

"Read this and watch the sparks fly!" - Dr. Kevin Leman, bestselling author, *Sheet Music*

# Jay & Laura Laffoon

FOREWARD by KEN DAVIS

Igniting the Passion, Mystery and  
Romance in *Your* Marriage

# THE SPARK



# The Spark

Igniting the Passion, Mystery, and  
Romance in Your Marriage

by  
*Jay and Laura Laffoon*

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To Jesus, He's the only reason we're here!

## Foreword

I sat in the back of the Grand Hotel Ballroom on Mackinac Island, Michigan, and watched with fascination as four hundred couples laughed and danced and sang the words to some goofy old hit tunes. This wasn't a room full of giddy teens. These were married couples of all ages, and they had come from all over the United States to celebrate their marriage. It was a party.

In the midst of all this hilarity a particular couple caught my eye. They appeared to have little to celebrate. They were not participating and turned slightly away from one another, not touching or smiling or making eye contact. In fact the sullen look on their faces advertised to anyone near that they were trying hard not to have fun. I remembered hearing them exchange harsh words during check-in. Evidently some conflict was inhibiting their ability to celebrate.

On the stage Jay and Laura Laffoon were doing what they do best - living out the give-and-take of marriage and having fun doing it. The spark of love burns bright in their lives.

Then Jay and Laura did or said something that brought the house down. I don't remember what it was. It really doesn't matter. What does matter is that the woman in this couple I mentioned started to smile. Oh, she tried to hide it with her hand, but she forgot to cover her eyes. (Eyes can smile, too, you know.) Then she playfully punched her husband in the shoulder and before long they were engaged not only in the festivities but with each other too.

I have known Jay and Laura for years. “Passionate” is the best word I can think of to describe them. They argue and minister and parent and love with intense passion. And they use the flame of their passion for Christ and life and one another to ignite the spark of love in other marriages.

A can of butane sits in my garage. On the side it says, “Flammable! Keep away from any source of ignition!” When I abide by that rule, the can just sits there. It is useless. But when I put the butane in the right receptacle and intentionally expose it to a spark, it warms my house, lights a fine cigar, or floods my patio with light. It suddenly has purpose and impacts lives with joy and brilliance.

Too many marriages are just sitting on the shelf. No fire. No passion, No fun. The potential is there. All that’s needed is a spark. This book you are about to read is the spark! Brace yourself for laughter and hope and love.

Ken Davis  
President, Ken Davis Productions  
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## Our Story

*How It All Began*

*The book of love has music in it  
In fact that's where music comes from...*  
Peter Gabriel

### **Three Rules of Dating**

On July 3, 1984, I (Jay) moved from my hometown of Petoskey, Michigan, to Atlanta, Georgia, to begin a job I secured after graduating from college.

Exactly one day later I was set up on a blind date with Laura Elizabeth Bass.

My friends and I arrived at Laura's house thirty minutes early. At this point I became keenly aware of the first rule dating: don't show up a half hour early! I knocked on the door for what seemed like an eternity. After each knock, I would turn to Chaz and Deaver (the couple who set this date up) and stare with disbelief. *Is this girl standing me up before we've even met?*

My self-esteem was withering by the milli-second.

We were just about to leave when the door swung open. The next moment is a bit of a blur. I remember being surprised, and I remember seeing a young woman who had obviously just gotten out of the shower. Her hair was soaking wet and strung all over her face. She stood before us in nothing but a T-shirt and Boxer shorts. Clutching a towel to her chest was an obvious attempt at modesty.

I stuck out my hand, and with every bit of personality I could

muster said, “Hi, I ‘m Jay.” Laura let out an embarrassed, Jr. High giggle and promptly turned toward Deaver with a look that sent chills down my spine. Now that I think about it, since then that look has been aimed at me a time or two... or a thousand.

Chaz and I went into the living room and turned on TBS; I think we were watching *The Andy Griffith Show*. Deaver went with Laura while she got ready. Twenty minutes later I learned the second rule of dating: when women go away together, miracles happen. I looked up and saw beauty. The shower-soaked woman I met at the door had been transformed. I was dumbfounded.

