

# Cultivating This Verbal Skill Can Transform Your Marriage

For some people, nurturing souls is a gift that is a part of their daily activities. They encourage the hearts of those they meet all day long. For others, a kind word can take an act of Congress for it to be extracted. Remember the old cliché, “I told you I loved you the day I married you. Why do I need to tell you again?” We laugh off such thoughts when we hear them, but I can tell you as a therapist who treats couples, a man or woman who is not regularly nurtured by their spouse becomes a very different person than if they would have been nurtured.

I liken the soul of a person to a sponge inside their body. This sponge needs regular watering (praise) to stay soft and alive. If a spouse decides for whatever reason not to water (praise) their spouse, this sponge begins to get dry. Over the years and decades of the sponge not being nurtured, he or she will become brittle inside. The sponge gets hard and seems to break easily. This will show up in sarcasm, anger, bitterness, rigidity and a lesser ability to give love toward the spouse who is withholding the nurturing.

What is nurturing? It is the skill to place praise and affirmation into another person’s heart. In the case of a marriage, nurturing is the ability to put that praise and affirmation into the heart of your spouse.

Many of us intuitively understand the responsibility to nurture when it comes to our children. The “I love you,” “great job,” “you’re really smart, creative, handsome or beautiful” just seems to naturally jump out of our hearts and mouths toward children. I can honestly say, rarely does a day go by with my two children that they do not get numerous nurturing comments from their dad and mother. We love to see

their little faces light up as we nurture them, clap for them and encourage them.

As Christians, many of us just accept this God-given responsibility to nurture our children. We want the primary nurturing voice of their lives to be the voice of their father and mother. We know if we build them up, they become more psychologically healthy and more resistant to life's challenges as they mature.

The same is true of our spouse. Think about it for a minute. God only has children. He doesn't have any adults on planet Earth. He is infinite, and we are fortunate to live 80 to 100 years. In His eyes, we are still just children. I think we make way too much of being adults. I am still a big child; how about you? I still need my heavenly Father's help with my life. I am not in control; He is. I am not all-knowing; He is. I am just fine with forever being a "child" of God.

Nurturing is the skill or ability to input praise and affirmation into your spouse's heart. I know most of you reading this did not grow up with parents who modeled this behavior to each other. Some of us grew up with little to no praise at all from our parents. Many of us cannot recall a positive thing said to our soul from Mother and Father. They may have lacked the skill to do so or were simply irresponsible in this area.

Even fewer of us reading this guide can recall our father saying, "Your Mom is so smart," or "Doesn't she look really pretty today?" Neither have they heard their mother affirming their father by saying, "I love that your dad did ..., He is so generous to others," or "Your dad is really a fun person to be with". I don't think I ever heard any positive role modeling of such to nurture another adult.

However, my past has not and will not determine my present. I have the right to have more excuses to not apply these

behaviors than most people. I can learn a new set of skills. Many of us have learned skills throughout our lifetime, received education and do many things differently than our parents. So learning to nurture will be just one more thing that we exercise and create a different journey for ourselves in Christ Jesus.

I honestly believe we will be accountable for how we have treated our spouses while on this earth. I believe I will be asked to answer these three questions first when I die. I know and believe this deep down in my heart of hearts, because I was in a car accident, and these three questions came to my mind as I got out of my car and was lying on the ground. Before all the heavenly hosts, these are the questions:

1. What did you do with Jesus?
2. What did you do with the spouse I gave you?
3. What did you do with the children I gave you?

I want to get A's on all three, don't you? While lying on the ground after that accident, I answered those questions to myself and could truthfully give a good account for each question.

Most of us hope that when our children grow up, their future spouse is kind and affirming to them. We have totally different feelings toward our child's spouse if we know they are willfully being neglectful to our child as opposed to if we know they are truly being consistently loving and kind toward them.

God is also a Father. He is the Father of your spouse. He loves your spouse and values them so much He died for them. Now, how do you think God would feel toward you if He knew (and He does) that you were willfully neglecting to nurture and affirm His child, your spouse?

As you can see, this point of view puts a whole new twist on the situation—at least it does for me. I don't nurture or

celebrate Lisa, my wife, based on how good she is to me or her mood for the day but because of whom she is to God. My Father loves when I love and nurture Lisa even when she is in a less than wonderful mood. I am responsible to God to nurture her for His sake, regardless of hers. You can become a great nurturer because it is simply a skill that anyone who is willing to can learn. {eoa}

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