This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_38\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of. And let’s see what kind of healing happens here.

One of my favorite relationship gurus is Leslie Vernick. She is a licensed clinical social worker and an author and has written many books on emotionally destructive relationships. Recently I was reading her book *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage,* and came across something I knew I had to share here with you. She says, “Every grownup relationship requires three essential ingredients to thrive: mutuality, reciprocity, and freedom.”

As I was reading about each, I knew these things didn’t just need to be present in romantic relationships or marriages, but in ALL adult relationships. I love also that she says these ingredients are *essential* for the relationship to *thrive*. You know what that means— we must prioritize and cultivate a relationship environment that nurtures all three.

So let’s spend some time today diving into each one so you can consider how to foster them in your own relationships.

1. Mutuality

Leslie Vernick says, “*Mutuality* means that both individuals contribute specific qualities essential for the care, maintenance, and repair of the relationship. These qualities are honesty, caring, respect, responsibility, and repentance… Destructive relationships lack mutuality.”

For every relationship, this is going to look different, but it needs to be present. This is when both people initiate talking and spending time together and getting to know one another; they both care for one another and work to help meet the others’ needs (as much as possible). They are honest with each other at all times, no matter what. They both take responsibility for what is each’s to hold, not passing blame for things that are one person’s responsibility and not blaming self for things that are the others’ responsibility. They both come together and apologize when wrong has been done, and both actively work to fix what has been broken.

When both people aren’t mutually involved in these things, a relationship will never thrive. One person is honest and the other isn’t. One person is repentant and the other isn’t. One is trying to right the wrongs, and the other isn’t. You can see how this can get toxic and destructive quickly, but unfortunately, many relationships look like this. If you are in one that does look like that, it is time to begin some hard conversations with the other person about it. If you or the other person can’t both contribute these qualities, then maybe the relationship needs to come to an end or you can seek professing counseling for an outsider’s help and perspective.

2. Reciprocity

About this, Leslie Vernick says, “Reciprocity means that both people in the relationship give and both people in the relationship receive. Power and responsibility are shared. There is not a double standard where one person gets all the goodies in the relationship while the other person sacrificially does most of the work.”

I see this way too much in the counseling room, but sadly, because people are often afraid to be alone or afraid to confront their people, they just let it continue. A tell-tale sign of a destructive and toxic relationship is when one person holds most of the power, and the other person bows to them, so to speak. A healthy, thriving relationship should promote equality of power, not dominance or blind submission.

Both people need to give and both people need to receive. If you feel like you are the one constantly on the giving end and much less on the receiving end, what is keeping you from setting some boundaries, saying no, and seeing your own needs as important, too? It may be harder to admit, but if you are often on the receiving end and don’t give much of yourself to your people, what is keeping the wall up around your heart? What are you afraid to lose if you give more?

Relationships won’t be okay for very long if they aren’t reciprocal.

3. Freedom

Leslie Vernick says this about the final essential ingredient, “Freedom means that in your [relationship] you are allowed to make choices, give input, and express your feelings without fearing you’ll be badgered, manipulated, and punished. When freedom is present, you’re not afraid to be yourself nor are you pressured to become something you’re not.”

This does not mean that each person in a relationship doesn’t push each other to continue growing in areas of weakness or working to cease sinning or making unwise decisions, but it does mean having more realistic expectations about each other. Not expecting the other to be someone they aren’t, but allowing them to be exactly who God made them to be. Always trying to change a person is a sign of a destructive relationship.

But this ingredient also is about allowing the other’s voice to matter just as much as your own— giving them a choice about small and big decisions, share their opinions and thoughts about something, and sharing how they feel. Healthy, thriving relationships should always foster an atmosphere of emotional safety so each party is able to do these things, trusting the other won’t mistreat them for it.

When someone is mistreated when they express their thoughts, opinions, feelings, or beliefs, they will begin to protect themselves from future hurt by hiding more, being quiet more, not sharing. They won’t feel safe to be their authentic selves.

Are you the one who mistreats others when they share these vulnerable parts of themselves? Or are you the one who wants to be who God made you, but you feel silenced and unable to share? Remember, all thriving relationships must have freedom.

Friend, no relationship is perfect. You know I believe that. People are human, and they will screw this up sometimes, and so will you. That’s the beauty of grace and boundaries. But if you are in a relationship that doesn’t have these three essential ingredients, or at least in a relationship where both parties are willing to fight for these ingredients if they aren’t present, then it is time to seriously consider whether you need to stay in the relationship. If you believe you need to fight for it, maybe a counselor could help you navigate the difficulties ahead and see what can be done.

I believe everything is redeemable, but remember, it takes two to make a relationship healthy and thriving. It isn’t all on you. Listen to this with your friend or family member or spouse and talk about each of the three. Consider if they are present in your relationships and what needs to happen if they aren’t.

If you are interested in Leslie Vernick’s book, it is called *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, but she also has some for other types of relationships that I highly recommend, including *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship.*

And just as one final thought on the matter: these three things need to present in all healthy, thriving adult relationships, but everyone expresses them differently. So don’t expect someone to do them the same way you would.

Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that having these three essential ingredients in your relationships will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

If you’ve been listening to the podcast for a while (in real time), then you know that every few months, I take a short break in order to spend more time with family, get some rest, spend more time with Jesus, and take care of other responsibilities in my life. I believe in good rhythms, and this is a part of mine. For the month of July, my family will be moving into our new house, so I will need to take some time off to focus on that! This will also be a time where I’m a little more quiet on social media. I’ll be back in August, friend, and so will the Monday Minute. I look forward to seeing you again soon!

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, [kerrahfabacher.com](http://kerrahfabacher.com).

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.