The four of us went to an Atlanta Braves game. I vividly remember paying too much for the tickets, that the food was awful, and that Laura and I talked about everything. I had spent time with many members of the opposite sex before. In fact, some of my best friends are women, but this was different. The conversation flowed like a mighty river. The current ran deep and strong. I was amazed by the intensity so early in the relationship.

When the game ended, the lights in the stadium went dark, and the July 4th fireworks lit up the sky, eliciting the usual oooo’s and aaaaah’s. Afterwards, Chaz grabbed Deaver’s hand and bolted for the gate to beat the crowd. Deaver instinctively grabbed Laura’s hand, and in turn Laura grabbed mine.

My heart leaped out of my chest. It was at that moment that I first felt “The Spark”.

It was strange. I’ve held many girls’ hands before, but this made my entire body feel like it was going into a seizure. My arms, legs, and head reeled in every direction because of the ecstasy. It scared me to death.

I quietly analyzed the situation the entire trip home. That may be why Laura got out of the car so quickly. Not so much as a goodnight handshake. I learned later that Laura’s mom asked her

how the date went the next morning. Without hesitation Laura replied, “Mom, I’m going to marry that man!”

Over the next ten days, I learned the third and final rule of dating: if a woman wants to marry you, give up! They should teach a course for men in every college across America called “Give Up 101.” It would save us all a tremendous amount of pain and suffering.

In a city of two million people, Laura managed to have our paths cross eight of the next ten days. I didn’t know it at the time, but we have a word for this now...it’s called STALKING! To this day I don’t know how she did it.

The coup d’etat took place when she asked me, and I agreed, to a weekend trip to the mountains with her and her friends. That Saturday night, ten days after our blind date, in a log cabin on a mountain in North Carolina, I asked Laura Elizabeth Bass to be my wife. Her reply: “What took you so long?”

## **The Ring**

Three hundred dollars! That was all the money I had in the world. I moved to Atlanta, paid my first month’s rent, and had three hundred bucks left over. I had told Laura I couldn’t afford a ring yet, and she assured me it was okay.

I appreciated her graciousness, but I wanted to give her a ring. To me a ring was a symbol of my love and commitment to her. I couldn’t wait for the moment when I could slide that symbol on her finger. That moment, it turned out, was not far off.

The day after I asked Laura to be my wife was a day from heaven: Carolina blue sky, billowing clouds, and my new fiancée sitting right beside me as we drove back to Atlanta. I lay in bed that night with my heart on fire. I was in love, and nothing else in the world mattered. That is, until Monday morning.

As soon as I got to work, I knew something had changed. I had been there only a week or so, but I could tell something big was going down. The company I had come to Atlanta to work for, the reason I moved a thousand miles from home, was closing its doors. I was out of work.

My life turned upside down and inside out. I was in love, but I had no job, no money, and no place to live. As Dickens so aptly put it, “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

What would I tell Laura? What would I tell my parents?

Laura was gracious once again. “First,” she said with a smile, “I have money; second, you can live with my mom if you need to; and the ring . . . well, I’ll get it when I get it. Now kiss me!” WHAT A WOMAN! At that moment I knew why I had moved to Atlanta, I knew why I was here. It was to begin the rest of my life with the woman my mom had been praying for since I was young. I truly felt peace in the midst of the storm.

I called home, and before I could relay the news Mom said, “I’m so glad you called. I’ve got some business to cover with you.” She proceeded to tell me of a life insurance policy she and Dad had taken out for me years before. She told me I could keep it or cash it in. Hmmm, I thought . . . cash! I didn’t know why we hadn’t covered this bit of “business” before I left home, but the thought of \$2,000.00 in my grubby little palms was just the news I needed.

Then it was time. “Mom,” I said, “put Dad on the other phone. I’ve got some good news and some bad news.” I told them about Laura, and . . . “JAY WILLIAM LAFFOON, YOU DO NOT TELL YOUR MOTHER YOU’RE ENGAGED OVER THE PHONE AFTER KNOWING THIS GIRL ONLY TEN DAYS! I certainly hope this is the bad news.”

I winced. “Well, Mom, actually that was the good news.” Silence.

Dead air. Nothing.

“We trust you, Son. Go on.” Dad’s voice was like a bell ringing on the steeple of a church, comforting and encouraging.

