

The One

PURSUING INTIMACY GOD'S WAY



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IRON COVENANT PRESS

Written
by Josef Kauzlarich

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Published by Iron Covenant Press
Martinsburg, West Virginia

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ISBN: 979-8-9986171-3-3

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The views expressed are solely those of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

A couple stands on a rooftop, their backs to the camera, looking out over a sprawling city at sunset. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, yellow, and dark blue, with large, dramatic clouds. The city below is illuminated with warm lights, and a rainbow is visible in the distance. The couple is silhouetted against the bright horizon.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO MY PRECIOUS
DAUGHTER, SUMMER. MAY YOUR FUTURE MARRIAGE
BE FILLED WITH JOYOUS WONDER THAT NEVER FADES.

A Note From the Author

I wrote this work to focus on intimacy and one of its greatest killers: pride. I sense this is one of the biggest issues facing couples today. We are caught up in ourselves, our concerns, our exhaustion, our frustrations, our children, our work, our schedules, our hobbies, our disappointments, and our constant sense of being wronged. In the process, we often neglect one of the greatest reasons God put us here: to love the spouse He gave us with humble and intentional service.

This book is designed to be read slowly, ideally with your spouse, over a series of eight sessions. Some sessions include personal reflection questions. Some include discussion questions to work through together. Some are simply meant to be read, considered, and allowed to do their work in your heart. Do not rush through it. The goal is not to finish quickly. The goal is to let God use these ideas to awaken love and rebuild intimacy.

Because this is a sensitive topic, I want to be very clear about how to approach it. This book will challenge you and some of the core presumptions you have regarding your marriage. My thoughts may make you defensive or even angry at times. I pray you will remain open to the possibility that, when it comes to your spouse, you likely preserve the image of your personal self-righteousness. Trust me, for every problem faced in your relationship, you are a contributor. When struggles arise, if you place most of the blame on them, hyper-focus on their faults, or spend most of your time ignoring them because you have “given up,” then you need to re-evaluate. Because Jesus did none of those things when it came to us (Philippians 2:5-8)*.

Your focus should be on improving yourself, not showing your spouse where they fall short. If you read this with a running list of everything your spouse needs to hear, you are missing the point. Be generous. Be kind. Be patient. Let conviction do its work without turning into accusation. Let discomfort lead to humility rather than self-defense. Do not allow the conversations within to degrade into arguing, scorekeeping, or replaying old wounds.

Your spouse is not your enemy. Pride is. Selfishness is. And so are the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12). So read with an open heart. Listen for what God wants to change in you first. If both husband and wife approach this work that way, there is real hope for deeper intimacy, greater joy, and a marriage that more clearly reflects the love of Christ.



*I feel compelled to clarify early in this book that its repeated call to examine yourself is directed primarily toward ordinary patterns of selfishness, neglect, resentment, and disconnection within marriage. It should never be used to minimize abuse, whether physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional, coercion, addiction, adultery, betrayal, abandonment, violence, or serious danger, nor should it be used to assign equal responsibility where responsibility is not equal. Such actions represent serious violations of the marriage covenant. Christlike love does not require enabling sin or remaining in an unsafe situation. In these circumstances, wise boundaries and appropriate pastoral, professional, legal, or emergency support may be necessary.





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“For it seems as though everyone else is busy seeking what is best for themselves instead of the things that are most important to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:21 TPT

INTIMACY IS MORE THAN SEX

When people in modern culture hear the word intimacy in the context of marriage, they almost immediately think of sex. There is a good reason for this - our culture appears to be obsessed with it - but sex is also the greatest gift God has given to foster holistic intimacy between husband and wife (Song of Songs 7:10-12). It is a beautiful, God designed practice, intended to unite husband and wife in both body and soul. However, intimacy is more than sex - much more.

Numerous misconceptions about marital intimacy have led to division between husband and wife. The structures and instruments we've been given by God to honor Him within marriage are misused or weaponized, undermining the very institution they were meant to strengthen. Instead of embracing God's designs for love,



husbands and wives find themselves fighting over what is fair. *“He never opens up. She never sleeps with me. He never hears what I have to say. She never shows me tenderness and affection. He never thinks about or considers me. She is always talking to me like I’m a child.”*

We quickly get caught in the ‘*always and nevers*’ and forget to admire anything about the person God made just for us.

Into this confusion step influencers who offer advice without a proper understanding of the problem itself. Rather than challenging their audiences with truth, they often serve candy treats that people want to hear. I don’t know who needs to hear this but that influencer that’s been making money over your

marital outrage and frustration does not care one bit about you or your marriage. They are incentivized to keep you in a perpetual state of angry victimhood so you will come back for more *justice*¹.

I’m saying that some online voices profit by continually intensifying marital frustration. Advice that only confirms our grievances may feel validating, but it can leave us less willing to examine our own responsibilities in pursuing reconciliation with our spouse.

This guide is for courageous spouses willing to test popular advice against Scripture and honestly consider what God may be asking them to change. Let’s start by getting to the root of the problem - pride.



The Problem of Pride

RELENTLESS OBSESSION WITH SELF

It might feel strange to start by talking about pride. You might be thinking, *“isn’t pride for people who think they are better than everyone else? I certainly don’t think I am better than everyone else.”* Well that is one form of pride but it isn’t the whole story.

Pride is a relentless obsession with oneself and most of us don’t even realize how much of it we have².

I want you to honestly consider a question: *how much time in a day do you spend thinking about yourself versus your spouse?* I am not talking about your daily cognitive functions to get through your day. I am referring to the time you spend reflecting on something deeper than what you are going to eat or wear. Are you thinking about your concerns or theirs? Your dreams and aspirations or theirs? Your relational wants or theirs? What is the balance—50/50? Or is it more like 90/10? Maybe even 96/4?

Most of us aren’t the best at thinking about others, and when we do, we tend to dwell on their faults rather than their qualities. It is very difficult to pull ourselves out of our own inner world and place another person in that spot of internal meditation for longer than a few moments. In one sense, we are wired this way. Our fallen nature urges us to put ourselves before all else (Romans 7:18-25). But what is natural is not necessarily what is right. Jesus came to patiently and persistently turn us into lovers of God and others, not of self (1 John 4:7-12).

Our self-centeredness has been dramatically amplified by a culture that constantly pushes self-focus, self-care, self-image, and even self-worship. I recently came across a *“self-care”* journal that had 600 prompting questions to help you explore and understand yourself. 600! That is more than a year of

self-focus in one single journal!

Awareness of this tendency matters because it helps us recognize our default state. And once we recognize it, we can prepare to fight against it instead of feeding it. Paul captures the spirit of our age when he writes:

“For it seems as though everyone else is busy seeking what is best for themselves instead of the things that are most important to our Lord Jesus Christ.”
—Philippians 2:21 (TPT)

The reality of our default mode is to worship the all important *me*.

Now you might say, *“No Joe, I actually spend a lot of time down on myself. I don’t feel valuable or worthy. Loving myself is about boosting my self-esteem and realizing that I matter.”*

First, who told you that you are not inherently valuable? God made you in His image, and Jesus gave His life to save yours. If that doesn’t scream your value, I don’t know what does. Your worth is not tied to what you produce or what you bring to the table.

Second, self-debasement is simply another form of pride because it is still an obsessive focus on yourself. A constant fixation on your shortcomings, or the devaluation of your talents and abilities, is pride disguised as humility³.

You are allowed to be good at things and acknowledge what you are good at. You are allowed to recognize your inherent value and worth—so long as it doesn’t become a god you worship. Do not fall into the trap of thinking self-criticism and self-debasement are noble or virtuous. They are not. They are pride disguised as

virtue, and they too keep your eyes locked on yourself.

What would be far more beneficial — for both us and those we love—would be intentional seasons where we deny ourselves entirely and focus on feeding our loved ones in a fresh and sacrificial way. But pride is the great enemy of noble intentions. It kills intimacy because it turns us inward—obsessing over what we are not getting from our spouse—instead of focusing on the intentional, productive actions we can take to build real intimacy and live an effective life for Jesus (John 13:14-15).

What is he talking about? Live an effective life for Jesus? Why bring that up? I thought we were talking about how to make my marriage better.

If you haven't learned this yet, your marriage is not just about your happiness. It is about how God is using you to bless *someone else*. But it is even bigger than that - much bigger!

A central claim in this book is that the depth of your marital intimacy is directly connected to God's ability to use you for His sovereign purposes (John 13: 34-35). Perhaps you do not yet realize just how vital this thing called marriage is to literally everything in your life. If you view marriage primarily as a means to your own happiness, then forgive my bluntness: you may be seeing God's design too narrowly and through a lens shaped more by self

interest than by His purposes.

I am talking directly because I am trying to awaken you a little here. We have been so inundated by the broader culture with the idea that marriage is about our personal happiness that, quite frankly, we often need to be slapped out of it. If this isn't you, I am happy for you! As for me, I fight against this tendency every single day of my life. Most of us are so self-absorbed that it takes a crisis—or two—before we even begin looking for other possible reasons why we are in our marriage. The sad part is that many never do.

Why don't we spend more time thinking about this? Because people just want to be happy in marriage and they want that happiness to come easy. They want to be blissfully in love - the picture-perfect marriage—as long as it never gets too hard and they don't have to sacrifice much to get there. Well I have some unfortunate news for anyone who thinks marriage should be easy—because if it isn't easy, something must be wrong, right?

Marriage is hard. We know that Scripture tells us to love our spouse as Jesus loved us. Yet we still find ourselves arguing over who does more around the house. Read almost any Gospel for fifteen minutes and it becomes obvious that Jesus did not come to preserve relational equality or make sure everyone gave Him as much as He gave them. He came to serve and willingly bear a staggering inequality of sacrifice (Mark 10:45). It was because Jesus was willing

to become a servant to all and obedient to the point of death that he was granted glory and honor by His Father (Philippians 2:8-11).

