

John Jordan: Welcome. It is great to have you join us today. My name is John Jordan, and I am very excited about the show. I have a very special guest Dr. David Olson, and before I welcome him officially let me tell you a little bit about him by way of introduction. Dr. Olson is Professor Emeritus of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul and he is the president of Life Innovations Incorporated. He is not only a fellow of the American Psychological Association, but also of the American Association for Marital and Family Therapy. Dr. Olson is a licensed Marital and Family therapist in the state of Minnesota, and he is the Licensed Consulting Psychologist, Marital and Family Therapist for the state of Minnesota. Dr. Olson has received numerous awards, one of the those for distinguished contributions to family therapy research. He is the author of over 100 articles, and of 20 books in the field of marriage and family. He developed the Prepare Enrich inventory about which we will talk today, and this tool has been taken by over 2 million couples nationally and internationally. Dr. Olson, welcome, it is great to have you with us today.

Dr. Olson: Ah, it's great to be here.

John Jordan: At ConnectionCare.com, we offer a compatibility test called Prepare Enrich. What exactly is the Prepare Enrich inventory.

Dr. Olson: Well prepare is an inventory we developed about almost 30 years ago from now, where it was generated by a research project where couples were going to large classes and they were finding that the couples like it, but they didn't know how useful they were for the couple. So they asked me at the University to evaluate the impact of their program and what was sad is that we found even though couples like the program, it didn't really help their relationship because it didn't apply to them, so we tried to figure out what would make things relevant for couples and we came up with the idea of this assessment because Prepare asked specific questions about how each person sees their relationship in core relationship areas like communication, conflict, roles. So, it was out of that, that we found that once couples answered a 165 questions about their relationships, all of a sudden they got curious, what did my partner say about this? And so they started talking with each other, and that's a core of where we started.

John Jordan: Dr Olson, there are many relational areas that make a big difference in compatibility. What relational areas are examined in Prepare Enrich?

Dr. Olson: We look at communication, conflict, roles, sexuality, what kind of spiritual beliefs they have, how they handle leisure. We also ask things about their family of origin, family they grew up in because we know that they learn a lot about relationships from their parents, and they will tend to either repeat or do the opposite of what they saw in their family of origin. So we look at a lot of different core areas and what's interesting is that we want to get his perspective and her perspective on the relationship and how much do they agree as a couple. And so a counselor using this would get a 15-20 page report on the couple, what their strengths are, what their issues are, and then the counselor then works with the couple, talking about these specific issues from their relationship, so that's why their feedback is very personalized.

John Jordan: We feel that there are some relational areas that are very important here at ConnectionCare.com, what are some of those important areas?

Dr.Olson: If we had to predict how satisfied they are as a pre-marital couple or even a married couple, there's probably 5 areas that are the best predictors. Communication, conflict, how close they feel, how flexible they are, and how they get along in terms of their personality compatibility. Those 5 areas.

John Jordan: Are there some specific goals that you try to set for the inventories?

Dr.Olson: Well, when you talk about goals we actually in the feedback process have six couple exercises and they tie until what the goals are for doing this program. One goal, the first is, to look at your strengths what you have to build on, but also what kind of issues you have. The second thing is that we look at communication and we teach how to be assertive and how to be better at listening, we call it active listening. The third thing is that we look at conflict resolution. How can you resolve conflict, and we have a 10-step model. The 4<sup>th</sup> is we look at finance, because finance is a big issue for all couples, and then we spend a time looking at family of origin. What are they each bringing in to their family, from their family that they want to repeat, and what do they not want to repeat in their own couple relationship from what they experience in their family. And the last is we look at goals. What are your goals for yourself, what are your goals for your marriage, and then goals for a family. So those six couple exercises really are designed to increase their awareness, to resolve some issues, teach them some basic communication and conflict resolution skills that they can use not only for current issues, but future issues as they move forward.

John Jordan: Dr. Olson, of course you would agree that there are many different types of couples out there, so there need to be different types of inventories for those couples. What are the different types of the inventories for the Prepare Enrich assessment?

Dr.Olson: Well, actually there are five different couple inventories. The first inventory is Prepare which is the core inventory, we started with, then we found a lot of couples are co-habiting, and so we developed an inventory for co-habiting couples called Prepare CC. Also in our culture now about a third of the marriages are between couples where there is already children involved. So we developed a Prepare MC, it stands for marriage with children. The next inventory called Enrich was developed early on for married couples and then in the last few years we started working with more older couples, who are either coming in for counseling or just getting married again, one spouse died or divorced and they are over the age of say 60, and that inventory's called Made. So we have really five different couple inventories that we use, the couple takes the inventory that's relevant to them, either they take it a paper and pencil version, or they can take it online, and then the counselor gets a report and then meets with the couple anywhere from 3-5 sessions, and goes over these exercises that I discussed and then integrates the information from the report in to those exercises with the couple. So by the time the couple is done, we cover a lot of the core issues for them and got them off to a good start for marriage.

John Jordan: ConnectionCare.com likes to use the Prepare inventory because it has been around for a long time, it's got a good track record, how long have these inventories been around?