As we talked, we began to revel in the fact that the insurance issue was just now coming up. God’s timing is perfect!

If I had wanted, I could have scraped by on \$2,000.00 for quite some time, but I was a man on a mission. That money was my ticket to an engagement ring, and nothing would stand in my way.

After days of shopping I purchased the ring and devised a plan to give it to Laura on top of a mountain in a camp near Woodland Park, Colorado, called Quaker Ridge, which my dad directed every summer. The mountain, Soldier’s Mountain, lies on the backside of the range that runs beside the U.S. Air Force Academy. At the peak is a cross made from pine trees, wedged between two large rocks. The view from the top of Soldier’s Mountain is nothing short of spectacular: a picture postcard of Pike’s Peak and the surrounding mountain ranges. I would give Laura the ring on top of Soldier’s Mountain, at the foot of the cross.

To put it mildly, I was excited. We drove from Atlanta to Colorado Springs with very few stops. We slept an hour in a rest area in western Kansas until the sunrise woke us, and we were on our way again.

I had hidden the ring and a bottle of champagne, given to me at the diamond store, in Laura’s backpack. My idea was to order two pan pizzas from a Pizza Hut in Woodland Park and hike to the top Soldier’s Mountain. After we had enjoyed our pizza and bubbly, I’d give her the ring.

The hike up Soldier’s takes about twenty minutes, depending on your physical condition and the number of times you stop to take picture after picture after picture of this place touched by the hand

of God. I kept pushing us to get to the top. “You’ve got to see it, you’ve just got to see it,” I kept saying. Laura, on the other hand, reminded me we had just driven twenty-four hours straight, gotten little sleep, and were now operating at 8,500 feet above sea level.

About halfway up, I saw something moving down the trail toward us at a rapid speed. We stepped to the side. Being in the middle of Pike’s Peak National Forest, a bear or mountain lion was not at all out of the question, and neither would make for good company.

But the view cleared, and bounding down the trail came a twelve-year-old boy. He was running so fast he was nearly out of control. From fifty feet away he yelled, “ARE YOU JAY LAFFOON?” “Yes!” I hollered back, and by the time I answered, he was twenty feet past me bellowing, “GOOOOOOD!” not even breaking stride.

My best friend in the world was Dean Moyer, a college bud who moved to Atlanta to work for the same now defunct company I had just left. He phoned ahead and arranged for a single red rose and a card to be delivered to the foot of the cross on the top of the mountain. The card read “Congratulations, Jay and Laura. Love, Dean.” Laura got to the cross first and saw the rose. “Hey, there’s a flower,” she said with her sweet southern drawl.

“Have a look,” I said.

“Oh, it has a card.”

“Interesting. What does it say?”

She read its message aloud and then looked confused. “What do you suppose that means?”

My plan was unraveling before my eyes, so I had to think quickly. “Oh, Dean’s always doing things like this. He’s just congratulating us on climbing the mountain. Awfully nice of him.” I paused, waiting for a reply, hoping she bought my story. “Oh, isn’t that

sweet? How nice.” At that moment I was very, very thankful Laura had been a cheerleader in college. Whoosh . . . right over her head.

The pizza was now cold and the champagne very warm. We had just gotten out of our car and climbed over a thousand feet to the top of this 8500-foot mountain. We sat with our legs dangling over the edge of the cliff with the cross right above us. We looked out over the marvelous landscape that was being drenched by the noontime sun.

The moment had arrived.

I reached in the backpack and pulled out the jewelry box. I opened it and held my hands toward Laura. “Honey, I know I’ve asked you this, and I know you said yes, but I want to make it official. Will you marry me?”

At that moment her bottom lip began to quiver. It was cute at first, but I now know what that quiver means. Sweat began to bead up on her forehead. I’d never seen Laura sweat before. I now know what that sweat means. The look on her face was puzzling, like it was caught halfway between extreme joy and agony. I now know what that look means.

Nothing came out of her mouth for what seemed like an eternity. Nervously I asked again, “Honey? Will you marry me?” At that moment the word yes did not come out of her mouth. Neither did the word no. But something did start coming out of her mouth, as this woman I loved, this woman I was asking to marry me, this woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with, began to spew an uninterrupted stream of pizza, champagne, and gastrointestinal juices. Laura was puking her guts all over me!