This sacrificial love, then, is the key. Most of the picture perfect marriages you see that are thriving and appear “effortless” or “easy” are built on a foundation of service and sacrifice that you, as an outsider, know nothing about. You see the happy couple walking hand in hand, flowing into one another like they couldn't possibly be more blissful. What you didn't see were the thousands of hours they spent thinking about each other, praying over each other, giving to one another, and sacrificing for one another the same way Jesus sacrificed for them.

That marriage is built on two people who went through the painful fight of dying to themselves so the other could thrive. They relentlessly—though often reluctantly—sacrificed their individual dreams, wants, demands, and attitudes, and instead humbly focused on knowing and loving the one God asked them to be closest to.

Should this really be this difficult? Shouldn't intimacy with our spouse be easier if they are the one? Aren't we supposed to be in love?

But think about anything in your life that you truly value. Did it come about by whimsical happenstance, or did you do something intentional to make it happen?

All things of real value require work



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“A staggering amount of our time is wasted or invested in things that carry little to no eternal value. We casually say, “I don’t have the time,” when the reality is that we do not make the time.”



and effort to see them through. The things we prioritize and plan for tend to get accomplished. It follows, then, that the greatest human relationship you will ever experience deserves passionate devotion and intentional care.

Let's again be honest: a staggering amount of our time is wasted or invested in things that carry little to no eternal value. We casually say, "I don't have the time," when the reality is that we do not make the time. Trust me—we all have time to take action to improve marital intimacy.

How much time have we spent watching television, scrolling social media, following sports, playing games, going out with friends, or pursuing personal hobbies? How does that compare to the time we have invested in knowing and intentionally pursuing our spouse?

How many minutes have we given to entertainment, appearance, shopping, online distraction, or other personal interests? Can we count those minutes and compare them to the time we have spent thoughtfully considering how to bless the person we married?

An additional challenge is the amount of time we spend on good things that can still crowd out our spouse. Children are a perfect example. How much time do we spend creating experiences for them or managing their needs compared with the time we invest in our marriage? Children are an enormous blessing, and raising them carries profound purpose and significance. But problems arise when couples forget that their first and primary obligation is to one another. Children are often deeply affected when marital intimacy collapses and divorce follows^{4,5,6}. Carefully curated childhood experiences cannot outweigh that loss.

I am very direct because I am tired of watching couple after couple fall apart without understanding why. Why does it happen? Often because far more time is spent pursuing self-interest, self-concern, or self-pleasure than pursuing one's spouse. Sometimes the pursuits are more noble than that. But even good things can cause priorities to simply drift out of order.

I am not saying that every moment of life must be devoted to cultivating intimacy, turning your marriage into an idol or placing expectations on one another that neither of you was meant to carry. What I am saying is that if most couples conducted an honest assessment, they would be shocked by the gap between the time they intentionally invest in their spouse and the time they invest in everything else. Take a moment and quantify it. Compare the hours you spend intentionally thinking about and pursuing your spouse with the hours you spend elsewhere. Are you satisfied with the numbers? Do they reflect a life ordered according to God's priorities? Is your spouse clearly above all others, including yourself?

If not, then the only thing I want you to recognize right now is that this area of your life needs work. The Apostle Paul writes:

"Be free from pride-filled opinions, for they will only harm your cherished unity. Don't allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves. Abandon every display of selfishness. Possess a greater concern for what matters to others instead of your own interests."
Philippians 2:3–4 TPT

The first "other" in your life is your spouse (1 Timothy 5:8, Ephesians 5:33). Within the ordinary demands of family life, your spouse should remain a central covenantal priority





rather than gradually becoming an afterthought. This is difficult but here is the good news.

Marriage not only becomes easier when two people embrace God's way of love, but it begins to overflow with joy and new wine. Intimacy and happiness grow when each person stops obsessing over what they are or are not receiving and instead focuses on giving. Generosity and humility sit at the core of every strong marriage, yet they are qualities our self-absorbed culture struggles to understand. The key to cultivating them is daily connection with the only One who has the power to transform the heart. That is where we turn next.

Personal Reflection Questions (5 minutes alone)

1. Take an honest assessment of your life and time. How often do you consider your spouse compared to all others, including children or other family?
2. What are some time detractors that bear little to no fruit in your life that you could let go of to refocus the time on blessing your spouse?
3. Are the people you allow to influence you encouraging you towards reconciliation with your spouse or are they justifying your behavior and telling you what you want to hear?

Questions to Discuss Together (as long as you want together)

1. How much intentional time do we spend with one another?
2. Do we think this reflects God's design for our marriage?
3. Without pointing to or blaming one another, can we identify potential detractors from spending intentional time together?
4. Are there good time consumers in our life, like children or service at church, that get in the way of building intimacy?
5. What strategies could we immediately employ (e.g., phones off at 8 p.m.) to rearrange our time and focus so that we are putting one another first?

God's Living Water

THE ANSWER TO OUR PRIDE

Unsurprisingly, God is the solution to every problem we face. If we, in our fallen nature, are chronically focused on ourselves, wouldn't it be just like God to have already provided the solution to that problem?

If you have ever been to Sunday school as a child, you were probably asked a question to which the predictable answer was "Jesus." It can feel simplistic. But sometimes truth is simple. Jesus really is the answer to our endless preoccupation with ourselves (John 15:4-5). Why? Because Jesus is the One who connects us to the only source that can teach us how to love—God Himself.

The prophet Jeremiah said this:

*"But blessed are those who trust in the Lord
and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.
They are like trees planted along a riverbank,
with roots that reach deep into the water.
Such trees are not bothered by the heat
or worried by long months of drought.
Their leaves stay green,
and they never stop producing fruit."
Jeremiah 17:7-8 NLT*

The trees described in this passage do not anxiously look to the sky to see what they are getting. They are not shaken by difficult seasons because their





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roots remain deep in the river. The river is always flowing, always supplying what they need to endure and thrive. But more than that, the river enables them to produce fruit—fruit that benefits others.

God is our source of living water (Jeremiah 2:13). Abiding in Him, staying close to Him, drawing daily from Him—this is what gives us the strength, passion, steadiness, and joy our spouses need from us. We cannot give what we do not first receive (1 John 4:19).

Why is this true? Because time in God's presence transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:18). It reshapes us from prideful creatures bent inward on ourselves into humble servants who are willing to lay down their lives for others. As we experience and welcome God's love, mercy, and grace, those attributes begin to flow through us to the people around us. We cannot remain unchanged when we dwell in His presence.

We must recognize that God is the source of all goodness and holiness (James 1:17). To drift from

Him is to pull our roots out of the river that sustains us. This is true not only for marriage but for all of life. Less of God results in more chaos, disorder, and self-centeredness. More of God produces peace, hope, and joy. He also helps us get our priorities correct.

If you want to be empowered to love your spouse, begin by pursuing intimacy with God. Jesus said to *"seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need"* (Matthew 6:33, NLT). This is the pathway to abundant life. Just as a loving parent desires what is best for their child, God desires what is best for us. He designed us. He knows what we need. And what we need most is Him.

Do you believe that? Really, truly believe that?

This matters because you can accumulate every technique and strategy for strengthening your marriage, but if you attempt to apply them apart from God, you will eventually fail. The fight for a



close marriage is not primarily with your spouse. It is a spiritual struggle within yourself—to become the person God created you to be (Romans 7:14-25). He has purposes for your life, missions uniquely assigned to you, and the first of those missions is loving your spouse well (Ephesians 2:10).

Do not fight that battle alone. Invite God into it every single day. Allow Him to change you. That process is often uncomfortable—not because He is incapable or harsh, but because we are stubborn. We resist the very changes that would produce lasting fruit.

Trusting God in this area requires faith. If you truly believe that He is your ultimate source, you will not collapse in seasons when your spouse feels distant. Even if your marriage enters a drought, your roots can remain in the river. When God is your prize, you will not live in desperation for what your spouse can or cannot give you. Instead, you will be strengthened, steadied, and equipped to love faithfully.

Recognize that God is the ultimate treasure, and you will possess the strength necessary to build lasting intimacy with your spouse. As we go through the rest of this work on intimacy, remind yourself that God is the source of power to help you do these things.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. What is your relationship with God like? Do you spend time with Him each day?
2. How might your intimacy with God be impacting your marriage? Have you experienced His love and passed it on? Have you felt drained because you haven't spent time with Him?

Questions to Discuss Together

1. Have we ever considered before that the love we give to one another comes from God?
2. Are we relying on one another for love that only God can truly provide?
3. What kind of activities could we start doing together to invite God into our relationship?



Value of Intimacy

THE SURPRISING ROLE OF INTIMACY IN GOD'S PLAN

There are two primary reasons why intimacy with your spouse is absolutely vital. The first is that it greatly contributes to your personal happiness. *What?! You just spent all of the first session convincing us that obsession with personal happiness and self is part of the problem.* This is very true. I definitely did that. But thankfully that's not the whole story. God still wants you to be happy!

God created us for communal relationship, declaring, “*It is not good for the man to be alone*” (Genesis 2:18). Nowhere in Scripture is personal independence presented as the ideal. The resounding testimony of Scripture is that human beings were made for connection.

In marriage, we experience the deepest form of human connection God designed, and this is a gift set apart for husband and wife within the covenant of marriage. Not everyone experiences this gift, though singleness can be a gift of its own nature to some (Matthew 19:5-12)⁷. Nevertheless, the ordinary pattern of human life is marriage—a relationship of mutual dependence and trust that fulfills our longing for connection on levels we often could not have imagined beforehand. This means the desire to be happy in marriage is not wrong. In fact, it comes from God. Marriage can be deeply fulfilling, and for most people, that promise is one of the primary reasons they pursue it. We hope for a long, joyful life with our spouse. However, happiness was never God's only purpose for marriage.

