



Lesson 1

PUTTING YOUR MARRIAGE IN PERSPECTIVE

Marriage has a way of revealing who we really are as partners in search of intimacy. There are many threats and dangers that seek to hinder the intimacy of our marriages. We cannot find intimacy in our relationship without being connected so that we can face the strongholds and spiritual warfare that we will confront.

Whether you want to enrich and strengthen your marriage or find hope for a troubled or broken marriage, *The Heart & Soul of a Real Marriage* will offer you practical resources to help you on your journey toward intimacy.

Putting Your Marriage in Perspective

When God said, "It is not good that man be alone," God was declaring that man was created and designed to experience deep intimacy with another person of the opposite sex.

God designed marriage to fill this deep need for relationship between a man and a woman. This relationship is described as two becoming one flesh.

Deep within each of us is this core need to experience intimacy with a person of the opposite sex that allows us to push away loneliness and experience a connectedness that offers love, acceptance, safety, and the need to make a meaningful impact on another person.

Marriage on the Surface

We enter marriage believing that we have found that special person who will take away our loneliness. We have found love. There is a mystery about this person that draws us to them. Somehow we were meant for each other.

From this point forward, we believe that we will not feel alone again. Our love will surely grow deeper. We will live happily ever after. We believe that we know all that we need to know about this special person.

It usually doesn't take us long to realize that the honeymoon does not last forever.

A wall begins to come between our partner and ourselves. Was our love really blind? Perhaps we saw what we wanted to see in the person we fell in love with. Marriage has a way of causing us to wake up to reality.

Love is blind, but after you become married you will see again. – Polish saying

When you have fire in your heart, smoke gets in your eyes. – Russian saying

The wall continues to build. The wall represents unresolved issues that develop in our marriage over time.



What are problems that can develop in a marriage?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money Issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication Problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criticism | <input type="checkbox"/> Infidelity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal/Emotional Abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Mistrust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Control Issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Intimacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Addictions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Addictions | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

It doesn't take long for us to begin to wonder if we made a mistake in marrying our spouse. We begin to blame each other. We may even begin to see our spouse as the enemy. Our loving partner now appears to be very selfish.

What are problems that your marriage has or is currently experiencing? What events have taken place during your marriage that have had an effect on your relationship?

Problems	Events
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Marriage Below the Surface

To get a better grasp of the problems that have built up this wall in our marriage, we need to look below the surface. Where did these problems come from? What is causing the pain in our marriage? The problems that created the wall are really symptoms of deeper issues.

We need to look beyond the problems, and find the source of the problems. Something is energizing our problems. A marriage is no better than the people in it.

We need to look beyond the problems and identify the source that is fueling them. There are needs inside each of us that we often look to our spouse to meet. Some of these needs may be from wounds we experienced in our childhood. Is it possible that these wounds have become a source of what may be fueling our problems?

A marriage is no better than the two individual people in it. Therefore, we each need to look at ourselves to understand better what is going on with us "below the surface" and see how we are contributing to building the wall between us.



BASIC NEEDS OF WIVES

	<input type="checkbox"/> Security
	<input type="checkbox"/> To be loved unconditionally
	<input type="checkbox"/> To be #1 in his life
	<input type="checkbox"/> To be cherished
	<input type="checkbox"/> To be understood
	<input type="checkbox"/> To feel emotionally and physically safe
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Are any of these needs wrong? No! God has designed the woman to have these needs.

BASIC NEEDS OF HUSBANDS

	<input type="checkbox"/> His opinion is respected
	<input type="checkbox"/> Feel he has something to offer
	<input type="checkbox"/> To feel valued
	<input type="checkbox"/> Feel competent
	<input type="checkbox"/> To be heard
	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical intimacy
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Where did husbands get these needs? From God, of course! Just as God designed women a certain way, He also designed men with unique needs.

If marriage was meant to take away loneliness, why do we often feel so lonely?

What's in Your Baggage?

A husband-to-be said to his future bride, "If this is who you really are, we should get along just fine." After he had been married for awhile he said to his wife, "Why are you so insecure and controlling? You were not this way before we got married."