“Does this mean yes?” I wondered.

She could have sent it over the edge of the cliff; she could have turned her head the other way, but no, she had to barf all over me.

Immediately she began to laugh. At first I failed to find the humor, but slowly a smile crept over my face as she put the ring on her finger and hugged me, all covered with goop. “YES, YES, YES, YES, YES! Don’t you know that in the South a woman must puke on a man before she can marry him?”

We wiped the remains off the corners of her mouth and off the front of me. I will never forget that day, or that smell.

“The Spark” had ignited passion, romance, and the mystery of why she felt the need to puke? Let the fire burn!

## Why This Book? *Introducing Intimacy*

Laura and I were married in 1984, and to make a long story short, in May of 1996 we hosted our first Celebrate Your Marriage Conference®. Working in youth ministry together for the first twenty years of our marriage, we never for a moment dreamed we would be considered marriage experts. But working with teens and their parents led us to see the importance of strong, healthy, fun marriages. Eventually we felt called to minister to married couples. **Our hope today is for every married couple to learn to celebrate their marriage.** To that end we offer tools to help married couples see and experience marriage as a lifelong journey of adventure and joy.

Over the past decade or so of marriage ministry we have noticed a trend in what married people hope to receive from us. Men, wanting to better understand their spouses, come to us hoping we have PhDs in “wifeology.” Ladies secretly wish we could give their husbands a shot of “casanova-cain” to recapture the magic they felt while dating. Married couples look to us with pleading eyes, hoping we can help them regain the wild affection they once felt for each other.

This longing for intimacy and our desire to help couples, lead us to conduct a survey asking over 2000 married people to share with us their views on intimacy. Further, we conducted an in-depth survey with nearly 100 married people delving deeply into the issues of intimacy. We felt we needed to know the problems, issues, and challenges most commonly faced by couples before we could help them.

Throughout this book we will be addressing needs and issues brought forth from the survey. As you read through many of the quotes and comments, we hope you will be able to relate to

many of the universal experiences we all share. Take heart in the knowledge that we all share similar joys and challenges. **Jay’s mom has a wonderful saying, “in marriage, you will struggle with three things: money, sex, and in-laws.”**

Intimacy is something we all long for because it is powerful and life changing. It is also elusive. We don’t know when it will show up or how long it will last. In fact, no one understands intimacy when they fall in love. We sure didn’t. We just heard the music in our hearts and started to dance.

Intimacy is the spark. The spark starts small and grows with time into a burning flame of love. Over the years, how that fire is stoked will determine the depth, and joy experienced in a relationship. To keep the fires of love alive, careful attention must be paid to all facets of intimacy. We believe that there are five facets of intimacy: social, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual intimacy. Each of these facets is key to igniting the passion, romance, and mystery in your marriage.

We wrote this book for you—for anyone who wants to experience intimacy in their marriage.

## **A Brief Word on Priorities**

The young people at the FCA golf camp were excited to hear Joe Schumer, owner of and PGA teaching pro at The Pines golf course in Weidman, Michigan. They were filled with anticipation because Joe was going to demonstrate the proper way to hit a bunker shot. I (Jay), on the other hand, couldn’t wait to hear Joe talk about his faith. He gets giddy when talking about Jesus. He didn’t disappoint.

Near the end of his demonstration, Joe mentioned something in passing that hit me like a slap on the face. Joe said, “Here are my priorities: 1. God, 2. My wife, 3. My children”. In that moment

it was as if all the synapses in my brain came together at once, and I formed the conclusion that most Christians really have their priorities screwed up.

Ask a typical Christian (male or female) to share their priorities and they will say, 1. God, 2. Family. Do you see the slight but essential difference in what Joe said and what most of us would say? Genesis reads, “The two shall become one flesh.” It DOES NOT read “the two shall become one flesh until the kids come along and then they become part of us too.” Here is where we make our mistake: not realizing that **our relationship with our spouse is completely distinct from our relationship with our children and the rest of our family.** While they may overlap, our first and primary relationship after God is with our spouse, and as a result our children must come later.

