

Uniquely Us
Gracefully Navigating the Maze of
Neurodiverse Marriage
Autism Faith Marriage

Chapter 12:

Escaping the Maze of Religion & Roles
and Weaponized Scripture

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Christian couples do not uniformly interpret scripture

Faith can guide our navigation of our ND relationship.

Faith also presents a potential source for barriers and complications when combined with rigid/inflexible biblical interpretations

The combination of AS/ND characteristics and faith based rules can lead to inadvertent harm to the relationship by well meaning though AS-untrained marriage helpers such as clergy, coaches, counselors, and chaplains

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

DSM-5 ASD criteria include

- Restricted or passionate interests

- Cognitive inflexibility

- A preference for rules and consistency

Inflexible thinking has been shown to result in challenges in the workplace and in relationships

“The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance- it is the illusion of knowledge.”

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Inflexible thinking is also associated with other diagnoses, and may affect the Non-ASD partner too.

Cognitive Inflexibility or Rigid Thinking has been defined as an Executive Function issue:

...a persistent need for sameness, adherence to rituals or patterns of behavior, and a tendency to be entrenched in one's own thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of reality, often at the expense of considering others' perspectives.

Inflexible thinking is related to the ASD struggle with theory of mind (ToM)

ToM refers to the ability or challenge to understand the intentions and thoughts of others and recognize that others may have perspectives and thoughts different from one's own

Challenges in ToM include difficulties in appreciating these differences in viewpoints and intentions

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

The NA/NT brain is predictive (Peter Vermeulen research)

The AS/ND brain has predictive coding errors *especially regarding relational or social contexts:*

1. Those on the autism spectrum may pay attention to different details than non-autistic individuals. (Dr. Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnette note the positive in this feature that those on the spectrum can think creatively and be out-of-the-box problem-solvers)
2. Those on the spectrum may find it difficult to generalize new information or new learning to broader contexts and social contexts.
3. They may struggle in learning information that is not very context-dependent, as the autistic brain needs highly specific contexts.
4. Prediction errors in the autistic brain can impair the ability to adapt quickly in an ever-changing socio-relational and emotional world.
5. Precision weighting in autism “could be aberrant in several ways, each resulting in context-insensitive perceptions and actions.”
6. “The process of predicting the world and dealing with prediction errors is much less context-sensitive in people with autism than in people without autism.”
7. “The models used by the autistic brain to predict the world are absolute and therefore, insufficiently contextual.”

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Understanding the differences between ASD and NT processing and predicting is crucial for both the ND Christian couple (NDCC) and those trying to support or help them.

ASD cognitive rigidity can result in the need for sameness and predictability such as a rule to follow

Intolerance of ambiguities and black and white thinking can show up as literalism (observed bias toward understanding metaphors, idiomatic expressions, implications, irony and other figurative language in a literal way)

Literalism combined with prescribed rules and roles from religion increases complexity for NDCCs

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

The ASD profile from the DSM and research

Challenges in theory of mind

Social-pragmatic language differences in communication

Emotional dysregulation

Need for predictability or sameness

Restrictive or passionate interests

Preference for solitary time to decompress

Hypersensitivity to criticism or perceived criticism (anything not seen as appreciation or gratitude)

Fear of making mistakes or failing

Work-life balance struggles

Difficulty applying new learning in broader contexts

Lack of emotional support or reciprocity with a life partner

Inadequate compassionate care

Avoidance of conflict or disagreement

Specific sensory needs or aversions

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

What happens in an NDC marriage relationship when cognitive inflexibility and black-and-white thinking are used to interpret theology, marriage doctrine, and societal roles?

Possible interactions between different neurotypes, faith, and spiritual abuse are not well researched

Counseling professionals or clergy do not take the psychological, emotional and spiritual abuse prevalent in ND relationships as seriously as physical abuse

Misuse of scripture by Christian marriage helpers contributes to sustaining abusive relationships

Malachi 2:16

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

In a 2017 study, Neurotypical partners in NDC marriages revealed they experience heightened distress and trauma in their daily lives from:

- Unmet emotional and relational needs

- Unintentional yet harmful behaviors such as explosive anger outbursts

- Harsh discipline

- Child abuse

- Withholding sex or physical touch,

- Dismissing or demeaning needs, and

- Casting blame for not meeting the needs of their autistic partner

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

The 2017 study also found that significant distress resulted from:

- Absence of a diagnosis

- Denial of a diagnosis

- Refusal to engage with an autism-trained therapist

- Expectation for the NT/NA spouse to accommodate the autistic partner's needs

The scarcity of Christian professionals trained to support ND marriages and ND adults makes these issues worse

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Religious Abuse has been defined as misconduct by a religious leader or organization, encompassing verbal, physical, social, psychological, economic, cognitive, religious, or spiritual abuse, exploiting God-given power to take advantage of another

Spiritual Abuse has been defines as denying “one’s most precious pillar doctrines of Protestant Christianity – namely the priesthood of all believers,”

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Core Verses on Marriage and Family that when misinterpreted can lead to spiritual, emotional, and psychological abuse:

