

# SEVEN SECRETS TO RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS

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You will Learn To...

- Set healthy boundaries.
- Understand your needs and get them met.
- Value and respect yourself in healthy ways.
- Stop emotional over-reacting.
- Communicate confidently and effectively.
- Experience true intimacy in relationships.

By Michelle Hollomon, MA, LMHC

## Introduction

Welcome to your new relationship upgrade! By working through this guide, you will improve three key relationships with yourself, with God, and with others. You will:

- Set healthy boundaries.
- Understand your needs and get them met.
- Value and respect yourself in healthy ways.
- Stop emotional over-reacting.
- Communicate confidently and effectively.
- Experience true intimacy in your relationships.

In this guide, you will become aware of yourself, your feelings and the powerful part you play to make your relationships stronger.

## **Seven Secrets to Relationship Success**

### **A Quick and Painless Guide on How to Feel Loved in Your Relationships**

Successful relationships start with a healthy relationship with yourself. You may be wanting quick tips to help you with your partner, and I promise, we'll get to that in Steps 5, 6, and 7. But first, look inward and evaluate where you are at in life. Are you experiencing painful

arguments, lonely feelings, or the discomfort of not seeing eye to eye with your partner? Is there so much hurt and frustration you just don't know how to move forward? Every successful couple I've worked with has found these steps were the key to their success. They unwound the ineffective relationship patterns they were used to, and started fresh. Use these steps to direct your heart on its new path. Each step builds upon the last – you simply can't have number 7 (True Intimacy) without number 1 (Self Awareness), and since the sections are short, you'll be able to build on each one with simplicity.

## **1. PRACTICE SELF AWARENESS**

Imagine you are planning a long trip to a destination to which you've never been. When you map your best route, you must first start with your current position. Self-awareness is nothing more than pin pointing your current position. *Where* are you, *why* are you, and *how* are you? are questions that are good to ask yourself as you get started. Practicing good self-awareness can give you the needed information to make small adjustments to your life that result in long term changes.

Feelings are gift, and we need to pay attention to them. Sometimes we don't like what our feelings are trying to tell us because they are so painful, so we blame shift, project, and deny them hoping they'll go away.

For example: if Becky's husband jokes about her weight, she may feel disrespected. If she acknowledged this feeling, she may be compelled to say something to her husband about it. Depending on the relationship, Becky's assertive move in the right direction may subject her to her husband's dismissal, which would feel even worse. In a split second, without being completely conscious of it, she denies her feelings of being disrespected and pretends his comments don't hurt her, because that is the path of least resistance. This act just splits her from her true feelings, and her authentic self.

I like to think of feelings as Messengers that ride up to our Castle of Consciousness on white horses – white because each feeling is innocent. The Messenger is supposed to deliver the Feeling message to King Reason so he can decide what to do about it, but the Messengers have to get by the Gate Keeper first. If the Gate Keeper is broken he won't be able to regulate the important Feeling Messages, and he will make one of two mistakes: he will either kill the Messenger because the message is too scary, or he will kill the King and let the Feeling rule instead. Neither option is good for the king. Without the Messengers, the King will become a numb and ineffective ruler. And without the King, the castle will become chaotic and out of order.

Our feelings give us important information by which to make wise decisions. We must slow ourselves down long enough to recognize what is going on with our feelings. If we feel hurt, it is important to check it out. If we feel stressed out, check it out. Stress is cumulative

frustration that we neglect to make inquiry about. Instead, we can examine the feelings we have, and get to the bottom of things. By asking the questions, "What do I feel and why do I feel it?" we allow our Feelings Messenger to provide our King Reason with the facts he needs to protect the castle, negotiate relationships with trustworthy allies, to avoid partnering with the distasteful brutes, and if at all possible, to avoid all out war.

It is a mistake for the Gatekeeper to dismiss a Feeling Messenger. Too many dismissed messengers will soon riot and storm the castle. All messages are important and should not be ignored, but rather, explored. This is not to say all feelings should be *acted upon*, but all feelings should be considered.

