



the
Bridge of Healing

The Healing Journey
Study Guide

Introduction

We believe that the strongest marriages are those that have found a way to integrate seven foundational attributes of a healthy relationship. We like to call those attributes The Seven Bridges. Bridges help us get from where we are to where we want to go, and help us to avoid unnecessary obstacles. They connect two parts of a singular journey.

Relationships are also a journey. Along that journey there are many gaps, gorges, obstacles and other impediments. These obstacles make it more difficult to continue on that journey. Some of those obstacles are so challenging that many people give up before they reach their destination. Some couples just need a bridge in their relationship.

The Seven Bridges represent the relational characteristics of God found in a covenant relationship. God often describes his covenant relationship with his people as a marriage. A marriage that is thriving and exhilarating. By taking the time to understand the relational characteristics of God, we will begin to gain some insights into what a healthy relationship looks like. When we apply these attributes into our relationship with our spouse, and with God, we will start to experience the kind of relationship that only a perfect and almighty God can design. The Seven Bridges are:

The Bridge of Fellowship
The Bridge of Purpose
The Bridge of Celebration
The Bridge of Humility

The Bridge of Healing
The Bridge of Forgiveness
The Bridge of Patience

We cross a bridge one step at a time. Some bridges take longer than others. The goal is to have a clearly defined path where we can begin to move forward.

Journeys

We have developed a study guide for each of The Seven Bridges to help you more fully understand these relational characteristics of God. They are great for couples to explore together or for use in small groups. Each Journey has seven steps and will allow you to understand how these characteristics apply in a marriage. We hope that they will also help you develop a greater appreciation of the relationship God desires with you.

Step One: What is Healing?

Personal Need

There are several aspects of healing and all are important to the overall health of an individual. In a world that is subject to imperfection and the sinful nature of mankind, every person will encounter some type of personal healing during their lifetime.

Read: Mark 2:17 and Romans 5:8

Healing is the process of being restored back to an intended physical, emotional or spiritual state.

Couple Discussion: What types of healing have you experienced during your lifetime?

Couple Discussion: What types of healing do you think you still need?

Physical Healing

Read: Matthew 4:23, Matthew 9:18-26 and Matthew 9:27-28

God's desire to provide physical healing to mankind is clearly evident in the miracles of Jesus. A significant part of his ministry focused on physically healing those that were sick. When we consider that God desires to draw us close to him in a personal relationship, we begin to see why healing the sick is such an important focus for God. When we experience the grace of healing, it softens our hearts and draws us closer to the Healer.

Couple Discussion: Describe a time that you went through a physical hardship and what were the challenges you experienced?

Emotional Healing

Read: Job 30:16-17, Mark 14:32-33, and 2 Corinthians 7:5-6

We read in these passages about several instances where worthy men of God and even Christ struggled emotionally. Emotional struggles and trauma are normal aspects of being human. They are not indications of personal sin or spiritual weakness, but may be a result of painful experiences in the past or chemical imbalances. Regardless of the cause, the resulting emotional state is not one that God wants us to continue in throughout our life (Psalm 147:3), although he may use it as an opportunity to strengthen us prior to healing.

Couple Discussion: What were the causes of depression for Job, Christ and Paul and how were they handled?

Couple Discussion: In what ways have you struggled emotionally and what do you think were the causes?

Spiritual Healing

Read: Matthew 4:24, Matthew 8:16, Matthew 17:18, Luke 6:18 and Acts 10:38,

Scripture is clear about the painful effects of spiritual oppression. Ephesians 6:12 also makes it clear that there is a spiritual struggle at work against mankind. It is

important to appreciate that these struggles are real and understand that the healing process required may be different than in other areas.

Couple Discussion: Do you believe the spiritual oppression is still prevalent today?

Read: Isaiah 53:5

Christ's death on the cross dealt with another aspect of spiritual healing which is spiritual separation from God. As noted above, healing is the process of being restored back to an intended state. Our sinful nature separates us from God, which was not intended at creation. After salvation, God begins the process of sanctification as he brings us to spiritual completion (Philippians 1:6).