When we say, "I do," we get the whole person or the whole package. Each of us comes into the marriage with baggage. Some of us have more baggage than others, but we all carry baggage.



The question is, "What's in our bags?"

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fears | <input type="checkbox"/> Past Influences | <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequacies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Past Wounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Deficiencies | <input type="checkbox"/> Addictions |

The items in our bags have been accumulating over the years. Now our new partner becomes part owner of our baggage and we become part owner of their baggage also.

We come into marriage hoping that our baggage has been forgotten or lost. We may even try to hide them. For some reason our spouse has a way of finding our bags and from time-to-time dragging them out.

When our baggage is exposed by our spouse we call this pushing our trigger buttons. Trigger buttons occur when we are reminded of something from our past that causes us hurt or disappointment. Naturally, we do not take kindly to our partner going through our bags. We may have married to escape the issues and messages that our baggage represent.

Before we got married we may have had glimpses of our partner's baggage, but we chose to ignore or minimize them. Old baggage always has a way of showing up. If our marriages are to grow in intimacy, we need to acknowledge that we both come with baggage. What is the baggage that we carry into our marriage costing our relationship? How do our fears and past wounds affect the way we relate and treat each other?

What Do We Do With the Pain?

How do we respond when our needs are not met by our partner? Usually not very well when we are in pain.

A Wife in Pain

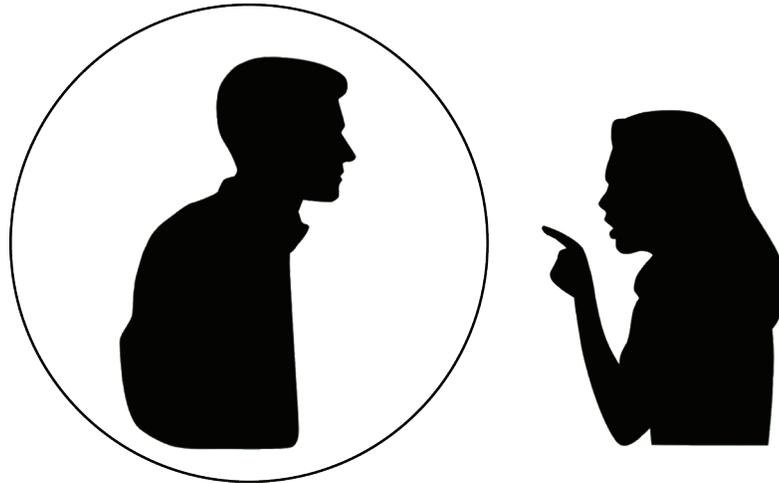


When a wife's needs are not being met, it becomes her goal to change her husband in order to get her needs met. She does this by manipulating and controlling her husband. She may resort to threats, anger, criticalness or enabling until she gets her desired results.



When she doesn't feel loved, she will try to produce from her husband what she perceives as love. If her husband responds because he has been manipulated, then he is not really loving her freely. In her heart, she knows that her husband is not loving her by his own free will, which creates more insecurity on her part.

A Husband in Pain



When a husband's needs are not being met, he usually withdraws and puts up a wall around himself. Inside the man feels that there must be something wrong with him. He asks, "Do I have what it takes?" Since his wife is unhappy with him and informs him of how he is not meeting her needs, he concludes he must not have what it takes.

Husbands do not want to be seen as inadequate or not enough. Men feel most inadequate when their wives are unhappy with them. To avoid feeling inadequate, husbands control by creating distance, silence, and using anger. When he pulls away he may seek other ways to feel adequate.

We Were Designed for Something More

Every marriage experiences pain and difficulties at one time or another. We were designed by God to love and be loved. We all have moments where we feel that we are not lovable or we are fearful of losing love. Marriage is difficult because Satan opposes anything that has to do with God's design for us to experience intimacy. Satan wants us to believe that our spouse is the enemy, rather than seeing Satan himself as the real enemy.

Many of our marriages are more about controlling each other so that we can be loved and get our needs met than it is about fighting against the evil one. Often we feel lonely and wounded and are not sure how to move toward intimacy. When we have been so wounded in our marriage, we are not sure if we even desire to pursue intimacy any longer.