*Considering* your feelings is not *obsessing* over them. Obsessing is a spiral that doesn't go anywhere. *Considering*, on the other hand, has a destination – it is solution bound. Considering your feelings is finding out where they come from, what they mean and what they are trying to tell you. *Considering* has a plan toward resolution.

One of God's greatest gifts to us is our self-awareness. The more aware you are of how you are feeling, and what your body is trying to tell you, the better you'll be able to connect meaningfully with other people.

### Tips for Super Self-Awareness:

- Boil your feelings down to their essence- they'll usually categorize well in these five areas: sadness, anger, jealousy, happiness, fear. Start by putting your feelings into one of these areas and explore from there.
- Acknowledge your body and how it's feeling. Our body gives us emotional clues and cues. Racing heart rate, shortness of breath, muscle tension, exhaustion, headaches, sweating, sexual sensations, and gut reactions are all sensations our body is trying to communicate regarding our environment and our needs. Identify them and examine what your body is trying to tell you. Too much negative energy, stress and emotional anguish can result in chronic problems and disease,
- Ask a trusted friend to give you feedback about how you present yourself to the world. A friend is a wonderful source of information to help you become more self-aware. A good friend will be honest and loving with you.
- Keep a journal, and when your thoughts are swirling, record the feelings you are having. The act of writing slows us down enough to think more clearly.

## 2. PRACTICE SELF CARE

Do you take care of other people's needs before your own? Many women are natural caregivers for others but seldom take care of themselves with the same dedication. I think it's interesting that flight attendants have to remind us in the pre-lift-off spiel to make sure we first secure our own oxygen masks before we help those around us. I'm sure there was a woman somewhere who probably died from oxygen deprivation while trying to help everyone else get their masks on.

Good self-care is a lot more than just visiting the doctor regularly, eating the right foods, exercising and getting enough rest. These things are really important and should be at the very least, a base line for healthy self-care. Good self-care is also more than a massage, a pedicure and retail therapy. These are signs of it, but not the heart of it.

Real self-care means that *I am responsible for myself first before anyone else*; therefore I will care for myself as a valuable person. Since I am important, my needs are important, and I will pay attention to them.

Self-Care starts with listening to yourself and identifying your needs, which may not be as simple as it sounds. When I ask couples to list out 5 to 10 things they need in their marriage, I am invariably met with blank stares. Identifying our needs and saying them out loud

makes us own them, and we may even feel sheepish, or needy about having needs.

Basic human needs include nourishment, shelter, and safety to survive. But there are deeper needs of a higher order that affect our ability to do more than just survive – they propel us to *thrive*. These needs are for love, belonging, respect, significance, competency and meaning.

Making a commitment to recognizing your needs and seeking to meet them in healthy ways is at the core of good self-care. It's not only OK to have these needs, it is absolutely necessary to meet these needs for personal and relational growth.

#### **Super Self Care Statements:**

- “Even if I don’t feel loved from others all the time, I can show love to myself.”
- “God has gone to great lengths to take care of me in this life and the next; I can certainly honor Him by giving myself the same kind of care.”
- “Letting God meet my needs in healthy ways will keep me from trying to meet them in unhealthy ways.”
- “I won’t expect my partner to meet my needs that only God can meet.”
- “I won’t blame other people for not meeting my needs that I’ve taken no steps to meet myself.”

### **3. PRACTICE SELF CONTROL**

There are many things out of our control- too many to count. And trying to control these things makes us frustrated, exhausted, frazzled and down-right loony-bin-bound. When we turn our attention away from the external things outside of our control, and toward internal things that we can control, we experience true growth and peace.

Once we let go of the things we cannot control, we quickly figure out that *Self-Control* is all that is left. Self-Control is listed in scripture among other fruits of the Spirit like love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. But self-control just doesn’t have as much “pop” as the others, does it? It makes us think of restricting desserts, controlling our tempers, and feeling guilty for gossiping.

But self-control is much more than denying yourself a piece of chocolate cake, and biting your tongue. It is the ability to have peace within, even when there is no peace outside. It is the ability to let go of what other people are doing and feeling, and focusing on what you are doing and feeling. *Self-control is the surrendered self, collapsed upon the beating heart of the open-armed Savior*. This is where true power is found. The following is a dynamic and scriptural answer to negative self-talk and powerless thinking. These statements will help you exert self-control and experience self-love. Feel free to make copies and give them to your friends.

