

NURTURING AN INTENTIONAL MARRIAGE

Part 2

In part 1, we examined how we lose the intentionality of marriage. We are very intentional about most of what we do in life. We are intentional about our personal hygiene, about our work, about our education, about our recreation, and many other areas of life. Why do we think our marriage can thrive or even survive without an intentional effort to enrich and grow it? Couples who are in a marital crisis have consistently neglected this area of connection in their marriage. Let's review how we define an intentional couple.

The Intentional Couple is being conscious, deliberate, and planful about maintaining and building the sense of connection over the years, especially through *couple rituals*. We are most intentional during courtship. We are highly intentional about the wedding, what about the marriage? It is one of the biggest challenges for having a lifelong, fulfilling marriage.

In part 1, we detailed many types of connection rituals. Some principles that go with the connection rituals (those activities we do to connect regularly) are:

- The ritual is for the couple alone.
- During the ritual, we should minimize distractions.
- As part of the time together, any conflict and logistical or problem solving talk should be avoided (the time should be relaxing and, even, fun).
- The ritual is regular and predictable in its beginning (when we get home from work, going to bed at night, going out on a date).
- In a meaningful connection ritual, both partners participate actively.
- The ritual has a clear exit or ending.

Some strategies for becoming more intentional about connection and intimacy rituals include:

- Start small – do one easy-to-accomplish ritual
- Do a trial run and evaluate how it went; then refine it.
- Try elevating something you already do to ritual status (e.g. – greeting when you come home, saying goodnight at bedtime, etc.)
- Monitor the level of shared responsibility (are both partners participating and helping to initiate the time?).
- Talk positively about what you create together: be proud.
- Be disciplined but flexible (make it a regular event but not legalistic; don't berate each other if a change needs to be made occasionally).

For example, when you or your spouse arrives home at the end of the day, make it a brief but special time. Greet each other with enthusiasm and a physical touch (a kiss, a hug, a high five). Both partners make a commitment to exert the effort to make it enjoyable, no matter how they may feel or what is on their mind.

Another easy connection ritual can be when you go to bed at night. For example, whoever turns in first goes to the other one and says "goodnight" and "I love you" (or even private, secret code words) and give each other a kiss and/or hug. Or you could choose to take turns giving a back rub for a short time before going to sleep. You decide the ritual as long as it is meaningful to both and both participate!

In part 3, we will provide more examples and information about having regular talk times and some guides for dates as opportunities for intimacy building.