Dr.Olson: Well, Prepare was developed over almost 30 years ago now. And we are just getting ready to launch a fifth version of it next year. The second instrument we developed was Enrich followed by Prepare MC, marriage with children and then the co-habiting inventory, and the last one was Made, which was developed just 3 years ago.

John Jordan: And as far as their accuracy, do the assessments really work?

Dr.Olson: Well, that's a good question. That was one of the first questions we address when we started doing research, and we find that in actually three studies, where we gave Prepare before marriage and then followed couples three years after marriage, that we could predict with 80-85% accuracy, which couple got divorced, and that's kind of an amazing in social science to be able to predict at that high level of accuracy.

John Jordan: Yes, I would imagine, so it really can't help the couple.

Dr.Olson: And what it does is that it really helps the counselor working with the couple know if there at high risk, I am going to have to put more time and effort in to helping them, then if they are low risk couple and so it's a very useful kind of indicator and we don't try to predict for an individual couple, but it does give us ideas about how much couples have to work on issues before they are ready for marriage.

John Jordan: Dr. Olson, you mentioned high risk and low risk couples, will the counselor ever tell the person that their marriage is a little bit difficult, will they suggest that they not get married or how would you work that?

Dr.Olson: Well, we train people not to tell a couple about whether they make a choice of getting married or not. But what we do say is that if a couple is high-risk, that we highly recommend more pre-marital counseling sessions, and if things are still not resolved that the couple come back after their marriage, so they can build a stronger relationship because you can really make a lot of progress with the couple early in their relationship. Kind of like treating cancer. You catch it early, you can be much more effective. However, if you wait until the terminal stages, then your chances of success are not as good, it's the same thing with working with marital issues.

John Jordan: We try to get a couple to connect here at ConnectionCare.com by giving them certain tools, what should the couple do with the information that is given to them after the assessment?

Dr.Olson: Well basically what the person working with the couple will do, is often teach them how to communicate more effectively, also use our 10-step model for resolving differences and we'll actually take some concrete issues that the couple has and have

them do it in the counseling session, but also do it at home on their own. So we can see how well they can do it and what kind of issues they have, when they don't have the support, and then as they work through more and more difficult issues, they learn better how to relate, how to prevent issues from occurring and when they do occur, how to resolve them.

John Jordan: Dr. Olson, let's say that the couple says that we already do all of those things that you suggest. Why do we really need to take a pre-marital assessment or a marital assessment?

Dr. Olson: Most couples think that they are off to a good start, that's one of the nice things about our assessment, it really tells us if they are or not. And some couples are much more insightful than others. But some times high risk couples, they know things aren't going well, but they don't know what to do about it or how to change it. They also feel like we're already making out wedding plans is too late to do anything, our experience is that, it's never too late. It's better to start pre-marital counseling a year before the wedding. So to use that, the first, if they did it a year before the wedding and worked for 6 months on the marriage, then the next six months, the last six months they could focus more exclusively on the wedding, and actually during the wedding process and planning, they can integrate some of the skills we have taught them, and use it because even planning the wedding can be very conflicting and difficult.

John Jordan: It sounds to me like there is a lot involved, even in marital preparation, that alone in marriage, would you suggest or shouldn't a couple go see a professional therapist?

Dr. Olson: Well, our experience is that our program for pre-marital couples, people that go through our day training can really help pre-marital couples and in fact there is a lot of marriage mentor couples that are quite good, that have successful marriages and can be very helpful to pre-marital couples. The couples that really need a marital therapist are the ones that I talked about earlier that have been married a few years and one or both are already thinking about divorce, at that point you are treating terminal cancer, and you need some one who has a lot of training in working with highly conflicted couples, those distressed couples are very hard to work with, and that does require a marriage and family therapist.

John Jordan: But a Prepare Enrich assessment would be a good gauge as to whether they should continue with the marital therapist or not?

Dr. Olson: Well, I think what it does one of the advantages of using the assessment is that it tells the person working with the couple, either a pre-marital couple or a married couple, very quickly what are the strengths and what are the issues for this couple, and this kind of a quick assessment that saves the counselor a lot of time and helps them get right to the core issues very quickly, so they don't have to spend a lot of time just visiting and talking in general, they can really spend their time trying to help the couple resolve on going issues.

John Jordan: Dr. Olson, our last question. What should a couple do if they are preparing for marriage or if they are married, what is the first thing that they should do about this inventory or about helping to improve their marriage?

Dr.Olson: Well, I guess, what we have learned over the years is that taking some kind of couple assessment really helps you to start talking about relevant issues in your relationship. Most couples find it hard to bring up talking about their relationship. And a couple assessment like Prepare and Enrich, stimulates people's interest and ability to talk about things because they have kind of been primed, it's like in the olden days you had to put water in to a pump to get it primed to make it work, and that's how this assessment is, it's like priming the pump, and once the couples start talking they find, they learn a lot about each other, there is a lot of surprises, and lot of good things. They can identify their strengths, and addition to finding out, areas where they could improve and ultimately that's how marriages grow is by talking about what you like, what you don't like, how you can make things better. So we think it's a really important first step and then if they need help they can also go to other people that can be helpful to them.

John Jordan: Dr. David Olson, President of Life Innovations Inc., also the creator of the Prepare Enrich inventory, Dr. Olson, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dr.Olson: Thank you.