I recently wrote a book called *Marriage Is Worth the Fight*. In it, I spend more time than some readers would probably like exploring the many purposes of marriage. These purposes matter because God's designs for marriage are precisely what intimacy is for. Intimacy is the energy—the turbocharged super juice—that propels a couple forward and enables marriage to accomplish its intended ends. It unites husband and wife into a genuine oneness that allows them to move powerfully in the same direction for all to see.

Our culture seems to recognize only one purpose for marriage: personal fulfillment and happiness. This is understandable. The problem arises when that good desire becomes the sole lens through which we evaluate the relationship. Your spouse can never make you happy through their own strength. No human being can carry that burden. Without maturity, couples begin hyper-analyzing what they give versus what they receive. The desire for fairness dominates every interaction. People become scorekeepers. And because human beings are remarkably blind to their own shortcomings, they almost

always conclude that they are being treated unfairly.

This often sounds like, "He never loves me the way I want." Or, "She never prioritizes me." Or perhaps, "All they care about is themselves." If you believe that all you do is give while your spouse contributes nothing in return, there is a good chance you have overlooked your own shortcomings and overestimated your generosity. Humanity has no shortage of ways to elevate the self over another.

I also want to recognize that these thoughts aren't entirely wrong. Many people tragically feel alone within the covenant of marriage. Because of sinful pride, husbands and wives transform what was intended to be a source of joy into a business arrangement that merely provides convenience, often because the relationship lacks reciprocal, sacrificial love. The giving of love is either one-sided or non-existent.

Giving love while never receiving it eventually leads to burnout and feeling unwanted. Receiving love while never giving it produces shame, selfishness, and misery. The joy of intimacy comes through the reciprocal exchange of pursuit and response. Both must be present or intimacy begins to collapse.

Take a moment to think about an especially joyful time in your marriage where you felt connected to your spouse. What were you both doing? What were you each receiving from the other? The odds are that you both went above and beyond to demonstrate intentional love toward one another. Each of you experienced the joy of watching your spouse's face light up with the love you gave them. Each of you experienced the fulfillment of receiving love you probably didn't deserve. It was a season of reciprocal giving and receiving.

Whether through growing familiarity, the passing of time, or downright selfishness of one or both people, marriage often spirals out of seasons like this into what feels like a barren wasteland of what it once was. Given the choice, many people decide to leave this state of affairs and simply try again with someone else. This is tragic—not only because it damages personal happiness and fulfillment, but because it diminishes something far larger than ourselves. It weakens one of God's primary means of displaying His love to the world. Therefore, we must mature beyond the self-centered narrative sold to us by the broader culture—the idea that your spouse exists primarily to make you happy.

This leads us to the second reason intimacy is so valuable: it expands the Kingdom of God by showcasing what God's love is like.

God's love is often expressed in Scripture as a father's love for his children (Psalm 103:13). For most of us, it is easy to imagine ourselves as wayward sons and daughters returning home to a loving Father. It is far more difficult to think of ourselves as covenant breakers pursued by a faithful lover. Yet this imagery appears throughout Scripture (Hosea 2:14-20). The motif of God as our lover strikes some people as scandalous, but that is usually because we have reduced intimacy to something merely sexual. We have forgotten that intimacy is fundamentally about relational closeness.

God does not love you only as a father loves his child. He also loves you as a husband fiercely loves and longs for his bride. Some theologians have argued that the Song of Songs is not merely about marriage but also serves as a picture of Christ's love for His Church⁸. Whether one agrees with that interpretation or not, the broader biblical theme is undeniable: God desires closeness with His people. He does not merely want to rescue you. He wants to walk in daily, passionate, abiding intimacy with you. He wants to know you and be known by you. He desires relationship, not merely reconciliation (John 14: 23, John 17:24).



A romantic scene of a man and a woman sitting on a dark, rocky cliff. They are seen from behind, looking out over a vast ocean towards a sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple, with dark, silhouetted clouds. Above the clouds, the sky is dark with many bright, vertical streaks of light, resembling a starry night or a digital art effect. The overall mood is peaceful and intimate.

GOD DOES NOT LOVE YOU ONLY AS A FATHER LOVES
HIS CHILD. HE ALSO LOVES YOU AS A HUSBAND
FIERCELY LOVES AND LONGS FOR HIS BRIDE.

One of the primary ways God demonstrates that reality to the world is through marriage. When a husband and wife love one another sacrificially, passionately, and humbly, they become a living picture of God's love (Ephesians 5:31-32). Their relationship begins to display something beautiful that others cannot quite explain but desperately want for themselves. This is the true value of intimacy. Closeness between husband and wife becomes a witness to believer and unbeliever alike. It projects an image of how God desires to walk in relationship with His people. It reveals that God is not passive, detached, or indifferent. He is a passionate lover in pursuit of His beloved.

This is why divorce is such a tragedy, particularly among professing Christians. We claim to be transformed by God's love and filled with His Spirit, yet sometimes fail to love the one person we promised before God to choose and serve for the rest of our lives. To the watching world, this can communicate that God's love is fickle, self-serving, and temporary. In reality, God's ways were likely absent from the marriage long before the divorce occurred. But outsiders cannot see that. They simply see Christians behaving no differently than anyone else.

You may never have thought about your marriage as a projection of God's love and ways, but that is exactly what it is. Your marriage shows the world what God is like. This is why intimacy matters so much. Two

Christians living according to God's design become attractive—not because they are perfect, but because they are overflowing with the joy that comes from being deeply loved and deeply loving another person in return.

Think about the happiest season of your life. However brief it may have been, my guess is that it was marked by deep connection with your spouse. It was a season where love flowed freely, where you felt known and accepted, where intimacy was thriving. That is not relationship worship. It is one of God's greatest gifts functioning exactly the way He intended. And when that gift functions properly, it not only brings happiness to husband and wife, but also points everyone around them to the God who designed it in the first place.

I want to pause here and return to the idea of reciprocal love by pointing out an important truth: God never fails to give or reciprocate love. We may walk away from Him, but He never walks away from us (Romans 3:3-4). Think about those seasons when it feels like God is silent. More often than not, it is not because God has become silent or abandoned you. It is because you have drifted from Him, perhaps chasing an old lover you once promised to leave behind. Yet God remains faithful. He continues calling out to you, pursuing you, and inviting you back the entire time.

This outrageous lovingkindness is how God tells us we are to love our spouse. Even in the darkest seasons—when they seem entirely consumed by themselves and you feel like the last priority on their list—God calls you to keep sowing seeds of love, trusting that one day they may blossom and flourish (Galatians 6:9). This is how Jesus loves His Church. This is how we are called to love our spouse.

Am I saying there is never a reason to leave a marriage? No. That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that most people give up unnecessarily, walking away from a beautiful opportunity to display the love of God to a deeply selfish and unloving world⁹.





Thinking about marriage this way casts it in an entirely different light, doesn't it? The stakes are much higher than we originally presumed. Intimacy, as God defines it, is not merely about personal fulfillment or relational satisfaction. It is a living testimony of God's love and a vital instrument for advancing His Kingdom (John 13:34-35). Before we can build that kind of intimacy, however, we must first understand what intimacy actually is. That is where we turn next.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Taking an honest assessment of yourself, how do you personally measure up to God's example of love?
2. Do you authentically believe intimacy with your spouse is important? How do your actions reflect this?

Questions to Discuss Together

1. Does it surprise us to learn that our marriage is about more than our personal happiness?
2. What are some other unique purposes God might have in mind for our marriage and how can intimacy supercharge them?

Nature of Intimacy

RELATIONAL EXCLUSIVITY WITH PASSION

What is intimacy? I'll get fairly precise here but it is actually a pretty simple concept. Intimacy is a measure of relational closeness between two people¹⁰. If you were to place it on a scale, its lower bound might be zero (i.e., you don't know the person at all), and its upper bound might be one hundred (i.e., as close as two individuals can possibly be).

Several criteria contribute to intimacy, including the following:

- **Knowledge:** the extent to which one person understands another. You cannot grow intimacy with someone you do not know. Understanding who a person is—their character, patterns, desires, fears, and beliefs—is necessary for intimacy to exist at all.
- **Acceptance:** the extent to which one person receives another as they are and chooses to move toward unity. Acceptance is not the same as tolerance. That is not what I am talking about. It is the willingness to align oneself with another—to order priorities, decisions, and direction in a way that makes shared life possible. Acceptance draws a person closer; rejection pushes them away.
- **Pursuit:** the extent to which one person intentionally moves toward another. Knowledge and acceptance do not, by themselves, produce intimacy. *Intimacy requires effort.* It must be pursued, maintained, and protected. It does not happen accidentally. No *intentional* movement, no intimacy.
- **Reciprocal:** the extent to which both people reciprocate acceptance and pursuit of the other. Intimacy requires mutual vulnerability. It cannot exist where one person hides, withholds, or remains guarded while the other reaches. Without reciprocity, intimacy collapses into pursuit without union.

In short, the more two people know, accept, and

pursue one another, the closer they become. While it is possible to increase intimacy with many people, the ability to reach the highest levels of intimacy depends on exclusivity and covenantal order:

- **Exclusivity:** Human beings have limited time, energy, and capacity for relational investment. As a relationship becomes more exclusive, it can grow more intimate. By exclusivity, I do not mean shutting other people out. I mean prioritizing one person above all others and sharing forms of connection reserved for that relationship, such as physical affection and the disclosure of deep thoughts and emotions.
- **Covenantal Order (i.e., God's Design):** intimacy flourishes most fully within the marital structure God designed to contain it. Covenant defines boundaries, establishes trust, and creates the conditions necessary for the deepest forms of closeness. When intimacy is pursued outside of its proper order, it becomes unstable and destructive rather than unifying. Believing that God's ways are best is a step of faith, and demonstrates trust in our Creator and His designs.

With that groundwork laid, here is my definition of marital intimacy:

Intimacy is a measure of relational exclusivity formed through mutual knowledge, acceptance, and pursuit, reaching its fullest expression within the order of marriage God has established.

