

Counselor's Corner: *The Relationship Cure* by Steve Palmer, M.A., L.P.C., Westminster Counseling Center

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A well-known marriage and relationship researcher, John Gottman, has some interesting ways of gathering data. Along with the clinical interviews and verbal reports from the people with whom he works, Gottman has also made use of what he calls the "love lab." This is a small studio apartment where couples come to stay for a weekend while agreeing to be observed through video cameras and two-way mirrors while at the same time being monitored for a variety of physical attributes like blood pressure or galvanic skin response. It has been Gottman's hope that by this kind of exacting, moment-by-moment observation, he can really begin to get a handle on what makes couples work—and especially what makes relationships flourish and last.

He has assembled many interesting ideas through this work and I'd like to call your attention to one in particular—the "relationship bid." Gottman calls this the "fundamental unit of emotional communication." As he has observed couples, he has paid close attention to the numerous small interactions that happen over a day. He has seen again and again that these "bids" and the responses returned by partners have a small, but powerful and cumulative effect on the overall tone of the relationship.

Basically, a relationship bid is when some form of reaching out to one's partner is offered and then responded to. It's as simple as that. These bids could be as small as a gesture or a look, a brief touch, or a comment offered about something in the newspaper—or as significant as a

request to discuss a difficult topic. And our partners (or friends, or siblings, or children) tend to respond in one of three basic ways: they turn toward us, turn away from us, or turn against us. As you might guess, "turning toward" is giving our partner a positive response, even if it's as small as simply acknowledging their statement, laughing at their joke or passing the salt politely rather than with a sigh. "Turning away" is the equivalent of ignoring someone's bid, whether done intentionally or through preoccupation. And "turning against" is giving a negative response, again whether that response is small or large. Gottman's research finds a significant connection between a high proportion of "turning toward" responses and a relationship's higher level of satisfaction, sense of closeness and resilience in the face of stress. Relationships that last have a lot of "turning toward" going on.

Gottman has taken this idea and written an entire book about it called *The Relationship Cure*. His suggestion is that we can nurture and/or rebuild relationships one bid at a time—if we can just become more conscious and intentional about our own bids and our responses to the bids of those who are important to us. To me this is profoundly important. I often find myself suggesting to my clients small changes that may at times appear insignificant—but it's the cumulative value of our efforts to make changes in ourselves or our relationships that really makes the differences for which we so often long. I think anyone who has worked hard to stay patient with a child, to stay engaged with a co-worker or to stay really committed and present to a spouse despite difficulties will know what I mean. And when we can go beyond simple "hanging in there" to a presence that is actively, compassionately, positively responding to the other, I believe we can see the power of love bring about great things. I am always pleased to see science bear out spiritual principles!



Steve Palmer

Welcome New Members!

By Annika Lister Stroope, Associate Pastor

Photo by Tom Northenscold



On Sunday, May 20, Westminster welcomed the spring new member class. The fall class begins in October. Invite a friend!

"Thank You" from Barb Ingerson

As I leave my position as Westminster's accountant, I want to thank everyone for your help and friendship over the years. I have so many great memories and I will miss everyone. You have all become members of my extended family and I look forward to seeing you in the future as I will continue to worship at Westminster.

Again, thank you for everything and see you in church.