Our wrongly configured priorities materialize in so many dysfunctional ways: parents who dive into work instead of diving into each other; parents who spend all their time chauffeuring or coaching or watching children play insane amounts of sports or other activities. Instead of using our time in these ways, we should be building the intimacy God ordained as His first institution – marriage. Our children must come third. Not gold or silver, but bronze.

While this flies in the face of so much evangelical thought today, **the single best thing you can do for your child outside of having an authentic walk with Christ is to make your marriage a priority.**

Some of you might be saying “but we enjoy watching our child play basketball and ,as a result, it draws us closer as a couple.” YEAH RIGHT! How can sitting in a crowded gym with no opportunity to really “connect”, surrounded by others who are passively observing sports, bring you closer as a couple?

Now, don’t get us wrong. Children need encouragement and

support from mom and dad. We attend many of our kids' functions. But what your kids and ours don't need are parents who are out three and four nights a week at the expense of a deeper, healthier marriage relationship.

## **Introducing Intimacy**

The main message of this book is simple: **We believe the key to unlocking celebration in your marriage begins with something we all desire—intimacy.** It is the building and developing of intimacy that will help you celebrate your marriage.

Intimacy is a tough subject because it means so many things to so many people. Often in our conferences we'll ask the ladies to shout words that define intimacy for them. "Closeness", "hugging", "talking", "cuddling" are frequent answers and all very good. Ask men the same question and you will hear them reply in unison "SEX"!

Ah, there's the rub...for every person, intimacy is spoken and lived out differently. For Laura intimacy is best realized in time alone with Jay. For Jay intimacy is what happens when Laura initiates physical contact of any kind, holding hands, a foot rub, kissing, or...

But this book will go beyond physical and emotional intimacy to help you realize that intimacy exists in five different facets of life. Each facet is essential in developing authentic intimacy. The five facets are:

- Social Intimacy
- Mental Intimacy
- Emotional Intimacy
- Physical Intimacy
- Spiritual Intimacy

This book is designed to help you and your spouse build intimacy

in every area of marriage. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. Laugh with each other and realize no one gets it right all the time. Most likely you are deeply intimate in one or more of the facets listed above. Rejoice, be GLAD! Then take a serious look at the areas which need improvement and begin working on the proven ways we offer to strengthen those areas.

Don't take yourself too seriously; just realize you're both human and won't always get it right. One time a man came to us and said he remembered his first marriage retreat with his wife because it was such a disaster. The leader of the retreat asked, "Can you describe your wife's favorite flower?" He turned to her and asked "Pillsbury, isn't it?" It went downhill from there.

When we are dating our spouse-to-be, we think they're perfect! After the honeymoon we realize this perfect mate changed overnight and did not clear it with us first! Those habits that were cute when we were dating became annoying quickly. We can all look at our spouses and see what we wish we could change. Marriage is accepting those idiosyncrasies and not spending too much energy on changing that which we cannot.

As a young teenager, I (Laura) spent many many hours babysitting. I loved children and was passionate about babysitting. The mothers who employed me were firm about one thing. After you put the baby to bed, do not get her up again. If she cries, let her cry. After twenty minutes, if she is still crying, I could go check and make sure the baby was okay, pat her back, but do not get her up out of bed. This was the best training I could have received. When Jay and I had our first child, Torrey, I remembered this training. I would put Torrey to bed and he of course would cry. I would wait twenty minutes, go check on him, make sure he wasn't hurt, hungry, or wet, rub his back, and then leave. Inevitably he would soon fall fast asleep. This process of allowing our baby to cry drove Jay crazy! He wanted so badly to go in and get Torrey up out of bed, rock him, feed him, coddle him. I said no and was firm

about it. We went round after round. Finally after many nights of watching what I was doing and realizing that soon Torrey did not even cry when he was put to bed, Jay realized I had been trained well.

At first he wanted me to *change*, but as time passed he realized the benefit of allowing me to be the mother God had trained me to be during those years of babysitting. Jay showed maturity in our relationship by accepting me rather than insisting I change.

