

## THE NEED OF NURTURE VERSES OUR NATURE

To state the obvious, men and women are different in countless ways. Descriptions include: “Venus and Mars” at times, “oil and water.” I’ll stop there. Nevertheless, different can be good once we accept it and embrace what it can mean. But different also implies a certain amount of responsibility. Whether dealing with different circumstances or different personalities, we are called upon to adjust our actions, words and response. This is true, even more so, in marriage relationships. I realize some people do not adjust or alter their course no matter what. These people subscribe to Abraham Maslow’s Hammer Principle who observed, “*If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.*” These folks do not look for better tools or better information. They look for a bigger hammer! They do not have good people skills. As for the rest of us who have or want good people skills—especially in our marriage relationship—we search for a better answer than a bigger hammer.

Numerous helpful activities can be employed in marriage and relationship counseling to help those involved to better communicate, set boundaries, get on the same page, problem solve, and so forth. However, one of the biggest hurdles for many to overcome is not a lack of resources or know-how, rather it is a tendency to stick with what seems normal. How a person has been living, behaving, and speaking for any length of time becomes the norm for them, and when all is said and done, most will drift toward what is “normal.” That does not mean people can’t change. It means change requires effort, first to start it and second to maintain it.

The fact is to be human is to do what pleases us first or look out for our needs first, unless we learn to be different. Call it what you will, it is our nature. Why should we learn to be different than we would be by nature? Healthy relationships require at least two people who are committed to nurture one another. To nurture someone is to cherish them, encourage them, support them, and help to develop them. Most people clearly see the need to nurture their children. Problems arise however, if they do not see the need to nurture the person or people with whom they are in relationships.

Although this mainly applies to those with hammers in their hands, consider for a moment how you might nurture someone with who you are in a relationship, say for example your spouse. Do they feel cherished by you? I didn’t ask if *you felt* you cherished them. *Do they feel cherished by you?* That is the question. Do they say you are encouraging? Do they feel supported by you? What have you done to help them develop or grow as a person? Criticism doesn’t count. We don’t motivate people to lose weight by calling them fat. We don’t motivate people to learn by saying they are dumb. We don’t motivate people to get better jobs by calling them a loser. I’m sure you get the picture.

The potential problem in many relationships is that some house plants have a better chance of getting nurtured than do some spouses. If there is one person in the whole world we should be able to nurture, other than our children, it should be our spouse. But it is not just a responsibility. It is one of the most basic and more powerful relationship builders in which one can engage. It increases love, positive feelings, fun, peace, a sense of well-being—I could go on and on. The bottom line is that nurturing one’s spouse is so powerful that if everyone nurtured those with whom they had a relationship it would probably put me out of business. Unfortunately, the counseling profession will need thousands of new therapists by the end of the decade just to meet the need in our society. Still, you and I have a choice as to what we will do. Nature or nurture, which of the two paths will we chose to follow?

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