<b>Rational vs. Irrational Thoughts</b>	
<b>Common Irrational Automatic Thoughts</b>	<b>Rational Thoughts that Promote Emotional Self-Control and self-Empowerment</b>
I can't stand it!	I can put up with things I don't like. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil 4:13)
I'm a failure!	I am a person who sometimes fails, but God will never fail me. (1 Cor. 1:9)
He/she stinks!	He's not perfect either, and he needs grace just as much as I do. (Jn 15:12)
This shouldn't have happened!	God works all things together for good – even this! (Rom 8:28)
He/she has no right!	He has every right to follow his own mind, though I wish he wouldn't have exercised that right.
I need him/her to do that!	I want/prefer him/her to do that- but I don't have to have what I want.
Things always go wrong.	Sometimes, even frequently, things do not go according to my plan. God knows the plans He has for me. (Jer. 29:11)
Every time I try, I fail.	Sometimes, even often, I fail, but God will complete the good work in me until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil 1:6)
I don't know what to do!	I will know and I do know the truth, and the truth will set me free! (John 8:32)
This is just how my life is going to be.	I have the power of God inside of me to change my life and my future.
I'll never be free of this!	Since the Son has made me free, I AM free indeed! (John 8:36).
This should be easier!	I wish this was easier but often things that are good for me aren't easy. Growing hurts, but God is with me. (2 Cor. 13:11)
I should have done better.	I would have preferred to do better but I did what I could at the time.
“I am not lovable”	God knows me better than anyone, and He loves and accepts me as is. (Jn 15:13, Ro 8:35)
“I don't have what it takes!”	God's grace is sufficient for me, and his strength is made perfect in my weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)
“I can't do this!”	“I am more than a conqueror through Christ who loves me!” (Ro 8:37)

**4. PRACTICE SELF ACCEPTANCE-** Self acceptance is the beginning of healing, and the beginning of all spiritual growth.

The bible tells a story about a son (Luke 15:11-32) who left his happy home and loving Father to squander his inheritance on “wild living.” This prodigal son regretfully ended up broke, destitute, cohabitating with pigs. But one day, he woke up and “came to himself.” He made the decision to return to his home and ask for his father’s forgiveness.

I like the words the bible uses, “came to himself,” because it’s like he lost his true self along the way, and he needed to find himself again. This happens to us too. Sometimes things in our relationships have to go really wrong before we “come to our senses,” and come back to who we really are. Offering ourselves acceptance is part of this process. We see the Father accepting the prodigal son with arms wide open, without a word of condemnation.

When we mess up, our job is to come to ourselves quickly. This is a process of acknowledging honestly what has been done. This is taking an accurate assessment of our responsibility in the breakdown of our lives and relationships. This is us, owning our contribution to the mess that lay before us. Accepting every part of ourselves (the good, the

bad, and even the ugly) is the beginning of healing and self-forgiveness.

**Own your Stuff:** If you’ve been focused on the other person’s faults for a long time, recognizing your own part can be difficult. Common causes of relationship breakdown are:

- Trying to control the other person with guilt, lecture, or nagging.
- Punishing another with withdrawal or silence.
- Treating the other person as if he were *more* or *less* worthwhile than you.
- Expecting the other person to meet your needs so you won’t have to.
- Submitting to the other person’s wishes *before* you’ve submitted to God’s.
- Acting out of obligation, guilt and duty instead of love, mutual respect and joy.
- Saying “yes” when you know you need to say “no.”
- Acting like you are *less* than the person you know yourself to be.
- Shifting blame onto the other person so you won’t have to look at your own part.

- Expecting the other person to fulfill in you what only God can.

Well, did I get any right? Chances are, if you're like 100% of us, you've been there, done that. The only way to grow, is to accept yourself just the way you are and let God take care of the rest.

### **Tips for Super Self-Acceptance**

- Refuse to shame or guilt yourself when you've made a mistake.
- Refuse the notion that something is especially wrong with you, and you somehow are irreparably broken and destined to relationship failure.
- Talk to yourself like God talks to you- as a treasured child instead of a disappointing misfit.
- Take God's offer of grace and apply it to yourself when you need it the most, especially when you've acted imperfectly or even down-right ugly.

