

## **“He took her by the hand”**

### **Mark 1:29-39**

Doctor Kelli Harding in her 2019 book entitled “The Rabbit Effect – live, longer, happier and healthier with the groundbreaking science of kindness” tells us that when it comes to our health, we’ve been missing some crucial pieces: hidden factors behind what really makes us healthy. Factors like love, friendship, and dignity. The designs of our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.

“There’s a social dimension to health we’ve completely overlooked in our scramble to find the best and most cutting-edge personalized medical care. Even having something that motivates us to get up and out of bed in the morning makes a difference to our physical well-being”.

Because, as it turns out, being and staying healthy isn't something that can be addressed through biomedical advances alone. Or by more and more spending on health care. Even the usual self-help directives—“Eat better! Work out! Get more sleep! – will only get us so far. All these approaches overlook the critical social dimensions to ensuring sound minds and bodies. Ultimately, what affects our health in the most meaningful ways has as much to do with how we treat one another, how we live, and how we think about what it means to be human than with anything that happens in the doctor's office.

Dr. Harding describes one of her mentors, Dr. Engel . . . Dr Engel, who often wore a red bow tie on his rounds at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, practiced what he preached.

Those who knew him said he always noticed not just a patient's physical findings but little details about her life, such as if she had family pictures up in her hospital room or flowers delivered by friends. He was the kind of trusted doctor you'd feel relieved to see and welcome into the room with a sick family member. He'd sit down to talk with the person not just about medical problems, but about her life and priorities. He built a large consultation service to address the holistic needs of hospitalized patients, including psychological and social factors. Though Dr. Engel died at age eighty-five, at the beginning of my medical training in Rochester, his legacy of taking the time to get to know patients as human beings permeates the medical school culture and its graduates.

Dr. Engel created this illustration of the "Social Dimensions of Health: The Hidden Factors". You in the middle, one on one, social ties, work, education, neighborhood, fairness, environmental influences, and all of us. Dr. Engel believed that illuminating the hidden factors helps us to see where to focus our efforts to improve our health.

Dr. Harding writes this about the first one: one on one close bonds . . . The presence or absence of close bonds, the first ring of the hidden factors, can literally have life-changing impact. Not just for babies, but also for couples, for whom marriage is so closely tied to health. For example, Esther Klein and George Szekeres met as university students in 1933 in Budapest. At a casual meet up, along with their good friend Paul Erdos, Esther proposed a challenging geometry problem that she was working on and George eventually helped solve. After the couple fell in love and married in 1937, the puzzle subsequently became known as the "happy ending problem." But the times were changing in Hungary, and with the uncertain political atmosphere, a happy ending was no guarantee.

To escape Nazi persecution, the couple relocated to Shanghai, China, in 1939. There, George found work as a leather chemist, and eventually found themselves caught up in the Japanese occupation and brewing Communist revolution." To escape turmoil again, in 1948 George accepted a mathematics position at a university in Australia. With the intellectual freedom to reengage with academics, the pair became two of the most influential mathematicians of the twentieth century. After two children and nearly seventy years of marriage, their remarkable journey wasn't over yet. Side by side in the same nursing home room, the couple died of natural causes within thirty minutes of each other. Esther and George Szekeres's intimate bond carried them through an incredibly eventful, stressful, and joyful life. In a very different way, that bond carried them through death as well.

Our intimate, one-on-one bonds are the most important critical hidden factor in our health. From the earliest moments of life, they are the building blocks of trust and attachment that can carry us through a lifetime of relationships. Strong one-on-one bonds also provide us with a solid base to navigate our world and peacefully manage conflicts that arise.

At the end of each chapter on each of the relationships in the illustration, Dr. Harding offers practical ideas on how to improve. At the end of the one on one relationships chapter she writes . . . Consider your closest intimate relationships. What aspects, either past or present, have you enjoyed the most? What elements might you consider expanding in new or more intentional ways? Here are some ideas to get you started in the process of discovering what feels authentic and works for you.