Couple Discussion: How would you describe the process of your salvation and sanctification thus far in life?

Step Two: Why is Healing Important?

Central to the Gospel

Read: Matthew 10:1 and 7-8, Mark 1:40-42

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, he made it very clear that they should make healing a central part of their ministry in preaching the gospel. He did not however heal for the purpose of recognition as he often instructed the healed not to tell anyone. From this, we see a God that views our healing as an important part of the process of salvation. The physical and emotional healing of Christ pointed to the spiritual healing that he wants everyone to receive (Matthew 9:12-13).

Couple Discussion: Why do you think Jesus started the commissioning of the twelve disciples by giving them the authority to heal?

Couple Discussion: What are some things that your spouse does that make it easier for you to handle difficult times?

Draw Close

Read: Luke 18:35-41

To be healed, we must be drawn close to the healer. During this time of closeness, we are able to express our inner desires and make ourselves vulnerable with our deepest needs. This is the point when intimacy emerges. When we are willing to participate with God as he heals our spouse (physically, emotionally or spiritually), we will be drawn closer to our spouse in greater intimacy.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think healing has the effect of drawing us close to the healer?

Couple Discussion: Why do you think God uses healing as a way of drawing us close to him?

Increase our Faith

Read: Matthew 9:21-22, Luke 8:50, Luke 18:42 and Acts 14:8-10

It takes faith to accept and follow God. The desire to be healed has the ability to increase our faith. This happens at the point when we decide that we want healing so much that we are willing to accept a miracle that only God can provide. This burning desire to be healed brings us to the point that he is able to connect with us at a personal level.

Couple Discussion: Describe how you have experienced God during your life?

Couple Discussion: How would you rate your level of faith and why?

Step Three: What Hinders Healing?

Harsh Words

Many people struggle throughout their life from harsh words spoken over them, particularly as children. The emotional wounds these words leave are real and painful and often take many years to overcome.

Read: Proverbs 15:4

It is often easy to speak negative words towards others in the specific areas that they have struggles and need healing. It is important to recognize that our harsh words will actually prolong the healing process in a needed area.

Couple Discussion: In what ways have you been criticized in the past?

Couple Discussion: Why do you think words are so powerful?

Hardened Heart

Read: Matthew 13:14-16 and Mark 6:45-52

A hardened heart occurs when we become spiritually insensitive and lose sight of God. A hardened heart can happen very easily. It even happened to the disciples right after Christ performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. When we have a hardened heart, we often fail to recognize God even when he is walking to us. When we don't recognize our healer, it makes it more difficult to be healed.

Couple Discussion: In what ways can you become spiritually insensitive and lose sight of God?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you can focus on drawing close to God with a softened heart?

Lack of Faith

Read: Matthew 17:14-21

While a desire for healing can increase our faith, a lack of faith can also prevent healing. The difference is often a result of the beliefs and desire of the individual. This becomes particularly important when God wants to use a spouse to help heal their mate. Comments that demonstrate a lack of faith like, "You will never change!" can have a detrimental impact on your spouse and reinforce a feeling of hopelessness.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think God desires to use us in the process of healing others?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you can be more supportive of the needs of your spouse?

Not Asking

Read: Luke 18:35-42

Just like it takes us going to a doctor and asking for the doctor to heal us, we have to go to Christ and ask him to heal us. When we decide to bottle up our struggles inside, we prevent our healing. We have to be open and honest with God about our needs. Healing is sometimes instantaneous, but often a process. In either case, it requires that we ask for it.

Couple Discussion: Do you find it easy or difficult to ask God for a miracle and why?

Step Four: What Promotes Healing?

Humility

Read: 2 Chronicles 7:12-16

God continuously reveals himself with a desire to heal his people. However, it is important to recognize that his desire to heal is based on a desire for a healthy relationship. This often requires humility on our part. Humility puts us in a position to accept God for who he is and to take the steps necessary to draw close to him so that he can heal us.

Couple Discussion: How do we demonstrate our humility with God and with each other?