Whew! That was tedious right? But sometimes the detailed stuff is necessary to understand why we should pursue intimacy God's way. Having this definition is helpful but we should also meditate on what relational closeness looks like in practice, starting with what it doesn't look like.



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WORKING DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, OCCUPYING THE SAME SPACE WHILE DOING DIFFERENT THINGS, AND TIME SPENT TOGETHER WITH OTHERS PRESENT IS NOT THE SAME AS INTIMACY-BUILDING TIME.



First, talking through or working together on domestic management is not the same as intimacy-building time. Many marriages get stuck in a transactional, business-oriented relationship centered on logistics and finances. Coordination, planning, and dividing responsibilities are necessary and valuable parts of marriage, but they should not be mistaken for intimacy itself. Married couples must manage life together, yet pursuing closeness requires time and intentional pursuit that goes beyond managing tasks.

Second, simply occupying the same space while doing different things does not necessarily build intimacy. A wife may enjoy reading while her husband plays games. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, and it may foster a sense of companionship. However, it does not contribute significantly to the deeper intimacy I am describing. Shared space alone does little to unite either body or soul.

Finally, time spent with others, even alongside your spouse, does not significantly build marital intimacy. Family time with children is a clear example. Family time is important and should be cultivated intentionally, but it does not produce the deep, one on one connection of body and soul that marital intimacy requires.





INTIMACY IS NOT ABOUT INCLUSION. IT IS ABOUT THE INTENTIONAL EXCLUSION OF OTHERS SO THAT YOU CAN PURSUE THE ONE GOD GAVE YOU.

Notice that each of these categories involves something good. They are healthy and necessary parts of life. The problem arises when we confuse them with the pursuit of intimacy. I am not saying they contribute nothing to marriage and there is no place for them. I am saying they are poor substitutes for the daily, intentional pursuit of deep, exclusive connection.

So what does count? Intimacy building activities generally share the following characteristics. Think of each one on a scale from absent to present. The more these characteristics are present, the greater the capacity to build intimacy.

- **Exclusivity:** intimacy is not about including everyone in the relationship. It requires the intentional exclusion of others

so that you can pursue the one God gave you. The more uniquely a form of connection belongs to your marriage, the more intimate it becomes.

- **Focus:** intimacy requires undivided attention. Phones are off. Children are elsewhere. Competing concerns are set aside.
- **Vulnerability:** both spouses are open - inviting both body and soul - to one another.
- **Joy:** both partners express delight in being together and in receiving the gift of the other's focused attention.
- **Humility:** each spouse is more concerned with meeting the other's needs and love language than satisfying their own.

The intimacy you share with your spouse should be marked by an intensity of attention and devotion that may at times seem



excessive. Of course, your spouse is not the only person who matters, but they should never feel like merely one priority among many. Seek to give them meaningful attention each day and pursue them as though no one else in the world could take their place. That is not unhealthy. It is part of covenant love.

Think that sounds extreme? I suggest spending more time in the Song of Songs. If you want to see a biblical picture of passionate, exclusive love, you must read it. Consider just a few examples:

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.”

Song of Songs 1:2 KJV

“My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.”

Song of Songs 2:16 KJV

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death.”

Song of Songs 8:6 KJV





Scripture is giving us a window into what God intends marital love to look like. Why does He want it to look this way? So that it can reflect His love for His people out into the world. He intended it to be *deep*, that we might comprehend how much God desires to know the innermost parts of us; *passionate*, that we might understand the fierceness with which God Himself loves us; and *abiding*, that we might reflect the constancy and faithfulness of God to a world of fickle commitments.

Now you may have a concern that this somehow places your spouse in God's position. But why assume that? Is it impossible to be an extravagant worshiper of God and love your spouse deeply at the same time? When you live this way, what you are actually doing is worshiping the God who made the incredible person you get to do life with.

Just as you might lie down to enjoy the warmth of the sun, take in a breathtaking view, eat a good meal, or experience something fun and new and feel thankfulness and adoration toward God, so you are meant to enjoy your spouse. This, too, is worship (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Not worship of your spouse, but worship of the God who made them.

God Himself affirms the goodness of marital closeness when He declares, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

Adam was walking with God in the garden, enjoying unbroken fellowship with his Creator, and yet God still said he was alone. That should tell us something profound. We were made to be relational creatures in need of human-to-human connection. Marriage is the highest and most covenantal expression of that design, and one of the beautiful things about it is that it helps us know God more clearly.

We should remember that humanity reflects God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). This does not mean that everything we do is like Him. However, it does mean that some of the ways we interact with and experience one another point us toward the way we are meant to experience God. It is like looking at the stars in the sky and feeling wonder and awe over the vastness of the universe. Creation points beyond itself to its Creator (Romans 1:20). In much the same way, your reckless, head-over-heels pursuit of your spouse points beyond itself to the God whose love it reflects.

Loving your spouse deeply does not compete with loving God. It is one of the primary ways you demonstrate your love for Him and share Him with the world. Enjoy it!

Personal Reflection Questions

1. When you reflect on all you just read about what intimacy is and what it looks like, how does this make you feel about the current state of intimacy in your marriage?
2. How are you personally contributing to intimacy in your marriage? Are you more of a positive or negative influence?
3. Have you ever thought about appreciation of your spouse as worship of your Creator? How might this change how you approach intimacy?

Questions to Discuss Together

1. What sort of activities do we do together that we thought built intimacy but now realize are more like "keeping busy" together?
2. What are the things we do together that we consider our greatest intimacy builders?



“Loving your spouse deeply does not compete with loving God. It is one of the primary ways you demonstrate your love for Him and share Him with the world. Enjoy it!”

Nature of Humanity

A SOUL THAT HAS A BODY - BOTH MADE TO BE KNOWN

Now that we fully comprehend what intimacy is, we need to think about human nature. What are we, and why in the world is this important for intimacy? It is essential that you understand what your spouse is if you hope to be truly close to them. How can you know what draws two people together if you do not even understand what we are made of?

So what are we? The simplest expression I can offer is this: we are a human soul that has a body. Let's think this through scripturally and then philosophically.

The Bible is replete with references to the soul. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word often used is *nephesh*¹¹. It refers to the inner life of a person—our breath, desires, emotions, and will. In Genesis 2:7, we're told that when God breathed into the man, he became a living *nephesh*, a living soul.

In the New Testament, the Greek word

psyche carries a similar meaning¹². Jesus tells his disciples not to fear those who can kill the body, but the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28). Paul, in Philippians 1, speaks of his desire to depart and be with Christ—clearly referring to a conscious existence apart from his body.

Scripture consistently affirms that we are more than physical beings. We are souls. The body is crucial, but it is not the source of our core self.

That said, Scripture does not treat the body as irrelevant. Far from it. Our future hope is not to leave our bodies behind forever, but to be *raised* in them. The resurrection affirms that the body matters (Romans 8:23). The body is how the soul expresses itself in physical reality. Through the body, we speak, act, love, and worship. The body reveals the soul. It makes the invisible visible. We are not our bodies, but we are not whole without them. So while we are

essentially a soul, we were never meant to be disembodied. A soul without a body still exists, but it is not complete.

Philosophically, this view is often called substance dualism¹³. It teaches that we are made of two distinct substances: the soul, which is immaterial and enduring, and the body, which is physical and temporary. The soul is not the product of the brain or the body's functions. It is the seat of consciousness, rational thought, moral judgment, and spiritual awareness. It is the "I" that thinks, feels, and chooses.

Christian philosophers like Augustine, Aquinas, J. P. Moreland, and Alvin Plantinga have defended this view in depth. They point out that many of the things most essential to being human—things like love, reason, and moral knowledge—cannot be explained by physical processes alone. They belong to the soul.

Of course, body and soul interact. The soul

A stylized illustration of a person with long dark hair, wearing a mustard yellow tunic and dark blue trousers, standing in a forest. The person is seen from behind, looking out over a path covered in fallen autumn leaves. The air is filled with many falling leaves in shades of orange, red, and yellow. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks and green foliage frame the scene. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by the autumnal tones of the leaves.

WE ARE MADE OF TWO DISTINCT SUBSTANCES: THE SOUL, WHICH IS IMMATERIAL AND ENDURING, AND THE BODY, WHICH IS PHYSICAL AND TEMPORARY.





moves the body. The body can influence the soul. When you're exhausted, it affects your mood. For example, when your heart is broken it shows in your entire demeanor. But they are not the same. The soul is primary. The body is the means through which the soul works. They are distinct, but they were made to function together.

And this is exactly why it matters for intimacy.

If your spouse is a soul who has a body, then you must learn to engage both if you want to love them well. You cannot truly connect by pursuing only the physical. But neither can you create meaningful closeness by chasing an emotional or spiritual bond while neglecting the physical design God gave us. We were created to live as whole persons—soul and body together (1 Corinthians 15:35-55).