Because God designed marriage, He is also able to heal our wounded marriages and restore hope and intimacy.

Our healing journey of intimacy asks that we face our fears and not minimize or ignore the wounds that we have carried into our marriage and have created in our marriage. We need to commit to a level of honesty that allows us to examine our marriage and look at what has and is happening.

Keeping Our Eyes on Our Destination

Every journey has a destination. Our journey of intimacy involves dangers, risks, and obstacles as we move toward our destination. But the hardships we face don't change our destination. The destination that God has designed us for in our marriage relationship is **oneness**. Satan wants to take our eyes off our destination and get us to focus on the obstacles around us so that we don't move forward to enjoy the thrill of experiencing oneness.

Do you know what the destination looks like? Have you imagined a picture of what oneness might look like in your marriage? Here is a glimpse of oneness:

Oneness, which the Bible calls "becoming one flesh" can be illustrated by using a three legged stool. Because God created each of us body, soul and spirit, He unites us as one in all three areas: body, soul and spirit. All that we are is joined together with all that our partner is.



Body Oneness

Body oneness is a gift from God. It provides the opportunity to experience a deep commitment to each other when we connect in a very intimate way. God made us sexual beings to enjoy sexual pleasure in the context of trust with each other exclusively. Sex has the power to bond us to each other. God designed us to find enjoyment and satisfaction in joining together. Because body oneness is so powerful, it also has the opportunity to cause great harm and struggles in our marriages if misused.



Soul Oneness

Soul oneness is a husband and wife honestly sharing who they are inside and meeting each other's needs. This requires getting to know one's partner and what his/her needs are. To do this we must be willing to:

- become transparent and communicate my needs with my partner
- understand my spouse and see his/her viewpoint

Spirit Oneness

Spirit oneness is each partner living life in such a way that they are entering into and experiencing more and more the resources and sufficiency of Christ. As we grow in Christ's love, acceptance, and forgiveness we are then able to extend those to our partner.

Our Journey of Intimacy

Our journey of intimacy can be compared to someone who experiences a journey or an adventure of climbing a mountain. Each journey awaits an adventure and mystery. We do not know what dangers and obstacles might lie ahead as we make our ascent. There are risks that must be taken and there are no guarantees that we will be successful. There will be moments along the journey where the view will be breathtaking and exhilarating.

The same is true as we pursue our journey of intimacy. It is risky to pursue intimacy. What will be required of us? If we take on the challenge to pursue intimacy, will we be successful?

There are two aspects to making our journey that are necessary. The first is preparation and the other is actually taking the first step.

Preparing for Our Journey of Intimacy

1. We Need To Be Fit

We cannot climb a mountain if we are not physically in shape. Just as we need to be physically fit, so we need to be fit for our journey of intimacy. We need to focus on ourselves, not on our spouse. We are responsible for our own condition first. We can only change ourselves.

There is a huge temptation to focus on our spouse and what they are doing and what they need to change to make our journey of intimacy. We need to resist the temptation to point out to them what they are doing wrong and trying to control them. The reality is that we cannot change our spouse and we are powerless over them.



Why are you on this journey of intimacy? Is it to get your partner to change? If your goal is to get your partner to change and get them to respond to your efforts to repair the marriage, you will probably become very frustrated and angry. Working on your issues in the marriage cannot be based on the condition of your spouse's response.

How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. - Luke 6:42

2. We Need the Right Equipment

It is not safe to climb alone. No one in their right mind would try to do this on their own. Mountain climbers climb with a partner, so that if one gets in trouble, the other is there to help.

There is certain equipment that is required when climbing a mountain. The type of equipment is based on weather and climate, conditions, terrain and other dangers. But there are two pieces of equipment that are absolutely necessary when climbing cliffs, snow covered mountains and glaciers.

The two most important pieces of equipment are the climber's ropes and carabiners. The carabiners and ropes are the tools they use to stay connected to each other so that they can remain safe as they climb.