When you are young and you watch a romantic movie, you really think that is what life will be like! You watch a TV husband and wife sleeping all cozy next to each other, appearing to be the perfect couple, never seeing the drool or hearing the sounds of sleep with a stuffy nose. When the TV couple awakens, they open their eyes looking at each other while adoringly smiling and kissing good morning. What a crock of hooey! What about morning breath, bed-head hair, and those lovely morning volcanic eruptions from that perfect man or woman next to you! **Being married is accepting the things we would rather change!**

In the first part of this book we will be looking at the purpose of marriage and how growing intimacy in every facet of marriage will help you become one. Becoming one is what turns the spark into the burning flame of love. In the second part of the book, we will detail some of the steps necessary to keep the home fires burning.

# 3

## No Longer Two

# *Can we actually have “Holy Sex”?*

I hope by now you see what this book is all about. We’re going to laugh, going to have fun, but most importantly, we want to help you in your efforts to have a great marriage.

We understand that, with so many different couples reading this book, there are people reading whose marriage is going great right now. Reading this book is a celebration of a great marriage because you want to keep it going. We understand that for some of you, life has thrown some bumps in the road and you’re thinking, “We need to reconnect and get ourselves back on track.” Some of you, we understand, think married life is rotten right now. You need time to focus and really sort out what marriage is all about.

We believe this book can meet every one of you at your point of need. Why? Because what we’re going to do is point you back to the author of celebration. That’s the person of Jesus Christ. We’re going to explore how He can impact your marriage, not just today and tomorrow, but every day of your life.

You see, we don’t want you to have a good marriage. We don’t. We don’t want you to have a great marriage. We want you to have a holy marriage. **We want to show you a way of being married that is totally different from what you might expect.**

Along with that we understand that even the name of this particular chapter is going to set some of you on edge. But part of marriage is

this thing called sex. You know, no matter where you are on your life journey, it's a part of the whole picture. And frankly, we don't want you to have good sex. We don't even want you to have great sex. We want you to have holy sex.

Some people ask us what we do for a living. Now you know. We sit around thinking of really strange ways to get people to think and act regarding their marriage. As we were putting this chapter together and trying to define what it means to have holy sex, we just kept thinking of a take-off of the old Batman and Robin television show, "Holy Sex, Jay Man!" Sorry, we digress.

However, for some of you reading this book, "Holy" and "sex" are two words you've never even thought about putting together. We're telling you, no two words deserve each other more than these two. God wants us to have holy sex. It's going to impact every aspect of your life. Unfortunately, many of us were brought up like our friend Ken Davis who shares that his parents always taught him, "Sex is dirty, naughty, and disgusting, so save it for marriage!"

## **The Purpose of Marriage**

Holy sex isn't all about sex. Relax, it's not. Holy sex is about being One

We love to ask couples, "What is the purpose of marriage?" Some of you may already be answering that question in your head. You may be coming up with all different kinds of answers: procreation, companionship, fun, to find a "sugar-daddy" or a "mommy-dearest", or if you're really spiritual, you might be saying that the purpose of marriage is to become like Christ.

We believe the purpose of marriage is to be ONE. It's not the sex, it's not the fun, not the companionship, it's not the sugar-daddy or the mommy-dearest. It is all of those and more. **The**

## **purpose of marriage is to be ONE.**

Laura and I are passionate followers of Jesus Christ. Some of you might also be passionate followers of Jesus Christ. For some of you reading this book, that might not be the case. We hope you are pursuing what it means to follow Jesus, but that is really your decision. (For more about what this really means see “A special message from the Authors” in the back of this book)

Because we follow Jesus, it occurred to us that if Jesus Christ is actually who He Said He was, God incarnate, and He told us the purpose of marriage, then that would be the purpose. Case closed.

We have a passage of scripture we want to share with you. It’s Mark 10:6-8. This is Jesus quoting the Old Testament,

*But at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh (.NIV)*

Now, understand something. Up to this point, Jesus is quoting the Old Testament. Every Jewish person knew this passage of scripture, but then Jesus closed His quote on the Old Testament and gave the purpose of marriage: “*So, they are no longer two, but one.*” (NIV)

The purpose of marriage, then, according to Jesus Christ Himself, is to be one.

