

DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS

—by Sandy van der Westhuizen

Do you feel emotionally close and connected to your spouse, or have you become emotionally distant?

To understand what emotional closeness is, we first have to understand what emotions are and how these emotions influence our behaviour.

lemon; then taking a slice and tasting it.

THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

Your body responds to the thought of a lemon, without the actual lemon even being present! In the same way our physical bodies respond to thoughts by releasing

us to enjoy emotional closeness with our spouse, we therefore need to diligently guard our minds and hearts, as we read in Proverbs 4:23 *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”* The heart is symbolic of intellectual, moral and emotional functions of individuals; it is our spirit.

GENDER AND CLOSENESS

It is mostly women who complain about men not being able to express their deepest feeling and emotions. Men are blessed with testosterone, which makes them competitive and causes them to be solution seekers and problem solvers.

Consequently, many men feel overwhelmed with a woman's emotional intensity. When she becomes so intense that he feels blamed, many men simply check out by leaving emotionally or even physically. Being aware of gender differences brings understanding, and enables couples to recognise areas for personal growth. The most important way to draw emotionally closer is to spend quality time together.

QUALITY TIME

This conveys the message to your partner that she is valued as a person, that you care for her. Trust and companionship grows and a deep sense of caring for one another will develop.

In the same way the opposite happens when couples do not spend enough time together; they start feeling less cared for, trust diminishes and this may lead to a communication breakdown.

a specific type of chemical or neurotransmitter depending on whether the thought is a happy or sad one. For

Many men feel overwhelmed with a woman's emotional intensity. When a man feels pressured, he will 'check out' by leaving emotionally or even physically.

We know that our bodies and minds are integrally connected. Visualise yourself holding a ripe lemon, smelling the typical aroma of lemon as you slice the



Ever felt as if there is a wall between you and your spouse? Or that you battle with emotional intimacy as a couple or family? What is the Bible's advice?

Communication is essential for developing and maintaining the deep intimacy that God designed for the marriage relationship.

COMMUNICATE TOWARDS CLOSENESS

Self-disclosure is essential to friendship and, in particular, to intimacy. Good communication skills can be used as a great tool to enhance emotional closeness with others.

We are commanded to *“speak the truth in love”* Eph 4:15. The question is how do I speak the truth in love when I am really upset? Paul writes *“...Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, pure, lovely, admirable...think about such things...”* Phil 4:8

What is true, gracious, lovely and authentic about my partner? Thinking on the beauty of your partner will enable you to speak the truth in love. Good communication is all about choice. I can choose to keep silent, choose to say something positive, or choose to say something hurtful. Pray that God would use your words to build up one another.

TREATING EACH OTHER WITH GRACE

If you are having a hard time communicating something to your spouse, write it down. Sometimes it's easier to think on paper. When communicating use 'I' messages for example: *“I feel frustrated when you...”* instead of *“You make me angry when you...”* 'I' messages will promote emotional closeness.

The Bible teaches us many important guidelines concerning relationships. As Christians we aim at becoming mature and to live wisely before God. Paul uses two of the most tender Greek words to describe the concern a husband must have for his wife. Those words are translated in English as 'nourish' and 'cherish'. If the husband's intent is one of cherishing his wife, emotional closeness will be a natural outcome.

However, if the wife has a mindset of feeling unworthy or rejected, she will find it difficult to accept and enjoy the cherishment that her husband is lavishing on her, and that could hinder emotional closeness. Therefore, let us accept the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord, and live in the freedom, love, peace and joy that He obtained for us on the Cross! ■

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