

NURTURING AN INTENTIONAL MARRIAGE

Part 1

What happens when you do not nurture an intentional marriage? You end up with what is called **The Automatic Pilot Couple**. We do not start marriage as an automatic pilot couple. This happens when the natural flow of contemporary married life, with its busyness, crammed schedules, and endless tasks, leads towards less focus on the couple relationship over time, and therefore towards less connection, less spark, and less intimacy.

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.

Couple Rituals have three elements:

- Repetition – they are done over and over at a certain time
- Coordination – you plan it; it isn't made up from scratch each time; who does it, when, what do we do
- Significance – it is important to you emotionally and would miss it if you didn't do it; you stay committed to it no matter how you feel; friendship talk, avoiding unnecessary conflict, conflict undermines ritual

Some types of couple rituals are:

- Connection ritual – hello's and good-bye's (we often greet the kids or dog with more enthusiasm than our spouse), talk times, playing together, working together, nearly any common activity in which both partners are intentional about connection (shopping, watching TV, going for walks, talking on the phone)
- Intimacy Rituals – dates, sexual intercourse, special occasions such as anniversaries, Valentine's Day
- Community Rituals – religious services and involvement, joint friendship rituals, neighborhood activities, other joint activities to build or serve community

Phases of rituals

The transition phase (now it is started) ⇒ enactment phase (the doing of the ritual) ⇒ exit (knowing when it is over)

Strategies for becoming more intentional about connection and intimacy rituals:

- Start small
- Do a trial run and evaluate, refine
- Try elevating something you are already doing to ritual status
- Monitor level of shared responsibility
- Talk positively about what you create together: be proud
- Be disciplined but flexible

More guidelines and examples in part 2, next month!