

Intimacy and Basic Trust

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Perhaps you are reading these articles today because your mate, the person you entrusted with your heart and soul, betrayed your trust and your marriage vows. As a result of this infidelity you vowed to "never trust again." Or, perhaps, you want to begin anew after receiving news of your husband's pornography or your wife's chat room romance and you're wondering, "How do I learn to trust again?"

These important issues will be addressed by: 1) previewing a healthy model of intimacy and basic trust, 2) examining intimacy disorder and distrust, and 3) learning how to restore intimacy and trust.

Intimacy and basic trust

From cradle to grave, trust is the foundation of all healthy relationships, such as those between baby and mother, husband and wife, business managers and employees, or terminally ill patients and their caregivers.

This vital element of trust occurs in two forms: primary and secondary. Webster's Dictionary defines trust as: "confidence in the integrity, ability, character, and truth of a person or thing." The Bible, on the other hand, defines trust as the core confidence that a person is secure. Isaiah 12:2 states: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation."

These two descriptions of trust are not at odds with each other. Webster's gives an accurate depiction of secondary trust, while Isaiah describes an abiding primary trust.

God's original design for us is to have intimacy with Him (primary trust) and intimacy with others (secondary trust). When both forms of trust are solidly rooted in our lives, we can maintain stability and sanity even in times of personal crisis and chaos.

Let's look more closely at each type of trust, starting with the one with which we are most familiar.

Secondary trust

In day-to-day relationships, secondary trust is established by the other person, based on what he or she does or doesn't do. You might liken secondary trust to the stock market. When the other person performs well, trust goes up; when she performs poorly, trust goes down.

For example, I might agree to loan my friend my laptop computer because previous experiences revealed he was responsible and dependable. In addition, when he has borrowed less expensive tools of mine, he has returned them on time and in their original condition. As long as he maintains his good track record, I trust him.

Our trust gets tested, however, in proportion to the value we place on the item someone is borrowing. When a relationship is new, we might risk loaning something that is easily repaired or replaced. But, what if the item is a family heirloom? Now we begin to weigh the value of the item against the value of the relationship. As the risk increases, more trust is required.

What happens if the stakes are even higher, such as extending our love or sharing our heart with someone else? Such a request might seem too risky or almost unthinkable if we previously suffered a broken heart or only learned distrust while growing up.

Such was the life of Bethany, who grew up in a family that appeared to be “the Christian ideal.” Her biological family was intact and her parents volunteered weekly at their church. She and her two older brothers received good grades and never caused trouble. No one struggled with any serious problems, so all appeared well—at least on the outside.

Bethany learned at an early age, however, to not talk about conflicts that might be churning inside herself or inside her home. Emotional needs were considered unimportant and generally ignored. Her dad seemed to have plenty of time to give to church members and her brothers. Seldom, however, did he show interest in Bethany or extend love and affirmation to her. Once, she confided her feelings of rejection to her mother and then got shamed for not being appreciative.

Bethany drove home crying one day when her boyfriend asked her friend to the homecoming dance. She didn't expect any support from her family, but she was unprepared for the jokes directed at her during dinner. Bethany's heart was broken first by her boyfriend and then by her family. That evening, Bethany made a silent vow to never get hurt again.

Bethany's needs were not met, and her feelings of rejection, shame, and frustration were ignored. These types of encounters during the formative actually set in place a type of “trust template” which will inadvertently continue to operate throughout life. People like Bethany are ill-equipped for establishing healthy, trusting relationships. Unless their wounds are acknowledged and healed, they will tend to be more vulnerable to addictions or becoming the partner of someone with an addiction.

Primary trust

While most people are familiar with secondary trust, primary trust is actually more critical to the healthy development of the inner person (intrapersonal) and later to the healthy development of intimate relationships with others (interpersonal). Trust in utero

Most specialists agree that the first eighteen months of a child's life set the stage for establishing a person's sense of primary trust—the feeling of being safe and secure in the world. But, few realize that the months before a child is born are also critical to the development of primary trust.

For generations, women have encouraged pregnant mothers to “think good thoughts and listen to music in order to have healthy, happy babies.” People across the globe have intuitively passed this message along to their children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, since superstitions were also added to the message, “civilized” people tended to downplay this advice until eventually the concept was generally considered folklore.

Yet, look at these examples in Scripture of developing primary trust:

- Psalm 22:9 declares, “You (God) brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.”
- Also, God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”
- In Luke, Elizabeth replies to Mary (pregnant with Jesus), “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”
- David proclaims in Psalm 139 that God knew him while he was still being formed in the womb and David further proclaims he has put his trust in God.

These passages describe a trust in God that began before and right after we were born. New babies don't yet have the cognitive functions to rationally place their trust in another, but they do instinctively know whether the world is proving to be a safe or dangerous place.

Modern medical research has verified this. One study revealed that a pre-born baby tightens into a fetal curl when its mother smokes a cigarette. The baby feels pain from the cigarette's toxins coming through the umbilical cord. Another startling fact is that a baby tightens its abdominal muscles when its mother even thinks about smoking a cigarette!

There is a real and mysterious bond between mother and child that we are still trying to understand from a scientific point of view, but it is clear that a person's sense of trust can begin to develop—and be harmed—very early in life. Obviously, this process continues outside the womb and in the first few years of a child's life.

Trust in early childhood

Primary trust is either strengthened or weakened depending on early childhood experiences. A small child's perspective about himself and life (his worldview) is based on what happens at home. When love, stability, safety, and forgiveness are balanced with fair and proper discipline, the child learns that he is valued and appreciated regardless of his performance.

A child's perspective on God is also formed in these early years, and is based largely on how mom and dad model the Trinity. Parents serve as “in-the-flesh” representations of

God until the child can learn to trust and depend on Him personally. If parents reflect God's unconditional love, the child's core confidence and security in himself and in God is developed. This kind of trust involves a fundamental confidence in God to keep us secure regardless of our circumstances. This illuminates Jesus' prayer that his followers would experience the same oneness with His Father that He enjoyed.

A high level of primary trust is crucial for personal growth and healthy connectedness or bonding to others. Another name for this attachment is intimacy. Too often we think of intimacy only in a sexual context, but this is not what God intended. Intimacy means being authentically known and knowing another, sharing one's soul, and being loved and valued by another. The relationship that exists within the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) reflects the intimate nature of God, fully balanced and fully functioning.

Trust in marriage

God's design for intimacy in marriage means connecting with our spouse in body, mind, and spirit. God declares in Genesis 2:24 that the husband and wife become one body, and in Malachi 2:15, "Has not the Lord made them one in flesh and spirit" (NLV).

Intimacy of Body includes nonsexual physical contact (hugs, snuggling, back rubs, holding hands) as well as sexual play and sexual intercourse.

Intimacy of Mind includes friendship, love, respect, honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, healthy conflict resolution, and sharing of feelings, thoughts, values, joys and sorrows.

Intimacy of Spirit includes worshipping together, sharing a bible study or devotional, and praying both together and for one another on a daily basis.

Marital intimacy "Divine Style" is the closest of human experiences and is a foretaste of the union of Christ with His Church. Probably no other human experience is more fulfilling. Conversely, probably nothing is more painful than the breaking of intimacy and the betrayal of trust which occurs when a spouse is unfaithful.

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