Genesis 2:18

Genesis 2:16-18

Proverbs 13:24

Malachi 2:16

Matthew 18:21-22

Matthew 19:4-9

1Corinthians 7:3-5

Colossians 3:18-20

Ephesians 5:22-26

Applying these verses out of context, with black and white thinking and cognitive rigidity can be problematic to the NA/NT partner in an NDC marriage

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

People of faith tend to feel more ashamed or guilty about mental or relational health issues and may not risk sharing their struggles or seeking help

Pastors and/or congregants may not believe in “labeling” with a diagnosis, and might even preach against psychological issues

Misuse and preaching Malachi 2:16 out of context results in many Christians staying in abusive marriages out of fear of rejection or persecution by their faith community

When pastors spiritualize or dismiss concerns about autism or ADHD, it can lead to the ND person, couple or family experiencing isolation and misunderstanding in their faith communities

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Harmful and abusive themes prevalent in popular Christian self-help marriage books:

Sex is primarily for men

A wife is to blame for her husband's pornography use (due to his sexual dissatisfaction or her unattractive appearance)

Wives are expected to perform sexual favors (sometimes specified as thrice weekly)

There is no such thing as “marital rape”

The belief that married women cannot refuse sex

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Recurrent themes prevalent in popular Christian marriage resources:

Husbands have the final say in disagreements

it is necessary to maintain a hierarchical chain of authority

Enduring abuse or suffering is a part of marriage

Verbal abuse is tolerable if there is no physical harm

Wives were advised against seeking external help without their husband's consent

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Messages Communicated in Christian Teachings:

Women are expected to remain silent

Women should confine their work to the home

Women should dress responsibly so as not to inflame a man's lust

Women should be excluded from leadership roles in the church setting

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Christian self-help books, often based on personal narratives or doctrinal beliefs, are frequently regarded as gospel truth and used in various church settings, reinforcing potentially negative or harmful messages.

When Christian literature and sermons advocate submission at all costs and downplay concerns about abuse or neglect, it becomes particularly problematic for women in NDCCs who are seeking appropriate help

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Rigid thinking, challenges with theory of mind, and rule based living when combined with misunderstood scripture can create abusive conditions in the NDC marriage

Most Christian marriage helpers are NOT aware of AS/ND characteristics and how they impact a relationship

Well meaning advice given in ignorance of AS/ND characteristics can create more harm instead of helping

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Possible AS/ND Christian Husband Reactions to Relationship Changes:

Anger rooted in mistaken strict gender role beliefs

Accusation that her actions are causing him harm

Inappropriate concept of 'fairness and equality'

Misconstruing a boundary as retaliation instead of a healthy limit

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Possible AS/ND Christian Husband rigidly held beliefs that can negatively affect the NDC marriage

The idea that the man is the head (authority) and the woman should obey even in disagreement

The belief that the wife's role is in domestic and childcare duties

Expectations of frequent sexual relations to satisfy the husband's needs

A policy of non-interference (by the wife) in the husband's discipline of children

Discouragement of the wife's outside employment if it hinders domestic responsibilities

A prohibition of marital boundaries

The husband's exemption from chores and accountability for his commitments

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

We hope that those reading who are pastors or biblical counselors will begin to *understand how their advice or use of scripture may be taken and weaponized, even if that was not the intent*

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Context (who, what, where, when) is vital in scripture

Jesus showed us how to use scripture

First see the *person*

Then address the issue(s) giving only what will benefit the person

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Differences in emotional processing matter

Stephanie shows her emotions as she experiences and processes them

Dan processes emotion quietly, and allows them to surface when alone

This caused Dan to see emotion as detracting from thinking about the problem(s)

He did not see Stephanie as Jesus does

Dan focused only on her expressions of emotion (that interfered with problem solving)

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

This caused Dan to miss out on chances to draw closer to Stephanie and become 'one' with her in their struggles

- Numb to pain that could inspire change

- Passive participation and abdication

Missed opportunities

'Thorn in the Flesh'

What affects one spouse affects both of you

- Discounting one aspect of your spouse, makes your marriage 'one' smaller

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Learn to allow and give respect to *all* of our spouse

Feeling in ways you do not understand is not a 'less than'

Our spouse is not a problem to solve

Use scripture lovingly and carefully, to build the other up
(not as a weapon)

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Malachi 2:16 “The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

Malachi 2:15-17 “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Malachi 2:15-17

Who: Men of Judah who married wives that worshipped other gods, and men unfaithful to their wives and still expecting to be blessed

What: The hearts of the men of Judah who believe they can live however they want and be blessed by God while doing so

Where: Judah **When:** about 430 BC

Meaning of 'unfaithful'; Hebrew 'bagad': to act or deal treacherously, faithlessly, deceitfully, in the marriage relation, in matters of property or right, in covenants, in word, and in general conduct

Chapter 12

A Review of How Faith or Religious Beliefs can Influence the ND Christian Marriage

Escaping the Maze: Rev. Dan's Insights and Hindsight Learning

Malachi 2:15-17

Meaning of 'unfaithful'; Hebrew 'bagad': to act or deal treacherously, faithlessly, deceitfully, in the marriage relation, in matters of property or right, in covenants, in word, and in general conduct

Malachi 2:16 is a passage about treating one another as brothers and sisters who are all made in the image of the same God-certainly something that should occur within the marriage relationship

Malachi 2:16 is **NOT** about staying in an abusive relationship