

REACHING PAST THE PRICKLY

You are well on your way to chopping down some major trees and creating new pathways! **Good for you!!** This work is not for the faint-hearted! You should have been practicing the **PROTEST** and **CATCH** while not in the active moment. Where this gets hard is trying to do the **SOFT PROTEST** and **CATCH** while in an activated cycle, in the moment of conflict. This is where sometimes the tires come off the bus.

Let me start with an illustration. Pretend there is a crime scene. At the crime scene, there are two eye-witnesses. In our judicial system, having an eyewitness brings the evidence from a place of circumstantial to hard evidence. However, having more than one eye-witness brings the case to a place of harder truth. Each of the eye-witnesses witnessed it from a different location, a different angle. Therefore, they have similar details of the crime, but they also have subtle variations of it as well. When the detective comes to do the investigation, which eye-witness will he interview? Both. Which eye-witness' statement will be included in the report? Both. Both of their stories give a bigger picture of the truth. Both statements are equally important and Both count for the bigger picture of making sense of the crime story.

When we come to a place of trigger that starts a cycle, a disagreement, or an argument, each of you has an angle of the crime scene. Both sides are necessary to see the bigger portion of the truth. Remember, our side of the crime scene is our perceptual truth. It is influenced by AMY (our stored emotional protection threat system). Even though it is our perceptual truth, it is still real to us.

Knowing and including each side of the perceptual truth into the whole story is equally important. If while out walking our partner saw a snake and you only saw a stick, it still should matter to you. Convincing them that there was not a snake is not a part of gathering the evidence for the whole report. In these moments, the tendency will be to deny the other person's perceptual truth, thinking that your version of the perceptual truth is the **REAL** truth.

The other difficulty that will happen is that both of you will want the other to know about their side of the crime scene first. This will be difficult for one partner to tolerate hearing the version of perceptual truth from their partner first while they protest and you having to **CATCH** them first before your side of the crime scene perceptual truth is then heard allowing them to **CATCH** you. A full connect cycle while activated is safe for our partner and vice versa, until the full report is complete. **PROTEST/CATCH**, then **PROTEST/CATCH**.

Another difficult thing will be to receive your partner's influence that their side of the crime scene needs to be included in the report, as well as your own. Both are the bigger truth to the story.

In this struggle, we will sometimes hear our partner but not do a good job at **CATCHing** before wanting to move to our side of the crime scene.

ACTION STEPS WEEK FIVE:

STEP ONE:

Write down some typical scenarios where your spouse will get activated, what their action tendencies will be if they are prickly, what their typical cognitive appraisals (story they tell themselves) are in those scenarios, and what their core primary emotions are in the Disconnect Cycle.

When a partner is protesting in the disconnect cycle in their typical prickly kind of way (i.e. escalated or shut down and moving away), the other partner can reach through the prickly protest and soften it. Knowing what your partner's action tendency is and when it typically presents itself is key. You have done this work in prior Modules. Knowing your partner's key areas of vulnerabilities, their typical stories in their heads (cognitive appraisals), and their patterned primary emotions in the relationship when the cycle presents itself, will be necessary if you are going to reach through the prickly protest at that moment. You did this work so that you would now have a different and new understanding of your partner. You have begun to replace the story in your head about your partner in these moments. **GREAT JOB!**

For example, when your partner typically protests in an escalated way when you show up late, your old story is, *"They are so controlling and demanding of my time. They have no compassion and understanding about what it's like for me to get home sometimes."* The new story is, *"They typically act like this when they are feeling unimportant. I know this was hard for them in the past not having a reliable parent picking them up for events."*

Reaching through the prickly would be responding to the primary emotion and the perceived new story in your head of what you know about them. Using the above example, it would sound something like this: *"I know you typically get angry in these situations when you are feeling unimportant. Is this right? If so, it matters to me and I want you to know about that, but I'm having a hard time at this moment hearing about it this way. I would like to hear more about when you are feeling unimportant. Can you tell me about that?"*

YES, this is really hard!! But, if we get good at reaching through our partner's prickly, even if it cuts a little, they will eventually de-escalate.

Let's use another example of reaching through the prickly. If your partner is shut down and using the silent treatment, the old story was *"They act like they don't even care. They are so checked out and are only concerned about themselves."* The new story is, *"This is what happens when they are upset about something and haven't been able to share it with me yet. They seem like a duck on the surface, but I know they are paddling hard underneath the surface."* So, reaching through the prickly will sound something like this: *"You typically get quiet like this when you are hurt and haven't wanted to share that with me. Is this right? If so, it matters to me that you are hurting and I would really like you to be able to share this with me."*

STEP TWO:

Now, write down the new story you will tell yourself in your head about why your partner is prickly in these moments:

STEP THREE:

Connect with your spouse and share what you wrote down in Step One to see if these are correct. Add or adjust accordingly.

STEP FOUR:

Practice reaching through the prickly with your partner when the disconnect cycle happens. It's almost sure to happen as you are progressively improving. Remember, grace and patience through this.

STEP FIVE:

End your time ***praying together*** for healing of these emotional triggers and for God to give you greater unity as you work together as co-regulators in your marriage.

REMINDER: Continue your mindset exercise from Module 1 every day to help shift your perspective!