

Bernie was also looking out for my relational needs. When he heard me struggling in the kitchen he realized that I probably needed support, so he came and made a salad. As we chatted together I was able to tell him that I needed some

encouragement, and I asked him for a hug. When Bernie talked about his day, it sounded as if he needed some comfort too. He’d been on a difficult committee, so he needed the comfort of a shoulder rub, a refreshing walk together, and some chamomile tea.

A GOOD QUESTION

These days, when either of us behaves in an unexpected or frustrated way, we no longer think our spouse is overreacting. Instead, we ask ourselves the question, “Which relational needs aren’t being met, and what can I do to meet them?” It also works well with our children and with our church members. I realize that when my colleague seems angry, he might really be feeling unsafe or disrespected in some way, and when my friend sounds discouraged she might need some support as well as encouragement.

Why is “relational need-meeting” important?

- **We need to know that God loves us.** God works hard to provide for our needs—physically, spiritually, and relationally, and God’s love becomes more real when another human being tries to minister to us in the way God ministers to us. *My God shall supply all your need (Phil. 4:19, KJV).*
- **We need to know that other people love us and care for us.** *It is not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18).*
- **When others take the time to meet our needs** it builds our self-worth in a positive way and we start believing we are valuable. We believe that we’re worth loving, not only by another human being but also by God. *Build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11).*
- **When we feel loved and valued** we have healthier thoughts about ourselves. We feel more hopeful, happier, less alone, and more able to meet other people’s needs and minister to them. *As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).*
- **We grow spiritually as we understand** and experience more about God’s love for us and how we can share that love with others. *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thess. 3:12).*

THREE BARRIERS TO MEETING EACH OTHER’S NEEDS

Ideally we learn how to recognize our own needs, and we discover the best ways to ask each other to meet those needs if the other person hasn’t been aware of them. We can also learn how to discover



what our partners need and how to ask them what we can do to help.

But there are three unhelpful and unhealthy barriers to meeting each other's needs:

1. We think our needs are more important than theirs (selfishness and greed).
2. We think we can meet all our needs all by ourselves (self-sufficiency and pride).
3. We feel guilty if other people try to meet our needs because we believe we should be the one who meets everyone else's needs (overly self-sacrificial).

If other people don't meet our needs we soon become self-sufficient. "Well, if no one's going to meet my needs, I'll just do it myself!" But in the world of relationships, this doesn't work very well. Try comforting yourself when you need a hug, or paying attention to yourself, or helping yourself feel secure. These are all hollow experiences when our needs aren't being met by other caring human beings.

THE DANGER FOR MINISTRY MARRIAGES

Ministry couples often find themselves in relational tangles or in a hurtful experience of aloneness. Ministers can easily and unintentionally give the message that their work is super-important because it's God's work, and everything else in the home and family is less important. This can leave the minister's wife feeling hurt and insignificant because she has to put her needs lower than her husband's needs. Everyone in the congregation seems to be more important than she is. Everyone else's needs are greater than hers. Eventually she feels lonely, overwhelmed, and uncared for because she *does* have needs that *do* need to be met by others for her own relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Neglecting the importance of each other's relational needs can quickly damage a marriage.

OUR TOP TEN RELATIONAL NEEDS

So what are some of these relational needs? Here's what the Bible and *Adventist Home* have to say:

Acceptance – willingly and warmly welcoming a person who has made a mistake

- "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Rom. 15:7).
- "Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude, the atmosphere that surrounds ourselves, which determines what will be revealed to us in another" (*Adventist Home*, p. 105).

Affection – expressing care through warm and gentle touching

- "And he took the children in his arms" (Mark 10:16).
- "Let the husband aid his wife by his sympathy and unfailing affection" (*Adventist Home*, p. 218).
- "Love cannot long exist without expression" (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Appreciation – expressing thanks or praise to each other

- "I praise you for remembering me" (1 Cor. 11:2).
- "The husband should let his wife know that he appreciates her work" (*Adventist Home*, p. 114).
- "Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness" (*Adventist Home*, p. 16).

ASKING YOUR SPOUSE TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

ATTENTION

I'd really like you to come for a walk with me, even though I know you have other things to do.

RESPECT

Please let me tell you some of my thoughts and ideas.

ACCEPTANCE

I need to know that you still care about me, even when I get things wrong and make mistakes.

AFFECTION

Please can I have a hug?

ENCOURAGEMENT

I feel as if this project is taking forever! Your encouragement would mean so much to me!

APPRECIATION

I washed your car for you because I know you like to drive a clean car.

SUPPORT

Please can you help me for a few minutes?

COMFORT

I'm feeling really sad. Can you just hold me for a while?

SECURITY

Can I trust you not to tell anyone?

APPROVAL

Tell me three reasons why you're glad you married me!

Approval – blessing, building up, or affirming each other

- “Building others up according to their needs” (Eph. 4:29).
- “Watch well your words, for they have a powerful influence for good or for ill” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Attention – being interested in each other and focusing on each other

- “There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:25).
- “Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions” (*Adventist Home*, p. 106).

OFFERING TO MEET YOUR SPOUSE’S NEEDS

ATTENTION

I want to spend time with you, doing whatever you’d like to do.

RESPECT

I really value your opinions and ideas.

ACCEPTANCE

It doesn’t matter that you made a mistake. It’s only human! Nothing you could do would ever stop me from caring for you!

AFFECTION

What can I do to help you feel especially loved?

ENCOURAGEMENT

I know it’s hard work, but you’re doing such a great job! I’m so proud of you!

APPRECIATION

Thank you for washing my car and filling it up with petrol!

SUPPORT

What’s the best thing I could do to help you right now?

COMFORT

I can see how upset you are. What can I do to comfort you?

SECURITY

You can trust me. I won’t let you down.

APPROVAL

I’m so glad I married you! I couldn’t have a better husband/wife!

Comfort – responding sensitively to each other’s pain with words, feelings, and touch

- “Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:4).
- “Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Encouragement – helping each other to persevere toward their goals

- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11).
- “His kindness and loving courtesy will be to her a precious encouragement, and the happiness he imparts will bring joy and peace to his own heart” (*Adventist Home*, p. 218).

Respect – valuing each other highly

- “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10).
- “Never should either party indulge in a joke at the expense of the other’s feelings. Never should either the husband or wife in sport or in any other manner complain of each other to others” (*Adventist Home*, p. 177).
- “Do not try to compel each other to do as you wish” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Security – enabling each other to feel peaceful and safe in the relationship

- “Live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18).
- “Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished” (*Adventist Home*, p. 120).
- “Let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union is a mistake or a disappointment” (*Adventist Home*, p. 106).

Support – coming alongside and helping each other

- “Carry each other’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).
- “Let the wife feel that she can lean upon the large affections of her husband—that his arms will strengthen and uphold her through all her toils and cares, that his influence will sustain hers—and her burden will lose half its weight” (*Adventist Home*, p. 216).



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION READ:

Never Alone, by David and Teresa Ferguson

Never Alone Devotions for Couples, by David and Teresa Ferguson