You may ask, "What is a carabiner?" In layman's terms one might call them hooks. Carabiners are built to connect things together; whether it's a climber to their rope, or one climber to another. Carabiners are strong enough to be able to withstand extreme forces because the climber's lives often depend on them. Carabiners can fail at loads well below their rated strength when they are used incorrectly or if they are loaded with their gates open. It is important to check the carabiners after each climb for cracks, sharp edges, corrosion, burrs, or excessive wear. If the carabiner has been used in extreme conditions, such as a fall, it is often destroyed because the strength of it has been compromised.

What does this have to do with our journey of intimacy? It is vitally important that we be connected during our journey of intimacy. Staying connected allows us to help each other overcome the obstacles and arrive at our destination safely together.

Our journey of intimacy is very dangerous. There is an enemy who seeks to destroy us. During our journey we face strongholds and we find ourselves in the midst of spiritual warfare. We need each other. We cannot make it alone. We need to make sure that we are connected at all times.



3. We Need an Experienced Guide

When we are facing difficulties in our marriage, well-intentioned friends and relatives will share all kinds of counsel with us as to how they think we should handle our problems. If we listen to all of them, we will find ourselves even more confused. We must protect ourselves from wrong counsel. Our source of authority and counsel must come from the Word of God.

There is a tendency to not seek guidance and try to find our way on our own. Perhaps we are embarrassed that anyone would think we are having problems. God's Word encourages us to seek godly counsel. It is important that we find safe people who will encourage us, be honest with us, pray for us and build us up.

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
- Proverbs 15:22, NIV

4. We Need a Map

A map provides us with the best route to reach our objective. It can give us the lay out of the terrain and the distance to our destination. Without the map we would surely get lost, confused and frustrated.

The reason why people get lost is:

- They don't have a map.
- They trust their own instincts rather than using a compass and following a map.
- They don't take the time to study their map in preparation for their journey.
- They may totally rely on the skills of their climbing partner who may be in the process of getting them lost.

God has also provided us a map for our journey of intimacy. Since God designed marriage, He has the map to get us to oneness in intimacy. If we do not follow the map, it is highly likely that we will get lost. God's Word is our map to intimacy. During this study we will be looking at God's map to intimacy.

Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.
- Proverbs 3:5,6, NIV

Making the Journey

1. Take One Step at a Time

When the terrain is dangerous, it is very important to take it one step at a time and to place each step securely. The same is true for our marriages. We tend to want to rush our journey of intimacy instead of taking it one



step at a time. We may feel that we are ready to climb new heights, but our partner may feel very unsafe and unable to move. The more we force them to work on the marriage, (go for counseling, read books to improve the marriage) the more they may panic. The chances are that they have been deeply hurt in the marriage and are not willing to risk more pain. Unless we give them the time to heal, we may lose the very thing we want.

There may be times along our journey when one partner has become seriously injured and isn't able to continue the journey at that time. We cannot continue the journey alone. This is the time to stop and stay with our wounded partner. Give them the time to heal. It is very possible that you may feel you are doing most of the work and caregiving. This is the time for you to work on your own issues while you wait to continue your journey with your partner.

When we begin to work on our own issues that have affected the marriage, we usually expect our partner to be willing to take steps to deal with their issues and respond to our efforts to repair the marriage. When they don't respond within a reasonable time, we usually become very disappointed and react in anger. If we are responding in anger, usually there are hidden hurts that need to be examined.

We cannot control or demand that our spouse be willing to commit to working at our marriage. Just because we are eager to work on the marriage doesn't mean they are ready. There may have even been a point in time when we did not understand, or were willing to work on the marriage relationship ourselves.

What we need to do is give our spouse to God and allow Him to bring them to the place where they are willing to take the risk to take some steps that will bring healing to our marriage.

2. You Need to Have Character

Taking on the challenge of climbing a difficult mountain has a way of revealing who you really are. It offers you a chance to learn about yourself. It shows what you are really made of.

As we begin our journey of intimacy with our partner there will be things that we will have to face that may be difficult. Are we willing to face what is true about ourselves and how we relate in our marriage? This will involve examining our fears, the wounds that we have carried into the marriage and how we have wounded our partner.