Sincerity

Read: 2 Kings 20:1-6

King Hezekiah was seriously ill and went to the Lord in tearful, honest prayer. God responds to us when we pray and he also recognizes our sincerity. Not only did he hear King Hezekiah's prayer, but he saw his tears. We should never be embarrassed or feel that it demonstrates any weakness in our faith to go to God in tearful prayer to reveal our inner-most desires. Sometimes, this is the exact point that God responds.

Couple Discussion: When makes a request sincere?

Read: 2 Kings 20:7

After God told King Hezekiah that he would heal him, Isaiah provided some necessary medical treatment. It is important to recognize that even after God tells us that he will heal us, he may require the involvement of others (e.g., a doctor, psychologist, therapist, spouse, etc.).

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you can make your spouse comfortable being sincere with you?

Worship

Read: Exodus 23:25, Proverbs 3:7-8

Worship is the demonstration of our recognition of God for who he really is and our desire to have fellowship with him. It brings us to God. This is God's ultimate desire. Once we draw close to God, he is able to heal us. The fear of the Lord is the acknowledgement of who he is which brings us to the point of worship.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that we can worship God together?

Prayer and Confession

Read: James 5:13-16

Many people recognize the importance of prayer when they want to ask God for his intervention and healing. However, many people also don't precede that with confession. The reason confession is important is that it breaks down the barriers that emerge between us and God and allows us to draw close to him, our healer. This passage encourages us to confess our sins with one another and to pray for each other. This is an important role of a spouse within a marriage. We should have the freedom and health in our relationships to confess our struggles. It is also just as

important to have the comfort of knowing that our spouse will not condemn you, but instead intercede on your behalf with God.

Couple Discussion: In what ways can a couple make it safe to confess their struggles with one another?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you can make your relationship safer to be honest with one another?

Faith

Read: Matthew 9:22, Matthew 15:28, Mark 5:32, Mark 10:52, and Luke 18:42

While it is clear that a lack of faith can hinder healing, it is equally clear that having faith can promote healing. Sometimes we need to exclaim as the disciples did in Luke 17:5, "Increase our faith!" Remember that faith is given by God, so we need to earnestly seek him in prayer to strengthen us (Romans 12:31 and Thessalonians 3:10).

Couple Discussion: In what areas do you think you could improve your faith?

Step Five: How is Healing Demonstrated by God?

With Compassion

Read: Psalm 30:2, Matthew 8:14-15, Matthew 9:27-31, and Matthew 14:14

God's desire for a relationship with mankind is demonstrated in a powerful way as we see the compassion that he has in healing the sick. The compassion that Christ had for the sick was so strong that it became a central part of his ministry. He saw the sick and wanted to heal them. God does not want us to be sick, whether it is physically, emotionally or spiritually. He wants to bring us to completion as he restores us to our intended state.

Couple Discussion: Do you find it difficult to respond to the healing needs of others with compassion? Why?

Couple Discussion: In what ways have we demonstrated compassion towards each other in our struggles?

With Conditions

Read: Exodus 15:26, 1 Samuel 6:3, and 2 Chronicles 7:14

While God has a strong compassion and desire to heal, he also has a primary goal to bring us into a relationship with him. That relationship requires that we put off the things that hinder us (Hebrews 12:1). Occasionally, God requires certain preconditions be met before he provides healing. That does not mean that any unmet need for healing is a result of something separating us from God, but it is something that should be asked in thoughtful prayer. Remember, whenever God had a precondition for healing, he made it well know.

Couple Discussion: What do the preconditions God set forth in the above passages have in common?

With Purpose

Read: Matthew 9:11-3, Matthew 4:23-24, Luke 4:14, 18-19 and John 5:19

As Christ began his ministry, he immediately set out to heal people. He recognized the need people had for complete healing. Jesus was purposeful in where he went and who he spent time with so that he could accomplish his ministry. He was always under the direction of the Father.

Couple Discussion: How would you describe the purpose of Christ's ministry?

Couple Discussion: How does God's purpose as it pertains to healing impact your view of your role as a spouse?

