

# Uncovering Destructive Patterns and Creating Edifying Patterns in a Relationship

Intro: As we look at these patterns, the key biblical truth to remember that your actions make a difference (Galatians 6:8). While patterns involve two people, it just takes one person actively taking steps to demonstrate Christ.

The point of looking at patterns is to launch us into better conversations about your relationship, to help you better understand each other's hearts, and to help you take steps toward patterns of mutual building up. One question to consider as we examine both building up and tearing down patterns in your relationship is, **"what actions or responses by your partner encourage you, which ones tempt you, and which ones confuse you in your relationship?"** So we need to examine the common actions and responses in your relationship that either build up or tear down to better understand the worship of your hearts.

## Some healthy relationship patterns advocated by Scripture would include:

- Weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15)
- Rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom 12:15)
- If your enemy is hungry feed them (Rom 12:20, Prov 25:21)
- Do not answer before you listen (Prov 18:13)
- Drawing out someone's heart takes humility, wisdom, and understanding (Prov 20:5)
- Reprove a wise man and he will love you (Prov 9:8)
- A soft answer turns away wrath (Prov 15:1)
- Do not answer a fool / answer a fool - depending on context (Prov 26:4-5)
- Do not rebuke a scoffer or he will hate you (Prov 9:8)

## Understanding "Pursuer-distancer" pattern biblically

There are only two ways we relate to one another in relationships. We move toward or we move away. There can be righteous and unrighteous intentions and actions associated with both moving toward and moving away from someone, the following exercise is meant to help you understand yourself more clearly as you live out this pattern in your relationships.

1. In the pursuer-distancer pattern one person responds to relational stress by moving toward the other person while the other responds to the stress by moving away. What are the potential sins that you could see happening here, on both the pursuer side and on the distancer side?

### Sins the pursuer could express:

- Impatience – feeling an urgent need to resolve an issue or to be reconciled
- Pride – personally seeking to control or fix what they think is wrong
- Anxiety – any distance feels like chaos, confusion, and a loss of control
- Defensive – Wrongfully assuming the distance is a personal attack
- Anger – Criticizing their partner for making things worse with their distance
- Fear of man – unable to endure moments without their approval, needing relational approval to calm down so they pursue until they get that approval.

**What sins might you express as you respond to relational stress by moving toward:**

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**Sinful thoughts a pursuer could meditate on:**

- "Why am I the only one who prioritizes communication?"
- "Why don't they care?"
- "Why does it all fall on me?"
- "What did I do now?"
- "How do I fix this?"
- "I have to make them understand"
- "This isn't fair, why do I always have to pursue"
- "This will never change"

**What sinful thoughts might you meditate on as you respond to relational stress by moving toward:**

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**Some sins the distancer could express:**

- Escapism – I don't like discomfort, so I'll avoid the tension
- Laziness/Deprioritizing – I can't deal with this, so I'll just distract
- Bitterness – mentally labeling the actions of the pursuer as needy, demanding, or nagging so you want to avoid.
- Anxiety – I don't feel comfortable with the vulnerability or talking about hard things, so I move away.
- Stonewalling, shutting down, withholding affection – Making your partner feel they must do something to earn your love again.
- Ignoring – Not acknowledging the other person's presence to punish
- "This isn't fair, why do I always have to pursue"
- "This will never change"

**What sins might you express as you respond to relational stress by moving away:**

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**Sinful thoughts a distancer could meditate on:**

- “Why can’t he see how his demands make me feel”
- “Maybe I’m just not good enough for him”
- “They should make the first move”
- “I just need to think about it more – and it becomes self-oriented”
- “It’s dangerous to share or be vulnerable”
- “They don’t deserve it”
- “I don’t want to have anything to do with that person”

**What sinful thoughts might you meditate on as you respond to relational stress by moving away:**

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○ **2.** What are some ruling desires and fears? List your own desires and fears associated with these roles below.

**Pursuer** – For example: Desires for Acceptance, Intimacy, Belonging, Understanding | Fear of man, fear of uncertainty in the relationship, fear of losing control.

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- \_\_\_\_\_
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**Distancer** – For example: Desire to get it 100% right, Desire for comfort, security, safety, perfection, control, order. | Fear of confrontation, Fear of hassles, chaos, punishment, being controlled.

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○ **3.** What are some potential godly characteristics of these two roles:

**Some potential godly characteristics of the pursuer:** It can communicate the desire to understand, the desire for closeness, the desire to learn, a desire to reconcile, to understand the other person, a desire to humble yourself, a desire to serve them, a desire to help. What other godly characteristics might you want to reflect through moving toward your partner:

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### Some potential godly characteristics of the distancer:

- A desire to glorify God, prayerfully reflect, and communicate in a way that puts the issue in the context of the relationship.
- To be able to understand things well and speak from truth rather than emotion. Not speaking out of fear.
- To come before God with it so that I can see my partner as God sees them.
- It's not just something you're wanting for yourself, but something you want ultimately for God.

What other godly characteristics might you want to reflect through stepping back from your partner:

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
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### 4. How to get off a merry-go-round of a destructive pattern:

- The pursuer must stop pursuing because they are in more distress about the distance and are likely trying to use various tactics to remove the distance. The pursuer must call off the pursuit, make the pursuit about trusting God and praying for their partner, then patiently waiting, and finding more natural ways to reconnect.
- Distancers must realize the unique opportunity to turn towards their partner at the right time and communicate a Godly reasoning for the perceived step back.
- Both partners must be proactive in stepping out of the destructive pattern without holding onto expectations for the other partner. The reason you get out of the pattern is primarily to demonstrate the love of Christ and to create the opportunity for your marriage to better reflect the picture of Christ and the church.

In a God-honoring relationship, neither moving toward or stepping back is completely right or wrong all on its own and often in marriage both spouses can take turns adopting one role or the other. To evaluate our response to relational stress, we must consider our intentions, our actions, and the outcomes of how we respond to discern if an action is truly a reflection of Christ's heart.

As you reflect on the information above, look at your relationship and write a response to the following questions:

- What might this pattern look like / sound like when it goes wrong?
- What might it look like / sound like when it goes right?
- What actions or responses by your partner encourage you, which ones tempt you, and which ones confuse you in your relationship?