## **5. TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO TREAT YOU.**

Have you ever felt invisible, like people don't see you or hear what you are saying? Maybe you've felt dismissed or taken for granted. Did you know that the answer to these problems is found inside yourself? It's true! When you value yourself, others will value you too.

Take for example, Rachel, who desperately wants her work-aholic husband to connect emotionally with her. She uses jabs and sarcasm to let her husband know that his late hours annoy her. She warms up his food when he gets home late, and then sulks alone in another room while he eats. She nags and complains, but it just pushes him further from her. She is communicating that she has little respect for herself, her time, her service, and is in fact waiting for him to value her before she will value herself. Her attempts at getting him to connect with her actually do more to push him away.

*Instead, she must learn to communicate her worth and value, while extending a hand of grace toward reconciliation.*

Something like this would do the trick, "Dinner will be ready every night at 6:30. I look forward to having dinner with you because I love you and I want to hear about your day, and tell you about mine. If you cannot make it home by 6:30, I will either put your food in the fridge or share it with the lovely old lady next door."

This can be done with truth and grace, without revenge or hostility and can be applied to any situation.

If we want others to value us and treat us with respect, we must first value and respect ourselves. If you feel disrespect from someone, chances are, you've allowed self-disrespect to fester somewhere inside.

When you are ready to begin valuing yourself as God values you, He will bring you a few "assertiveness" tasks to accomplish for practice. When I was doing some of this work some years back, those tasks first came in a benign way. I had to become more assertive with strangers- the retail clerk, the librarian, etc. Then came a neighbor or two about a fence line and a barking dog.

Then God brought me muscle-strengthening tasks with a bit more risk. I had to assert my wishes with a few friends- and since they weren't use to this, it changed our relationship. Some friendships became closer, some became more distant. Then, I began asserting myself with truth and grace with my husband. And guess what- it wasn't as bad as I feared. Because I valued myself, I wasn't as afraid of rejection from others. When you take a risk to assert your wishes, you may feel the anxiety of the other person's possible displeasure or rejection. However, you can survive it because you will promise yourself that you will never reject or devalue yourself, no matter what. And *this* makes all the difference.

### Tips for Super Self-Assertion

- *Anxiety*: Teaching other people how to treat you involves moving out of your comfort zone and into risky territory. You will feel anxiety, so expect it. Use this anxiety to propel you back to God for strength and love. Ask Him for help, because you can't do it on your own. Develop some healthy self talk of around your value, your worth-whileness and your needs. Conjure your inner Prom Queen! Remember, there is no growth, no reward, no fruitfulness without the risk.
- *Resistance*: When you are engaged in the process of becoming who you really are, and giving yourself what you really need, you will encounter resistance- some internally and some externally. So expect it. Stay Calm, you planned for this. Sometimes I'll see an eagle fly over my house, with several black crows hot on its tail- dive bombing and pestering him. They do this because they don't want the eagle to claim his territory. Just because the crows are taunting you, don't quit soaring! Each time you practice, you'll get better.
- *Stay Loving*: It is important not to take assertion practice as a license to be mean, angry, sarcastic, harsh or rigid. But you wouldn't be that way, would you? No, not *YOU!* Stating the truth of who you are and what you need must be tempered with grace (unmerited favor) at all times, or it just doesn't count. God will make you do it over until you get it right.

**Setting Boundaries:** Assertion practice goes hand in hand with Boundary Setting. It is important to learn how to say “no”, until you can say “yes” with a genuine and whole heart. When someone asks something of you, you must determine if you are conflicted about it. If you are, you must delay your answer until you have better clarity on whether you can say “yes” with a whole heart, or “no” without guilt.

Boundary setting comes up frequently in marriage regarding making love. Sometimes women view giving sex to their spouse as a service to them, because their men “need” it. This cheapens love-making as a commodity between one powerful “seller” and one powerless “buyer,” not as the mutual exchange of love and value between two powerful equals. This un-verbalized arrangement does not fix itself overnight, but if you practice saying “no” until you can say “yes” fully and genuinely, you will change the power dynamic, stay authentically true to yourself, protect your husband from “obligatory sex” which he’ll thank you for later, and show up fully for genuine awesome love making when you’re ready.

Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” “Guard” in the original language is likened to guarding a fortress or a prison. My husband was in the military and some of the overseas Air Force bases were fenced, guarded with armed airmen, and a checkpoint at every entrance. Not just anybody

could enter without being thoroughly checked and approved. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, the security measures were even higher, with “bomb dogs” sniffing each car, and armed airmen disassembling the seats in the cars looking for suspicious stuff. This is the way Solomon says we are to guard our hearts- diligently checking who and what gets to come in and go out.

From your heart springs forth life, joy, energy, and creativity. We should not give just anyone or anything access to our most prized assets. Our heart holds instruction and the wisdom of God’s word (Proverbs 4:21). And from the heart, flows the capacity to love, to share and to trust. We guard it because it is extremely important. The better we guard our heart, the better we can share it.

It’s ok to say “no” to things that make you feel uncomfortable, conflicted or stretched too thin. Actually, it’s *essential* that you say “no.” This is the loving thing to do.

**People Picking:** When you take responsibility for yourself, your needs and your life, you will attract healthier people- people with the same values for respect, responsibility and authentic living as you. If you have some blind spots for attracting the wrong kind of person, use your friends and family as screeners. Let them observe how you act around the “person in question” and give you feedback. If you are in a committed relationship and you are doing this growing work on

your own, the dynamic between you and your partner will shift too. Over time, he will either see the changes in you and become inspired to join you on the journey, or he will leave and find another to fulfill the unhealthy role you once filled. This may be a painful, but necessary ending to an unhealthy relationship.

## 6. HEAL PAST WOUNDS

Trauma and unmet needs are common problems that result in relationship conflict. Most counseling professionals agree that trauma consists of "anything less than nurturing."<sup>1</sup> Some people have a series of small "t" traumas, some people have a few big "T" traumas, and some have a combination of both. If these traumas are not addressed, passed through and healed, they will negatively affect us for years to come. People who have experienced less than nurturing care from care givers growing up are likely to have unmet needs and hurts from childhood that creep up on them in marriage, parenting, and work settings. The remedy is recognizing your unmet childhood needs and then finding them in the context of a loving relationship with God and others.

*Splitting* is a process of denying parts of our authentic self in order to get love. People have a way of unconsciously denying, hiding or suppressing valid and valuable parts of themselves for fear of being

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<sup>1</sup> The Cutting Edge, January 2008, The Psychological Impact of Traumatic Life Experiences, Bessel A. Van der Kolk, MD

rejected, humiliated or abused. Splitting occurs as a result of painful experiences with significant people in our past. This splitting process makes it difficult to have intimate relationships with others because we can never be wholly engaged. We fear being vulnerable with another person, and vulnerability is a key component to healthy relationships. You will find that the feelings of fear are anchored in childhood insecurities and past traumatic events. When we feel emotionally flooded, devastated or numb, chances are our growth was stunted as a child and we are triggered back to that child ego state.

Pain from grief and loss often separates us from the ones we love. Our partners may not know how to communicate or connect with us when we are suffering from grief and loss, resulting in feelings of isolation and loneliness. Taking time to seek help for grief and loss issues can help you recover from the pain and reconnect with those you love.

## 7. PRACTICE TRUE INTIMACY

I sure hope you stuck with me so far, because this is the *best* step. The Intimacy Step has the power to transform every single relationship you have, if you'll let it. There are different kinds of intimacy: intellectual (stimulating conversation about shared interests) physical (hiking, tennis, activities), sexual (needs little explanation) and emotional (sharing of feelings and needs). We'll talk about emotional intimacy

here because that is the one that seems hardest to accomplish. Each relationship has the capacity to become meaningfully intimate with a few key components- trust, vulnerability, commitment, and unconditional love.