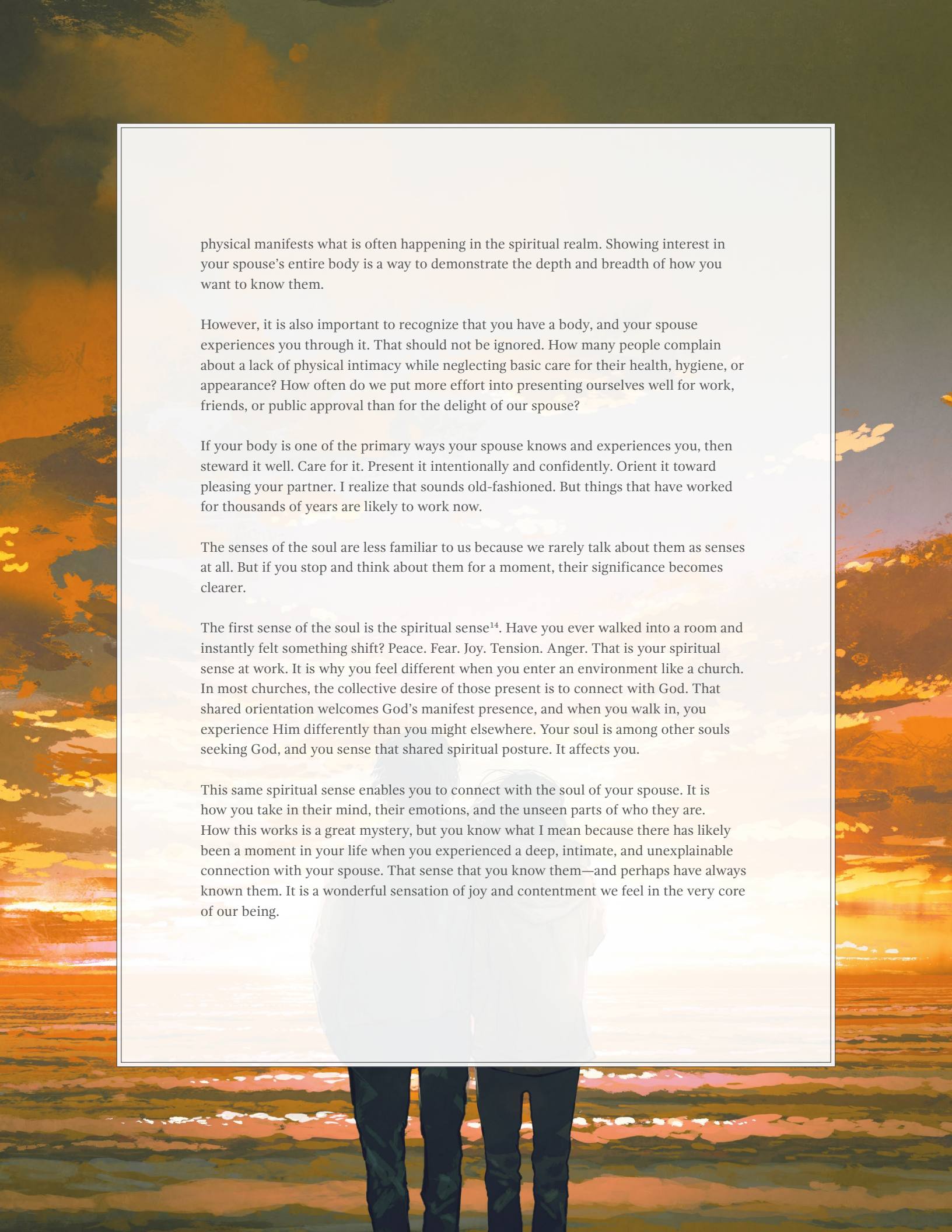
SENSES OF BODY AND SOUL

God created us with instruments of both body and soul through which we can interact, know, and be known. These instruments are our senses—the means by which we take information into our being. A more helpful way to think about how your senses relate to intimacy is this: they are how you take in your spouse. And just as importantly, they are the instruments through which your spouse takes you in.

Why does this level of detail matter? Because if intimacy is about interaction between two people's bodies and souls, then understanding how your spouse receives information is essential to growing closer to them. You cannot love your spouse well if you are inattentive to the ways they take you in. And you cannot truly know them unless you are willing to engage every part of them through every sense God has given.

So what are these senses of body and soul?

We are all familiar with the senses of the body because their input is constant and unmistakable. We see, touch, smell, hear, and taste. Every one of these senses can be used to know your spouse more deeply by interacting with the physical frame God gave them. This exploration should not be downplayed or ignored. Remember that the



physical manifests what is often happening in the spiritual realm. Showing interest in your spouse's entire body is a way to demonstrate the depth and breadth of how you want to know them.

However, it is also important to recognize that you have a body, and your spouse experiences you through it. That should not be ignored. How many people complain about a lack of physical intimacy while neglecting basic care for their health, hygiene, or appearance? How often do we put more effort into presenting ourselves well for work, friends, or public approval than for the delight of our spouse?

If your body is one of the primary ways your spouse knows and experiences you, then steward it well. Care for it. Present it intentionally and confidently. Orient it toward pleasing your partner. I realize that sounds old-fashioned. But things that have worked for thousands of years are likely to work now.

The senses of the soul are less familiar to us because we rarely talk about them as senses at all. But if you stop and think about them for a moment, their significance becomes clearer.

The first sense of the soul is the spiritual sense¹⁴. Have you ever walked into a room and instantly felt something shift? Peace. Fear. Joy. Tension. Anger. That is your spiritual sense at work. It is why you feel different when you enter an environment like a church. In most churches, the collective desire of those present is to connect with God. That shared orientation welcomes God's manifest presence, and when you walk in, you experience Him differently than you might elsewhere. Your soul is among other souls seeking God, and you sense that shared spiritual posture. It affects you.

This same spiritual sense enables you to connect with the soul of your spouse. It is how you take in their mind, their emotions, and the unseen parts of who they are. How this works is a great mystery, but you know what I mean because there has likely been a moment in your life when you experienced a deep, intimate, and unexplainable connection with your spouse. That sense that you know them—and perhaps have always known them. It is a wonderful sensation of joy and contentment we feel in the very core of our being.



GOD CREATED US WITH INSTRUMENTS OF
BOTH BODY AND SOUL THROUGH WHICH WE
CAN INTERACT, KNOW, AND BE KNOWN.



The Christian spouse is called to pursue inequity in marriage by sacrificially laying down their life for the good of the other. This feels like lunacy, but it is how Jesus loved us.

The second sense of the soul is the moral sense. Few people stop to consider where their moral intuition comes from. The short version is this: the moral values we recognize are grounded in and emanate from the very nature of God Himself, and we apprehend them through our moral sense¹⁵. I say apprehend because these are not arbitrary rules invented to suit our preferences, as much of modern society claims. They are objective moral truths rooted in the eternal, unchanging character of the Creator¹⁶.

We are designed to sense and reflect these moral realities whether we acknowledge God or not. This is why even those who deny God still speak of right and wrong as real boundaries rather than social inventions (Romans 2:14-15). It is why evil is treated as something that must be judged and answered for. We know the world contains both good and evil because we sense them.

This moral sense governs how we judge the treatment we give and receive from our spouse. At a basic level, it begins with equity: you treat your spouse well and expect them to treat you well in return. For the Christian, however—who should be most attuned to the heart of God—it becomes something far deeper.

The Christian spouse is called to pursue inequity in marriage by laying down their life sacrificially for the good of the other (Philippians 2:3-8). It is a posture that says, “Just as Christ gave and continues to give all for me, I will give all for you—regardless of how you reciprocate.” To the non-Christian, this sounds like



lunacy. And perhaps it is—until one actually tries it and discovers its power. I will always preach that two persons pursuing inequity in marriage will result in the greatest happiness possible in a relationship.

I could say much more here, but the point is this: the moral sense helps us understand the heart of God, or rather the good that flows from Him. It is one of the primary ways we learn how to show Christ to our spouse.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever thought much about human nature before? Did you realize that intimacy must include both the mind and body?
2. Do you think you put more emphasis on engaging the body or soul of your spouse? Is there a good balance?
3. How might understanding our dual nature change how you approach intimacy building?

Questions to Discuss Together

1. Have we ever really thought about ourselves as souls who have bodies? How does that idea change the way we think about marriage?
2. Why do you think it matters that both body and soul are involved in intimacy rather than only one or the other?
3. In our marriage, do we tend to engage more naturally through physical connection, emotional connection, spiritual connection, or how we treat one another? Why do you think that is?

God Designed Tension

MALE AND FEMALE DESIRE FOR INTIMACY

One of the most persistent sources of frustration in marriage is not a lack of desire for intimacy, but a disagreement over how intimacy should be pursued. Men and women are often oriented toward intimacy differently, and when this difference is misunderstood—or worse, degraded into accusations of right and wrong—it quickly becomes a battleground¹⁷.

In general, men and women often approach intimacy from different directions. This is not an absolute rule, but men tend to pursue closeness more physically, while women tend to pursue it more emotionally and spiritually. This difference is not accidental, cultural, or arbitrary. It is designed.

The mistake many couples make is assuming that the way they experience intimacy is the way intimacy should work for their spouse. A husband feels most connected through the process of physical intimacy and assumes his wife should feel the same. A wife feels most connected through emotional closeness and assumes her husband should as well. When this does not happen, one or both feel rejected.

Left unchecked, this tension hardens into resentment. But this difference was never meant to divide. God built it into marriage to draw each spouse into a more complete form of intimacy.

Men have deep emotional needs but rarely talk about them. The reasons are part natural and part cultural. Men are naturally more stoic and often less

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GOD DESIGNED THIS INTERPLAY INTENTIONALLY. MEN
ARE OFTEN DRAWN TOWARD EMOTIONAL INTIMACY
THROUGH THE BODY. WOMEN ARE OFTEN DRAWN
TOWARD PHYSICAL INTIMACY THROUGH THE SOUL.

in touch with their emotions. I personally have to be coached through the processing of my emotions because I simply take little to no time to consider them. Many men are like me. We just do not think about it much.

Most men do not experience deep emotional intimacy outside of their marriage¹⁸. Their friendships with other men tend to be activity-based rather than vulnerable¹⁹. As a result, many men suppress emotional needs they do not even know how to articulate. God, in His wisdom, designed physical intimacy to lower male defenses and open them up emotionally. After physical intimacy, many men find it easier to talk, to open up, and to be known. Sex does not shut men down emotionally when practiced rightly; it often opens them up²⁰.

Women often experience the inverse. They have physical needs that need to be met but may rarely think about them in the same way men do. How do we know this? The science is well documented. Women who have consistent sex with their husbands are often happier, less stressed, sleep better, and feel more connected in their relationship²¹. However, while men may think about sex numerous times in a day, women tend to think about it less, in some cases not for weeks at a time²². But when it comes to emotions, women think about them constantly. And not just their own! They are often thinking about the emotional state of their husband, their kids, their parents, their siblings, their friends, and their dog. A day in a woman's brain would completely exhaust the average man. Sound familiar?