Step Six: How is Healing Demonstrated in Marriage?

Acceptance

Read: John 13:20, Romans 15:7 and Ephesians 5:28-29

As Christians, we are called to accept others with the love of Christ. When others are struggling, it is not our responsibility to pass judgment on them, but instead, show them love and acceptance so that Christ can do a good work in them. Even more in a marriage relationship, we are called to a special level of caring acceptance in the model of Christ. As we have explored, Christ saw healing as being critically important in their relationship with God. In the same way, we need to accept our spouse where they are and love them through the good times and bad. What great reward there will be for the one that loves their spouse in a way that draws them even closer to Christ!

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that one can communicate that they don't accept their spouse for who they are?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that one can communicate that they do accept their spouse for who they are?

Couple Discussion: Why do you think demonstrating our acceptance of our spouse can have such a dramatic impact on their healing?

Prayer

Read: Genesis 20:17, Genesis 25:21, James 5:16 and 3 John 1:2

Prayer is central to the Christian life, particularly as we are called to pray for others. God wants to act through the prayers of mankind. We should make it a daily act to pray for our spouse to bring healing and to keep them in good health.

Couple Discussion: How would you rate your prayer time for each other?

Couple Discussion: What are some ideas to improve your prayer time for each other?

Encouragement

Read: Proverbs 16:24, Romans 1:11-12, Philemon 1:7

We can have a great impact on others through words of encouragement. Science has shown the helpful effects of a positive attitude in the healing process. Our words of encouragement may be the one thing needed to help our spouse.

The process of healing can often feel like a battle for many people. We should realize the power that encouraging our spouse can have in helping them fight that battle.

Read: Deuteronomy 3:28, Judges 20:22 and 2 Samuel 11:25

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you can encourage your spouse?

Step Seven: Steps to Healing

Patience

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:3, Psalm 27:14, Lamentations 3:24 and 1 Peter 2:19-21

God's timing and purpose is often a mystery. We are however not called to understand that mystery, but to pray continuously and to wait patiently. This is not always easy, but when we place our confidence in the Lord and endure hardship, we know that he will welcome us as a good and faithful servant.

Remember that patience is a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Couple Discussion: How would you rate your patience individually and as a couple?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you could increase your patience?

Attitude

Read: Proverbs 15:13, 30 and Proverbs 18:14

We can choose our attitude. Our attitude whether good or bad will impact our healing process. We need to also be mindful of how we are impacting our spouse's attitude and ensure that we are being responsible with our words.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that your spouse is able to positively impact your attitude?

Prayer and Anointing

Read: James 5:14-15 and Mark 6:13

The process of prayer and anointing with oil is often overlooked by couples as a step in the healing process. Anointing with oil is seen throughout scripture as a process of setting apart in dedication to the Lord. It can become a great moment of spiritual intimacy bringing a couple closer together in difficult times.

Couple Discussion: What are times in your relationship when anointing with oil should be considered?

Action

Read: John 9:6-7 and Mark 2:3-5

Healing sometimes requires action on our part or by others, whether it is through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, or words from a pastor, doctor, spouse, etc. We should be mindful of what we should do to aid our healing process, as well as, ways we can help our spouse. Some people don't want healing. For some others it takes time to let go of past hurts that will enable healing.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think it is hard for some people to do what is necessary for healing?

Read: 2 Kings 5:1-15

There are times that we may not understand what God calls us to do before we are healed. Like in the case of Naaman, it may require humility. In Step Four, we discussed the importance of humility to promote healing. For humility to be effective, it requires action on our part to demonstrate that humility. Crying out

for help often requires great humility, but may be the first necessary step towards healing.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think it was difficult for Naaman to cleanse himself in the Jordan?

Forgiveness is also an important step that needs to be taken to heal many of the struggles people experience today. We encourage you to spend time on The Forgiveness Journey to help in this process.

Couple Discussion: Are there any steps you feel you should take in your life as you continue to improve your physical, emotional or spiritual health?



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SEVEN BRIDGES