Once you have practiced the six previous steps, you will be ready to try intimacy with a partner. You have been practicing how to be a functional, emotional adult, able to regulate your own emotions, recognize and meet your own needs, and how to offer the same love you give to yourself to another person. Connecting to another person as a functional and emotional adult may trigger some child-ego fears. Connection requires vulnerability, and that may feel uncomfortable, maybe even terrifying. As long as you practice your new self-soothing skills, and depend on God as your protector and provider, you will be fine. Push through the discomfort, and share your authentic self.

When you attempt connection with another adult, you may not get back exactly what you expected. You may need to examine your expectations to see if they are realistic. You may need to communicate your expectations with the other person for greater understanding and awareness. If your attempts at healthy intimacy are met with withdrawal, anger, sarcasm, or deflection, you can check it out. You can ask some questions about it. If those questions are answered with more withdrawal and anger, then you know that the other person is not emotionally ready for intimacy at that moment.

Let's look at what healthy intimacy is.

- **Intimacy Is:** *Healthy intimacy comes when two people are able to share their experience of life together without being controlled, judged or abandoned.* When I am able to be myself with another person, sharing my heart, needs, desires and boundaries, without being judged, rejected or controlled, then I am free to relate intimately with that person, and they with me. We can understand each other without fear of judgment. We can say “no” without fear of abandonment or anger. We can say “yes” without fear of being used or taken advantage of. This way of relating to each other can be so stinking healthy that it could feel down-right boring at times! But it isn't really boring, it's just the absence of conflict and drama. What it really is, is peace.

Healthy intimacy is when you are able to keep hold of your authentic self, while sharing your reality with someone you love. The other person will have permission and safety to do the same, because you will present no threat of control or abandonment.

- **Intimacy is not:** Intimacy is not intensity or enmeshment. Many of us confuse *intensity* with *intimacy*. Relationships that have intensity are characterized by emotionally and/or sexually charged interactions where power and responsibility are tossed back and forth like hot potatoes. The lack of mutual respect and loving intimacy becomes so painful between the

two, that intensity (fighting, chaos, drama, inappropriate sex, “sexual chemistry”, intense negative emotions) becomes a substitute. A woman in this kind of relationships may say, “When we fight, at least I feel like he’s engaged.”

When a relationship lacks true intimacy, there is usually an imbalance of power too. One person will feel the burden of responsibility to keep the other person close, and the other will feel smothered or never able to measure up to expectations. One will act as more of a responsible parent figure and the other will take on the role of irresponsible child. There is certainly a connection, or a closeness that is experienced between the two, but these relationship patterns are *not* intimate. They are enmeshed. Enmeshment always produces spiritually lifeless, soul-less, lonely relationships where one smothers and the other is smothered, one controls and the other submits, one is a narcissist and the other props him up. Bad juju.

- **Intimacy with yourself-** by telling yourself the truth with grace, you enter into full knowledge and acceptance of yourself. You can be most honest with yourself when you determine to deal with yourself without judgment or abandonment. When you shame yourself, you will split in two parts- the real (who is considered not good enough) and the ideal (which is unattainable). But when you refuse to shame

yourself, allowing any emotion, dream or fear to surface and be explored, then you are acting with integrity and wholeness.