Men do not often think about emotions. Women do not often think about sex. These are obviously generalized statements and there are exceptions - but it helps explain the usual relational tension.

In the same way that sex can be a gateway for men to open up emotionally, emotional connection is often the gateway to physical desire in women²³. When a woman feels emotionally connected to her husband, her body responds because her soul has already been engaged. Emotional intimacy does not compete with sexual intimacy, but rather prepares the ground for it. Sex becomes meaningful and deeply satisfying when it flows from relational closeness rather than obligation or pressure. And again, the surprising thing is that women benefit from physical intimacy as much as men do, as long as it is built on a foundation of spiritual and emotional connection.

God designed this interplay intentionally. Men are often drawn toward emotional intimacy through the body. Women are often drawn toward physical intimacy through the soul. Each spouse becomes the means God uses to pull the other into wholeness.

How wonderful it is to reflect upon God's wisdom and design. Intimacy was never meant to be divided into competing categories. True intimacy engages both body and soul of the husband and the wife. It is not the pursuit of the body to the exclusion of the soul, nor the pursuit of the soul to the exclusion of the body. It is the pursuit of the whole person.

This again demonstrates why marriage requires humility. Each spouse must be willing to move toward the other's preferred pathway to intimacy rather than demanding their own. This is not easy. Men often struggle to open up emotionally without first being affirmed through sex. Women often struggle to engage sexually when they do not feel emotionally close already. But what if we considered this tension an invitation from God to a fuller experience of intimacy?

One note of caution is that you should approach this interplay as more than a sacrifice you make for the other person. Yes, humble sacrifice is required—but this is one of those moments where you must recognize that it benefits you as well. The highest joys of intimacy require both your body and your soul to fully engage in the relationship. So don't just love from obligation. Don't merely tolerate it. Participate. Pursue. Lead the charge. Love like Jesus.

Men, pursue emotional connection by entering your wife's world and allowing her to express her feelings without judgment or immediately trying to solve every problem. Invite her into your world by reflecting on your own struggles, seeking her counsel, and genuinely valuing what she has to say. Work diligently to share the mental and physical burdens of the home, especially the unseen responsibilities of planning, preparing, and caring for your family. In doing so, you demonstrate that you value your wife as your equal partner and are committed to bearing life's burdens together. Do not take this lightly. Your wife needs you.

Women, make space for physical intimacy in your marriage. Prioritize it because it is one of God's primary gifts for cultivating oneness between husband and wife. Remember that your value to your husband is not found in what you earn or accomplish. You are his treasure. His desire to connect physically with you is not simply because of some overcharged sexual drive, but because it is you. His desire for physical closeness is often also a desire for emotional connection. By joyfully pursuing him, you participate in God's design for drawing your husband into deeper intimacy. Do not take this lightly. Your husband needs you.

Note: No discussion questions. Pray and ask God to reveal to you how this interplay currently works in your relationship. Ask Him to show you honest and tangible steps you can take to be there for your spouse. Remember, this is not about you. It is for them.

How to Build Intimacy

INTENTIONAL AND FREQUENT PURSUIT

We now move to the most critical part – personal application. Having a knowledge foundation is great but it must be followed up by action. We're going through an approach you can act on immediately to get closer to your spouse. Whether you are struggling or things are going great right now, building the following steps as a periodic practice will help you bring new life to your marriage.

Intimacy does not grow automatically. It grows through rhythmic practices. What you repeatedly give your time, attention, and priority to shapes the depth of your marriage far more than occasional emotional moments or isolated acts of effort. There is nothing wrong with grand gestures, but they are as fleeting as an evening sky. If intimacy is treated as something that happens only when conditions are perfect, it will slowly erode. But if it is treated as an intentional daily practice, it will increase abundantly.

Daily rhythms matter because intimacy is fragile. We are forgetful creatures, and closeness can be weakened in small, almost imperceptible ways. A neglected day turns into a neglected week. A neglected week turns into distance. Distance, left unchecked, turns into disconnection. This is why waiting for “more time,” “less stress,” or “a better season” is rarely wise. There will always be reasons not to pursue intimacy. We must learn to let them go.

Because intimacy involves both body and soul, daily rhythms must attend to both. This does not mean every day looks the same or that intimacy must be expressed in identical ways. It means that each day includes some intentional movement toward one another.

For my wife and me, this looks different in every season and often changes day to day. Right now, we are in a particularly busy and demanding season with work and school-related activities. Even so, we

wake up every day and choose closeness as a way of communicating, “*you matter more than anything else.*” I make her coffee. I sit near her during her devotional time. I talk to her while she gets ready. We text throughout the day. I embrace her when she gets home and stay in her presence as much as possible before one of us leaves to take the girls to dance class. And we take advantage of any evening we can for a date. Time is hard to find right now, but we work to maintain a normal cadence in every season.

Daily practices of intimacy do not need to be elaborate. They need to be consistent. A few minutes of focused attention is often more powerful than hours of distracted proximity, such as watching television together. A short, meaningful conversation can do more for a marriage than an entire evening spent half-present.

Sex itself must also be understood rhythmically (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). When it becomes regular, pursued, and grounded in mutual giving, it becomes one of the strongest forces binding husband and wife together. Sexual intimacy was never meant to be occasional or incidental. It was designed to be a repeated, embodied reminder of oneness.

I do, however, have a specific note regarding sexual rhythms—for both husband and wife.

If you are the husband, you must open your eyes to how deeply you have been shaped by a culture in sexual hyperdrive. If you are an average man, odds are you were exposed to pornography and sexual content by the age of thirteen—likely earlier²⁴. You have been bombarded by sexualized advertising your entire life. You have unprecedented access to fantasy through the privacy of a smartphone. You live in a society that is actively normalizing prostitution under the label of “sex work.” You probably don’t realize the extent culture has influenced how you approach sex.



If you have ever pressured your wife into a sexual act you saw in a video at some point in your life, stop. Sexual love is meant to elevate your wife, not degrade her. If you carry expectations for how she should perform sexually, stop. She has enough of those from the culture already. Your posture in the bedroom must be sacrificial and focused on serving her—not indulging your culturally influenced fantasies. Recognize your sexual desires have likely been shaped by your unfortunate sexual education. You must acknowledge these influences, name them honestly, and rise above them.

If you are a wife, there are forces working against you as well. Life is busy, and busyness breeds exhaustion. Exhaustion is a powerful enemy of physical intimacy. Often, that exhaustion comes from good things—pouring into children, building experiences for them, supporting their activities. Serving at church, caring for friends, and tending to yourself are all good pursuits. But even good things can crowd out what is greatest.

There is nothing you will ever do in this life that is greater than loving your husband well. God placed you uniquely in his life to be his wellspring, his counselor, and a source of immeasurable joy (Proverbs 18:22). If you do not believe this, you will unintentionally place other things above him and miss perfect opportunities for physical love because he never made it onto your mental checklist.

I am not saying husband and wife must engage one another - body and soul - every day. What I am saying is that we must wake up to the reality of our modern culture—one defined by relentless busyness and exhaustion. We live at a pace no previous generation faced, simply because there was not as much competing for our attention. Technology has reshaped how we eat, sleep, work, spend leisure time, communicate and make love²⁵.





If the schedule leaves no room for intimacy, then adjustments should be made. Jesus said:

“My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:41b-42 NLT

Just like Mary rejected what is good for what is best, we too should sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to how He tells us to live. Live to walk in relationship with God first, and then people, starting with your spouse.

“Critical to intimacy is how you accept and pursue your spouse. However, you cannot truly do either unless you first understand them. How can you accept someone you do not know?”



01. MEDITATE ON YOUR SPOUSE

Critical to intimacy is pursuing and accepting your spouse. However, you cannot truly do either unless you first understand them. How can you accept someone you do not know? How can you pursue someone effectively if you do not understand them?

This requires deliberate and intentional time to think about your spouse—their current season, emotions, trials, dreams, victories, hopes, wants, and everything else that makes up their inner world. You will never waste time reflecting on these things because this is your primary mission field and one of the greatest reasons God has you here on earth.

To support this practice, I have included six questions for you to consider as you try to explore your spouse's world. They are meant to be filled out or considered weekly. Why so frequent? Because it builds a habit of dwelling on your spouse. We miss so much of what our spouses go through. A tool like this should help you stay focused.

When you're completing these questions, do not rely only on what your spouse has said. Pay close attention to what they did and how they react to moments in their life. People may not say or even know how to articulate what they feel inside, so try to pick up on their emotions and behavior.

If you can't answer the questions, take it as a signal to increase your attentiveness. You need to step up your game! Your goal for the first week is to observe your spouse more closely, especially their reactions to ways you interact with them, and ask questions that check in on their thoughts and feelings.

I encourage you to take your time with this. Don't rush it! Invite God by asking Him to

give you insight as you complete it. He will not fail to steward an open heart in the right direction. Your spouse is worth the time and effort.

Remember that this is not meant to be about you except for how you relate to them. Dwell deeply on how you relate to and love them. Spend time observing all the ways they respond to your efforts to love them. What made them exceedingly happy? What made them sad? Did they ever look neglected or dejected because you didn't give them attention? This is your greatest calling! Work hard at it! Be intentional with it!

Weekly Questions About Your Spouse

- What has been occupying most of my spouse's time and mental energy lately? (e.g., trials, burdens, frustrations, joys, work, hobbies, love, God, kids, past, future, etc.,)
- What specific moments have made them happy this past week? What has made them sad?
- What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations in the short term?