We may be fearful of being seen as a bad person or that we really don't measure up, or have what it takes. We may also feel shame or guilt that we have disappointed or deeply wounded our partner by our attitudes, actions, or the choices we have made. We usually see what we want to see about ourselves. We may find it difficult to take an honest look at ourselves, but that is where we all must start.



3. It's Going to Take Perseverance

There may be moments in any difficult climb to the summit of a mountain when we question whether we have it in us to make it. Perhaps we don't want to admit it, but we may even feel like giving up. The climb may be more difficult than we imagined.

There also will be times when we begin to work on our journey of intimacy that we find things get worse in the marriage instead of better. The reason for this may be because we have ignored problems in our marriage and now, as we begin to address them, it creates tension. Or it may be that we were not in tune with where our marriage was at. We chose to bury the problems, lived in denial, or just plain avoided the real issues that hindered our marriage. But when we make a commitment to face our fears and struggles, it allows us to be set free to pursue intimacy in our marriage.

The question we need to ask is: do we have the willingness to work through the problems that have brought us to this point in our marriage? It means looking at the ways we have wounded each other. It takes hard work to look at the damage. We cannot just sweep it under the carpet and move forward. It may mean that we will see little progress in our journey of intimacy for a period of time.

When we do not see the progress we desire, we may be tempted to give up and consider divorce as a way out of the pain. The word divorce suggests freedom and elimination from pressure and pain. We convince ourselves that next time things will be different and we will find someone who will love us without all these problems. The problem is that we usually have not stopped to understand what has really caused the pain in our marriage and how our marriage deteriorated. The result is that we then carry these wounds and unresolved issues (critical spirit, control, insecurity, anger, mistrust, jealousy, or unforgiveness) into the next relationship. Unless we take the time to work on our part of the relationship and allow time for healing, we will carry some amount of guilt with us. Did we exhaust all means possible to see if God could heal our marriage?

If your partner is not willing to invest in your journey of intimacy it is probably because they have been deeply wounded and have given up hope. Just because they have given up hope does not mean that you have to give up hope also.

A brother (partner) offended is harder to be won than a strong (wall) city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle. - Proverbs 18:19 NIV

There were three ways to conquer a walled city. The first way was to climb over the walls. This was often a bloody ordeal that ended in failure. The second method was to lay siege to the city and wait. This required much



patience, but it let the city know that its pursuers were sincere. The third way was to watch for an unexpected opening in the wall.

A patient partner will usually see a door open unexpectedly if he or she is willing to watch and wait.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. - I Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV

4. Overcoming the Obstacles

It is inevitable whenever we go on an adventure or climb a mountain that we will face obstacles along the way. We can keep getting diverted by obstructions such as cliffs, dangerous rivers, dense brush, or crevasses. It is while we are dealing with these obstacles that we can lose sight of our objective. It's at these times that we have to set our sight on intermediate objectives so that we don't get lost and go off course or get discouraged.

What are the obstacles that you are facing on your journey of intimacy?

- A partner who will not forgive?
- A partner who will not invest energy into the relationship?
- A partner who will not be honest?
- A partner that cannot be trusted?
- Family members or friends who interfere?
- New problems that arise?

These are obstacles that have to be dealt with before you can move forward on your journey. These obstacles did not get there overnight. It will take time to assess the obstacles and begin to work through them. We often have the tendency to want to rush around the obstacles and get back on track. If we don't take the time to work through our problems, there is a high likelihood that we will repeat them. Our obstacles don't have to stop us in our tracks. Set your sight on an intermediate objective that you can work on until you can get back on course.

Obstacles have a way of making us feel powerless and out of control. It is at these moments that we may realize that we are in need of God's help and power. Often we find it difficult to be dependent on God and trust Him in the midst of our marriage difficulties. This can be a time when we learn just how well we really know God and are willing to trust Him. Are you willing to take your hands off of the controls and let God have control of your spouse and you?