- Express your love for family, children, and grandchildren in a way that feels comfortable to you. For some this may be physical or nonphysical affection, such as sharing words, food, a helping hand, or anticipating needs.
- Ways to increase comforting touch with those you love in your life may include more hugs, handholding, smooches, and snuggles. If it's an option, pop on a movie or read a book and cuddle on the couch. Offer a teen a pat on the back, shoulder squeeze, or high five when you greet. It may be something you have to consciously think about at first, but it's a rewarding bonding process.
- If you live alone, add touch to your life in other ways: chair massages, hair blowouts, mani/pedis, get your makeup done, or a foot/hand rub. While self-care may sound like a luxury, touch is absolutely critical for every human being.
- Lock eyes more with those you love. Try to hold their gaze for longer than feels comfortable. If you have small children in your life, challenge them to a staring contest, or mimic one another's silly faces.
- Full attention may require that everyone puts their phone away or on airplane mode during family time. Cut down on activities that distract you from paying full attention. Can that email (news, TV show) wait? Can you check emails just during work hours? Spend less time posting on social media and more time actually being social. Try an old-fashioned board game night. Play cards and practice your best poker face and playful trash talk. Or on your next family outing, pretend you're living in a pre-smartphone world.

Consider using an instant camera instead of using a phone for pictures. Please don't let moments with the ones you love pass you by.

- Before you pick something at random off your friends' baby registry, support new moms and dads in a way that gives them more time with their little one. Drop off a tray of frozen homemade lasagna, offer to run errands or take the older children out for a day, or pay for a laundry or housekeeper service.
- Good relationships are the most important ingredient in a happy, healthy, successful life, so invest your time accordingly. Set boundaries around work hours to protect family time and commitments, Schedule a few hours each week (literally put them on your schedule) to check in with those you love. Put love and connection first. Model this for your kids. Make a point of giving your kids, spouse, or dog a hug, kiss, or high five walking out the door in the morning. You just never know what a day holds.
- Celebrate your history. Consider a “they grow up so fast” family night to show your child or grandchild old photos or videos from when she was little. Show her old family photos and tell the stories that go with them. (This is also fun to do with your longtime friends). If you are married, for your anniversary, get all dressed up and watch your old wedding footage. Break out the bubbly and make a toast.

How did Jesus do it?

Dedication. After spending the morning in the synagogue teaching and healing, they go down the street to visit the house of two of his disciples, Simon and Andrew, for some lunch. But like all families, this is a family with problems. There is no lunch to eat because the cook,

Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. If you want to eat, you'd better keep the women of the congregation healthy.

Jesus knows this and so he takes her by the hand and lifts her up. Then the fever left her, and she cooked them a wonderful lunch.

Dedication. Jesus' disciples had witnessed him teaching and healing very publicly in the synagogues and now very privately in their home. It didn't matter that it was the Sabbath, although Jesus would quickly get into trouble with those law-abiding Pharisees for working on the Sabbath. We are to be dedicated to using our gifts to serve others 7 days a week, all day long.

After spending the afternoon in Simon and Andrew's house, they find that their house has become a magnet for all who were sick or possessed with demons. It seemed that the whole city had gathered on the street and around the door.

Dedication. That night Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons.

The disciples were very tired after a long day in Capernaum and slept well that night as did Jesus. But the disciples had not yet learned that Jesus was an early riser. While they were still snoring away in that house, early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

After the business of the previous day, Jesus needs some time alone in prayer – as we all do. How and when do we do it?

We all need time alone, whether it be laying in bed, sitting in our favorite easy chair reading a good book, going for a walk or run, or anyplace where we can have a quiet heart, an open mind, and a willing spirit to reconnect with God in prayer and meditation. It might be walking on the golf course, biking through the woods, or driving in your car. Whenever and wherever it is, prayer and meditation changes us slowly and gives us new life.

Jesus knew how to nurture himself and his relationships. We can learn from him and people like Dr. Harding in living healthier lives.

May the peace of God . . .

#617 – We Come to You for Healing, Lord