Weekly Questions About Your Love For Your Spouse

- Have I been thinking about and observing my spouse this past week or have I been preoccupied?
 - Am I holding onto any grudges against my spouse? Have I forgiven them of all past offenses?
 - What have I done to show my spouse love the way they like to be loved this past week?
-

02. ASSESS INTIMACY LEVELS

The next step is to be honest about the current state of intimacy in your marriage. I really enjoy a model developed by Josh Squires, which identifies distinct but interconnected types of marital intimacy²⁶. This framework is meant to help us think holistically about how husband and wife engage one another in both body and soul. By assessing these categories, we gain insight on where intimacy may be strong, where it may be neglected, and where intentional rhythms can bring restoration.

The five types of intimacy in this framework are:

- **Spiritual Intimacy** – cultivated through shared pursuit of God, including prayer, Scripture, worship, and spiritual conversation.
- **Emotional Intimacy** – built through vulnerability, empathy, and the sharing of feelings, fears, hopes, and inner experiences.
- **Intellectual Intimacy** – developed by engaging one another's thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and perspectives through meaningful conversation.
- **Recreational Intimacy** – fostered by shared activities, hobbies, and enjoyment that strengthen companionship and joy.
- **Physical Intimacy** – expressed through bodily closeness and sexual union, which God designed as a powerful instrument for oneness in marriage.

For each area I want you to think through the following questions:

1. How important is this area of intimacy to me? Why did I answer that way?
2. How important is it to my spouse? Why do I think that?
3. How frequently are we intentionally engaging in this area?
4. Is this the right frequency or could things be better?
5. What are the barriers that might keep us from improving this area of intimacy?

As with the previous exercise, invite God to come and be with you. Resist the urge to defend yourself, justify the current state of things, or assign fault. This is about developing understanding that leads to healing. The clarity gained here will serve as the foundation for what comes next: your plan of action.

3. CREATE A PLAN OF ACTION

Now that you have carefully considered each area, you are ready to think through a plan of action—or rather, a singular action.

Why just one? Because we struggle to focus on someone other than ourselves. Keeping one thing in mind is achievable. More than that, your action is not meant to be a one-off event. The goal is to build a new habit, and habit formation requires consistency and focus. Trying to overhaul everything at once often leads to feeling overwhelmed and doing nothing at all.

I encourage you to begin with a spiritual habit—one that intentionally invites God into your marriage and into your current season. When you anchor your efforts spiritually, you are not relying on your own strength alone. Once that rhythm is established, God will guide you toward the next area that needs attention.

4. REMEMBER THE GOAL

Why put forth all of this effort? To continually transform yourself - not your spouse - into who God created you to be. Seasons come and go and they will change both of you. Allow God to use intentional practices like this to create space in your heart for your spouse. The more you surrender, the more He uses you.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17 WEB



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God's Sovereign Design

YOU WERE MADE FOR THIS

Are you willing to do the things it takes to build relational intimacy? I mean really willing? The moment you start thinking about intentionally improving your marriage, the enemy is going to bring up all the reasons you can't. Reasons will flood your mind that appear to be impossibilities. You'll start thinking in absolutes like, "He will never change," or "She will never come to church," or "He will never listen to my ideas," or "She will never give herself to me again."

The enemy loves when we live in the world of absolute lies. He wants to keep you in a place where improvement feels impossible. It's somewhat funny, isn't it? Before two people get married and commit to one another before God and man, the enemy does everything he can to bring them together in physical intimacy. But as soon as they are married, he works every day to keep them from the spiritual and bodily intimacy that would do both husband and wife so much good.

Why mention the enemy? Because he is behind the spirit of "can't." Think about what is holding you back from a more loving and fulfilling relationship with your spouse. Most of our minds go immediately to something our spouse is responsible for. But perhaps it is something we aren't doing. Perhaps it is even something we've dismissed as impossible because it feels too embarrassing, would wound our pride, or might feel like rewarding our spouse when we do not believe they deserve it.

- *"I can't be tender and caring with my husband because I feel so far from him."*
- *"I can't apologize to my wife because it would be humiliating."*
- *"I can't explain things to my husband because he'll just try to fix things he can't fix."*
- *"I can't ask my wife's input on something because she just won't understand."*

Each one of these statements belittles the other person and creates artificial barriers you could break through. In fact, the actions that lead to healing are almost always those we tell ourselves we can't do. Let's look at each of those examples.

A woman's tenderness is probably the number one thing that can cause a man to open up and reveal his innermost thoughts. It is also one of the fastest paths to helping him see and care for his wife's needs. He is much more likely to become patient, kind, open, and loving when his wife is showing him tenderness and care.

A man's refusal to offer a sincere apology has ruined so many days between husband and wife. I can't tell you how many days could have been better if I had simply apologized authentically to my wife. And I know why I didn't do it. Because the process feels humiliating. But the reward is restoration of relationship, increased closeness, and probably a saved day.

A woman's unwillingness to share her inner world because she no longer trusts her husband also hurts the marriage. That distrust may be understandable given how he has listened in the past. Even so, each day gives him another opportunity to grow. Your husband probably wants to understand you. He wants to know your thoughts, fears, and dreams. Yes, he will often try to fix what cannot be fixed. But with patient, gentle guidance, many men learn to become better listeners. Give him the opportunity to grow. And when he misses the mark, gently—emphasis on gently—help him understand what you need.

A husband's unwillingness to engage his wife on a solution robs him of his greatest counselor. In my experience, this always has far more to do with my male pride than my wife's aptitude. Your wife completes the representation of God's image in the

world and brings so much wisdom to every situation, even those she knows little to nothing about. I have been amazed at how stupid I can be about some things while my wife finds a solution in three seconds. My brain tends to overcomplicate. But Scripture says my wife is a counselor. So I hurt myself when I don't take advantage of this.

What I'm really trying to show you with these examples are things that we say we can't do but that is not true. These aren't things we *can't* do, but rather things we *won't* do.

But God works through people who cast aside their pride and humbly do what He asks them to do—love their spouse. Remember the passage from Paul that everyone loves to read at weddings:

“Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails.”
1 Corinthians 13:4–8a WEB

This is it! Read this passage every day if you have to until you convince yourself that this is the way to act in marriage. Because if you read these verses and honestly assess your current attitude and actions against them, you will likely find yourself wanting.

I encourage you to move from “*I can't*” to the more honest statement: “*I have not been willing to sacrifice my personal pride.*” Or maybe you did once, and it didn't work. Maybe you were embarrassed, ashamed, or frustrated. Well, did Jesus give up after one attempt? Thank God He didn't.

Right before Jesus was about to be arrested, do you know who He was thinking of? You!

“Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me.”

John 17:20–21 WEB

Do you see it in our Savior's own words? He was about to face the most excruciating death imaginable on the earth and rather than whining or complaining, His heart was for those of us who would come into the Kingdom. His prayer was that we would be *one*. This is one reason why I think oneness between husband and wife is so important because I believe it is one of the greatest ways to grow the Kingdom by demonstrating the wisdom and love of God through the intimacy of husband and wife.

But what I really want you to understand from Jesus' prayer is that He didn't give up on you. So many times we want to give up and let go on a spouse that we claim just can't come back to us. We try and we try but day in and day out the result seems to be the same. We want to stop and I completely understand this sentiment. Yet as I scour the scriptures for answers on this topic, the Holy Spirit directs me to the same answer over and over again. Jesus' love for us never gave up. Therefore, what justification do we possibly have?

Jesus said, “It is finished,” meaning the work was completely done. Our sin was entirely atoned for by the work of the cross. He is our example, and can be our motivation to keep going.

Don't give up. Don't let go. Release the pride that is holding you back. Let go of selfishness, and build eternal treasure in heaven by becoming more like Jesus. Seek eternal things, not temporary happiness. Seek wonder, beauty, wisdom, and holiness instead of temporary satisfaction.





You might say it is too hard, and yes, in your own strength it is too hard. You might say, “I’ve tried everything, and it hasn’t worked.” Maybe that is true. But are you really going to give up? God brought you to this person for a reason.

The best spouse for you is the one you are already with²⁷.

How can I make such a claim? Because God is sovereign. God’s sovereignty refers to how He is working all things for His ultimate purposes and aims. Nothing is random. Everything is either orchestrated or allowed by God. Nothing happens apart from His will.

So what does this mean for your life and your marriage? It means you exist in this time and place for a reason. It means even your mistakes are worked into God’s purposes. It means that even if your spouse leaves you and all your efforts end in divorce, He still has a great plan for you and will remember how you were faithful. It means that even if your marriage began in the most ungodly way, you are still in the marriage God has allowed you to be in and intends to use.

If you are unhappy in your marriage, the solution is almost never to find a new person. The evidence suggests you will simply walk out of misery and into an even higher probability of misery. Besides, as you now know, happiness is not the primary goal. Not even close.

If you are unmotivated to grow in intimacy with your spouse, let your discontent act as fuel that transforms you into the greatest spouse possible. That is God’s way. And you may be surprised how much joy He gives you along the road of obedience.

So ask yourself: how often do you think about them? How often do you take account of the season they are in? How often do you intentionally plan ways to bless them? How often do you try something fresh in their love language?

If the answer is not “very frequently,” then you may need to revisit whether your unhappiness with your spouse is truly about their faults. Perhaps it is more about your lack of attention, effort, and priority.

Your first mission field for representing Christ every day is your spouse. They should be your highest priority, and your thought life and actions should reflect that. Go out and fulfill the primary reason God created you for. Only you can do it, because God designed this calling to be uniquely yours. What a privilege to be chosen for this work! Go be Jesus to your spouse.