Broken Dreams

*As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He was my Friend.*

*But then instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
With ways that were my own.*

*At last I snatched them back and cried,
“How can You be so slow?”
“My child,” He said, “What could I do?
You never did let go.”*

–Author Unknown

5. You Need a New Perspective

Do you feel overwhelmed by the vastness of the climb you have before you on your journey of intimacy? It's easy to become overwhelmed by the problems we have in our marriage and our partner's attitude and lack of response. From our perspective, our partner's actions and attitudes will not change. It looks hopeless.

Perhaps your spouse seems like a giant that does whatever they want and as long as they don't change, our situation looks impossible. God wants us to see our circumstances from His perspective because He is greater than our giants and He can see the whole picture. From our perspective we only have a limited frame of reference from which to work.

We have the story in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14, where Moses is leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land, which is already occupied with giants. The Israelites' response to their giants is interesting. They wanted to give up before even trying. Because of their unbelief in not trusting that God had given them the land, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before they possessed the land. It is interesting to see the giants perspective in Joshua 2:9-11 and what they thought about the children of Israel. The giants were afraid because of what God had been doing for the children of Israel. The giants in our life (sometimes our spouse) are not too much for God to handle.



6. When You Feel That You Are Lost

When people get lost in the wilderness, they can be struck with terror and panic. They often make bad decisions that can cost them their lives. Here are some suggestions from a book, *Mountaineering – Freedom of the Hills*.

“The first step is to stop. Look for other members of the party, shout, and listen for answering shouts. Blow your whistle. If the only answer is silence, sit down, regain your calm, and combat terror with reason. Once you have calmed down, start doing the right things. Look at the map in an attempt to determine your location, and plan a route home in case you do not connect with the other climbers. Mark your location with a cairn or other object, and then scout in all directions, each time returning to the marked position. Well before dark, prepare for the night by finding water and shelter. Go to an open area so that you can be seen from the air. Spread out some brightly colored clothing or other material to give searchers something to see. Staying busy will raise your spirits; try singing for something to do and to give searchers something to hear.”

We often feel lost with no sense of direction and have a feeling of panic and despair when we see our marriage in serious trouble. The best thing to do is to stop and assess your marriage. How did we get to this place in our marriage? This is the time to begin to establish a strategy for how you will survive until your partner is ready to reconnect with you. This is your time to focus on yourself and what you can control. This is the time to be silent and to listen to God’s quiet voice.

*“Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.” - Psalm 46:10, NIV*

7. You Have to Have Hope

You cannot conquer a mountain if you are negative and do not believe you can do it. All bad marriages look hopeless. If you allow yourself to focus on the negative, you will surely fail.

Most hurting marriages are looking for some form of hope that things could actually change for the better. Hopelessness is the cancer of marriages.



Using data from the National Survey of Family and Households (a nationally-representative survey with a wide-ranging data set looking at all kinds of family outcomes, including happiness,) the research team studied 5,232 married adults who were interviewed in the late 1980's. Of these individuals, 645 reported being unhappily married. Five years later, these same adults—some of whom had divorced or separated and some of whom had stayed married—were interviewed again.

The results of these interviews were astounding. They revealed that a full two-thirds of the unhappily married spouses who stayed married were actually happier five years later! Among those who initially rated their marriages as “very unhappy,” but remained together, nearly 80 percent considered themselves “happily married” and “much happier” five years later. Surprisingly, the opposite is found to be true for those who divorced. The Institute for American Values study confirmed that divorce frequently fails to make people happy because, while it might provide a respite from the pain associated with a bad marriage, it also introduces a host of complex new emotional and psychological difficulties over which the parties involved have little control. They include child-custody battles, emotionally scarred children, economic hardships, loneliness, future romantic disappointments, and so on. This helps explain why of all the unhappy spouses in the initial survey, only 19 percent of those who got divorced or separated were happy five years later.

- Taken from Focus on the Family, September 2002





EXERCISE



1. To the best of your understanding, what is fueling the struggles in your marriage?

2. What needs do you identify as being the strongest for a husband or a wife?

3. What are some obstacles that could hinder your journey of intimacy?

4. What would you like to see happen in your marriage as you go through this journey of intimacy?

5. Write a short letter to your partner expressing your dream and desires for your marriage. If you are not comfortable doing this at this point, that is okay. Let your spouse know that you are not in a position to do it at this time.