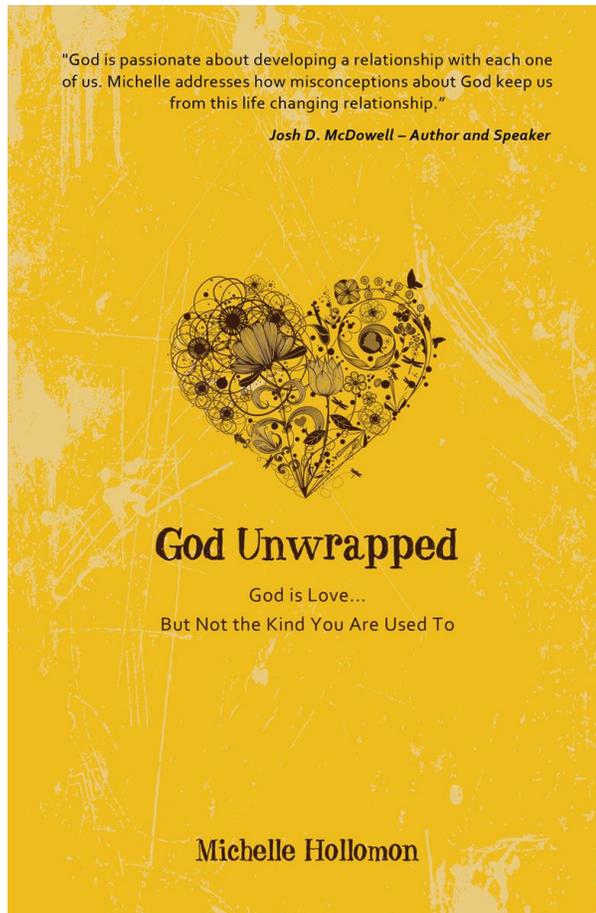
- **Intimacy with God-**by turning to Him moment by moment with a humble heart, desperately dependent on His presence, you can enjoy true intimacy with God. When you are split from yourself, then you are cut-off from God too. Being honest with yourself is being honest with God. When you are free to self-explore with God holding your hand, then you have intimacy with yourself and with God. When you show God what’s in your heart, the imperfect and the perfect, like a child to a Father, then you receive the intimate embrace from the Father. A feeling of “all is right with my world” results. When you surrender control of the things you cannot control to the Father, then deeper intimacy results in His loving hand empowering you to be a part of your own solution.
- **Intimacy with others-** connected with non-condemning, non-controlling attitude toward the other person, while maintaining your own internal and external boundaries produces a calm, peaceable, unbreakable connection. You allow your partner to have his own feelings without being offended by them or trying to change them. You say “no” until you are free to say “yes” fully. You allow him to say “no” and accept his boundaries for himself without revenge. Because you have become a functional and emotional adult, leaving childish

antics in the past, you are able to self sooth, practice new communication skills you've learned, and keep hold of yourself while reaching out to another.

**But What if I'm the Only One in the Relationship Doing These Steps?** Sometimes, there is only one motivated person in the relationship and she/he is the one doing most of the relationship heavy lifting. This can feel very lonely. If this describes you, you are probably feeling frustrated, defeated and even hopeless. I'd like to say a few things to you before you throw in the towel: 1. Continue doing your work. The work at becoming the person God designed you to be is always worth it, no matter if the relationship lasts or not. You are worth the effort to stay on course and pursue an authentic, grace-filled life. You have to live with yourself with or without your partner. 2. Give him/her freedom. Your partner may join you in leaving dysfunction behind. He/she may join you in the process of healthy communication and intimacy. AWESOME! However, he/she may choose another way with another person. Sad and even devastating as this is, it is loving to let the other person have the freedom to go. 3. Don't Ignore Abuse: If your partner is not only choosing dysfunction, but is using abusive language, physical aggression or psychological manipulation against you, then get help immediately. You

putting up with abusive treatment for the sake of staying married is not loving toward yourself or toward him/her.

Now you are ready! The journey of following God with a surrendered, authentic YOU will reward every ounce of effort you put into it. My own journey of surrendering my heart to God one layer at a time has bolstered not only my self-worth, but has transformed my effectiveness in my roles as wife, mother, friend and counselor. These powerful truths can have the same effect on your relationships too. There's nothing to it, but to do it. Blessings on your journey!



“God is passionate about developing a relationship with each of us. Michelle addresses how misconceptions about God keep us from this life changing relationship.” *Josh D. McDowell, Author and Speaker*

Michelle does a masterful job of unraveling the assumptions we have about God, and surprising the reader with the powerful truth of God’s character. *Steve Arterburn Best-Selling Author, New Life Ministries*



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Michelle is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and a Certified Professional Coach. She is an adjunct Communication professor at Northwest University, a speaker, and author. Whether it be in an office, a classroom, or a group, Michelle feels most inspired helping people realize fuller relationships with themselves, God and others.

Michelle is mother to Sweet and Sassy, wife to Mr. Dashing, and smitten for one naughty pint-sized pup. She lives near spectacular Seattle- the land of liquid sunshine and running salmon. Subscribe to her weekly Relationship Savvy Blog posts for some caffeinated insights to all your relationships.