ENDNOTES

- 1 William J. Brady, Killian McLoughlin, Tuan N. Doan, and Molly J. Crockett, “How Social Learning Amplifies Moral Outrage Expression in Online Social Networks,” *Science Advances* 7, no. 33 (2021): eabe5641, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe5641>
- 2 There are many places in Scripture that help us understand pride, but I think it is best understood in contrast to humility. Consider Philippians 2:1–11. In verse 3, Paul instructs us not to act out of selfish ambition but, in humility, to value others above ourselves. He then tells us to have the same attitude as Christ, who did not use His equality with God for His own advantage but humbled Himself by taking the form of a servant. Humility directs our attention away from ourselves and toward others. Pride does the opposite.
- 3 C. S. Lewis offers a helpful picture of genuine humility: “Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably, all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.” C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. and enl. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 128.
- 4 Paul R. Amato and Bruce Keith, “Parental Divorce and the Well-Being of Children: A Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 110, no. 1 (1991): 26–46, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.110.1.26>
- 5 Gabriel Xing Da Tan et al., “Outcomes Associated with Childhood Parental Divorce: An Umbrella Review of Meta-Analyses,” *Child Protection and Practice* 9 (2026): 100320, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2026.100320>
- 6 Felicitas Auersperg et al., “Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Mental Health—A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 119 (2019): 107–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2019.09.011>
- 7 In Matthew 19, Jesus is responding to Pharisees who were trying to trap Him. Their question was cleverly devised because, by forcing Jesus to take a position on the reasons a man could divorce his wife, they likely believed His answer would damage Him regardless of which position He took. As always, Jesus gives a response that undermines the question itself. He essentially turns it on its head, declaring that people should not be looking for reasons to separate what God has joined together. However, this is not the primary reason I use this passage to reinforce my point. More relevant is the conversation Jesus has with His disciples immediately afterward. They are surprised by His answer because He has shown them that marriage is far more binding than they had assumed. They respond that, if this is the nature of marriage, it may be better not to marry. Jesus’ response to His disciples is why I use this passage here. After they suggest that it may be better not to marry, Jesus replies, “Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given” (Matthew 19:11 WEB). He then gives dignity to those who remain unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. His words show that God may have unique purposes for single people and that their lives are not incomplete, lesser, or without meaningful Kingdom purpose. Jesus preserves the dignity of the single person while also affirming the dignity and seriousness of marriage.
- 8 Many Christian interpreters have understood the Song of Songs as portraying Christ’s love for His Church or for the individual believer. See Richard A. Norris Jr., ed. and trans., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, introduction to the Song of Solomon; and Brian Simmons, *The Book of Song of Songs: Divine Romance*, 2020 ed. (Racine, WI: BroadStreet Publishing, 2022). See also Ephesians 5:25–32.
- 9 Waite, Linda J., Don Browning, William J. Doherty, Maggie Gallagher, Ye Luo, and Scott M. Stanley. *Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages*. New York: Institute for American Values, 2002.
- 10 Laurenceau, Jean-Philippe, Lisa Feldman Barrett, and Paula R. Pietromonaco. “Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process: The Importance of Self-Disclosure, Partner Disclosure, and Perceived Partner Responsiveness in Interpersonal Exchanges.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 5 (1998): 1238–51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238>
- 11 BibleProject. “Nephesh / Soul.” Video, 4:23. November 9, 2017. <https://bibleproject.com/videos/nephesh-soul/>.
- 12 Bible Hub, “Strong’s Greek 5590: *Psyche*—Soul, Life, Self, Inner Being,” accessed July 30, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5590.htm>
- 13 J. P. Moreland, “What Is the Soul and Is It Real?,” The Table Podcast, Biola University Center for Christian Thought, October 28, 2012.
- 14 By the “spiritual sense,” I mean the soul’s capacity to perceive and commune with spiritual reality. Scripture describes human beings worshipping God “*in spirit*” (John 4:23–24), the Holy Spirit testifying directly with the human spirit (Romans 8:16), and a person’s spirit participating in prayer beyond the ordinary activity of the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:14–15). Hebrews likewise portrays believers as participating in a heavenly assembly that includes God, angels, and “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22–24). Together, these passages, among numerous others, support the conclusion that human beings possess an inward faculty capable of relating to God and the spiritual realm.
- 15 William Lane Craig, “Personal God,” *Reasonable Faith*, accessed July 30, 2026, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/question-answer/P30/personal-god>
- 16 William Lane Craig, “The New Atheism and Five Arguments for God,” sec. 3.3, “The Euthyphro Dilemma,” *Reasonable Faith*, accessed July 30, 2026, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-new-atheism-and-five-arguments-for-god>.
- 17 Research suggests that men and women often approach intimacy from different directions, even though both value emotional and sexual closeness. For many men, sex is an important way of feeling emotionally connected to their spouse. For many women, feeling understood, cared for, and emotionally close often strengthens sexual desire and openness. These are broad tendencies rather than rigid rules, but they can help explain why husbands and wives sometimes pursue the same desire for closeness in different ways. See Bianca Fileborn et al., “The Importance of Sex and the

Meaning of Sex and Sexual Pleasure for Men Aged 60 and Older Who Engage in Heterosexual Relationships,” **Archives of Sexual Behavior** 46 (2017): 2097–2110; Shari M. Blumenstock, “Expectations and Sexual Desire in Romantic Relationships,” **Journal of Sex Research** 59, no. 3 (2022): 283–302; Gurit E. Birnbaum et al., “Intimately Connected: The Importance of Partner Responsiveness for Experiencing Sexual Desire,” **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology** 111, no. 4 (2016): 530–46; and Josh Squires, “Marital Intimacy Is More Than Sex,” **Desiring God**, March 2, 2016.

18 Research finds that men are less likely than women to seek emotional support or discuss personal struggles with friends. Men’s friendships also tend to center more on shared activities, which may help explain why many men rely heavily on their wives for emotional intimacy. See Pew Research Center, “Where Men and Women Turn for Emotional Support and Social Connection,” January 16, 2025; Iris V. Wahrung, Jeffry A. Simpson, and Paul A. M. Van Lange, “Romantic Relationships Matter More to Men than to Women,” **Behavioral and Brain Sciences** 49 (2026): e88; and Eiluned Pearce, Anna Machin, and Robin I. M. Dunbar, “Sex Differences in Intimacy Levels in Best Friendships and Romantic Partnerships,” **Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology** 7 (2021): 1–16.

19 I only refer to male-to-male relationships here because married men and women should not cultivate deep emotional connections with members of the opposite sex who are not their spouse. It is dangerous and there is absolutely no need for it.

20 Research on post-sex communication suggests that sexual intimacy can make personal disclosure feel safer and more rewarding. One study found that orgasm was associated with more positive disclosure, while another found that increasing post-sex conversation improved relationship satisfaction among men. See Amanda Denes, “Toward a Post-Sex Disclosures Model,” **Communication Research** 45, no. 3 (2018): 297–318; and Amanda Denes et al., “Exploring the Effects of Pillow Talk,” **Communication Monographs** 87, no. 3 (2020): 267–90.

21 Research links positive partnered sexual experiences with better mood, lower stress, greater affection, and improved relationship well-being. One daily-diary study of middle-aged women found that partnered sexual activity predicted lower stress and negative mood the following day. Other research found that sex predicted greater next-day well-being and was associated with falling asleep faster and reporting better sleep quality. These benefits appear to depend on sex being positive, affectionate, and mutually satisfying rather than merely frequent. See Mary H. Burleson, Wenda R. Trevathan, and Michael Todd, “In the Mood for Love or Vice Versa?,” **Archives of Sexual Behavior** 36, no. 3 (2007): 357–68; Todd B. Kashdan et al., “Sexuality Leads to Boosts in Mood and Meaning in Life,” **Emotion** 18, no. 4 (2018): 563–76; Anik Debrot et al., “More Than Just Sex,” **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin** 43, no. 3 (2017): 287–99; and Carlotta F. Oesterling et al., “The Influence of Sexual Activity on Sleep,” **Journal of Sleep Research** 32, no. 4 (2023): e13814.

22 Research indicates that men, on average, think and fantasize about sex more often than women, although individuals vary considerably. In one week-long study of young adults, men reported a median of about nineteen sexual thoughts per day, compared with about ten among women. See Terri D. Fisher, Zachary T. Moore, and Mary-Jo Pittenger, “Sex on the Brain?,” **Journal of Sex Research** 49, no. 1 (2012): 69–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2011.565429>; and Julius Frankenbach et al., “Sex Drive,” **Psychological Bulletin** 148, nos. 9–10 (2022): 621–61, <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000366>.

23 Research suggests that emotional closeness and feeling understood, cared for, and valued by one’s partner can strengthen sexual desire in both sexes, but often more strongly among women. See Shari M. Blumenstock, “Expectations and Sexual Desire in Romantic Relationships,” **Journal of Sex Research** 59, no. 3 (2022): 283–302; and Gurit E. Birnbaum et al., “Intimately Connected: The Importance of Partner Responsiveness for Experiencing Sexual Desire,” **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology** 111, no. 4 (2016): 530–46.

24 Common Sense Media, “New Report Reveals Truths About How Teens Engage with Pornography,” press release, January 10, 2023, <https://www.common sense media.org/press-releases/new-report-reveals-truths-about-how-teens-engage-with-pornography>.

25 Sexual frequency has declined in recent decades, including among married couples. Researchers suggest that stress, fatigue, constant connectivity, and screen-based distraction may reduce the time and mental space available for intimacy, though technology is only one possible cause. See Kaye Wellings et al., “Changes in, and Factors Associated with, Frequency of Sex in Britain,” **BMJ** 365 (2019): l1525; and Brandon T. McDaniel and Michelle Drouin, “Daily Technology Interruptions and Emotional and Relational Well-Being,” **Computers in Human Behavior** 99 (2019): 1–8.

26 Josh Squires, “Marital Intimacy Is More Than Sex: Five Ways to Connect with Your Spouse,” **Desiring God**, March 2, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/marital-intimacy-is-more-than-sex>.

27 I again say this should never be used to minimize abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional), coercion, betrayal, abandonment, or danger. I believe God can restore even these circumstances; however, these need to be treated seriously and immediately with appropriate pastoral, professional, legal, or emergency support.



The One

BY JOSEF KAUZLARICH

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