## **The Difference between “Oneness” and “Being One”**

When we use the phrase “being one”, most Western minds think “oneness,” but the two are very different. Oneness is the perception which comes from sharing daily duties together. **Being one is a state of the heart, soul, and mind.**

When we discussed the difference between “oneness” and “being one” with our good friend Terre Grable, who is a counselor by trade, she told us about a counseling technique she uses with couples. Terre talks to many couples who have not mastered what she terms the “institutional aspects” of marriage. What are the institutional aspects of marriage? It is figuring out who is going to assume what role within the union; i.e. who is going to pay the bills, mow the lawn, bathe the kids, etc.

So we took that idea and discovered that a great way to discern the difference between “oneness” and “being one” is to understand the difference between “the institutional aspects of marriage” and “the mysterious aspects of marriage.” As we look at couples practicing the “institution” we find people who live in the same house, pay the same bills, raise the same kids, maybe even “go out” to the same movie together. While practicing these institutional aspects of marriage may bring a feeling of oneness, it does not answer some of the deeper questions.

This is why so many couples have this thought: “Is this really all there is to marriage?” This thought is the breeding ground for affairs. Men and women begin looking for fulfillment elsewhere because they have not become one with their spouse.

While the “institution” of marriage is mostly practical, figuring out who will pay the bills, do the grocery shopping, mow the lawn, clean the house, the “mystery” of marriage is more of an art. The art is revealed as we discover the heart, soul and mind of our spouse and, at the same time reveal ours in order to probe the depths of emotion, character and love; which is truly being one.

Let’s take a look at Scripture. The entire 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ephesians is encapsulated in the first four words: *Be imitators of God.* (NIV) Seems simple enough. In the chapter Paul gives us some practical advice: *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these*

*are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.* Ephesians 5:3-4(NIV)

But he also gives us an illustration that makes us think on an imperceptible yet profound level: *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*<sup>[c]</sup> *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* Ephesians 5:28-33 (NIV).

Even Paul, one of the greatest theologians ever, could not comprehend practically this “mystery” called marriage any more than we can practically comprehend the “mystery” of Christ’s church being one with Him.

This side of eternity none of us will ever have a lock on the art of being one. But, the Lord has given us an opportunity to fulfill His prayer for His people

*That all of them may be one, Father, just as you in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one**... John 17:21-22(NIV)*

It is our conviction that becoming one will never happen in the church, nor will it ever happen in our families, until it FIRST happens in our marriages. Marriage is the model for the church, not the church for marriage. Marriage is the simplest form of church. *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.* Matthew 18:20 (NIV) Therefore when we strive to become one in our marriage it will spill over into every other relationship and aspect of our lives. We must understand God’s

plan for becoming one with our spouse before we will impact the world for Christ.

## **There is no “I” in Football**

The year was 1986 and the NCAA Division I football championship was going to be decided between two very different teams. Behind Heisman Trophy winning quarterback Vinnie Testeverde, the number one ranked Hurricanes from Miami of Florida were a flashy, superstar ridden, offensive juggernaut putting up an average of 38 points a game. Number two ranked Nittany Lions of Penn State were the boring uniformed mid-western version of a blue collar plodder, their white with black trimmed uniforms as dull as their game plan. Miami was the clear favorite.

The hype behind this number 1 vs 2 match up was so big that the Fiesta Bowl was moved from New Years day to prime time on the evening of January 2<sup>nd</sup>. I could tell you the winner before the game even started. You see this is college football, one of the last and truest forms of a team game.

Miami came out for warm-ups with the names of the players embroidered on the backs of their uniforms. This made it easy to identify which superstar was making what amazing play. Penn State came out in their drab white and black and it struck me that there were NO NAMES on the back of their jerseys. I turned to Laura and said. “Penn State is going to win this one because they are a team”. Sure enough when the game was over, Testeverde had thrown 5 interceptions and the Nittany Lions prevailed 14-10.

So what does this have to do with being one? Plenty. You see when you put on the “uniform” in marriage you put on a uniform that has no names on the back, no superstar husbands or Heisman trophy wives. Sure you have an identity, but it’s the team’s identity not your own. You are one.

## For men – the beginning of being one

Let us lay it on the line. Most men like sex. I mean REALLY like sex. In our work with couples we are finding about twenty percent of men will have a lower sex drive than their wife, but by and large, most men love to make love to their wives.

Men are simple creatures. I tell Laura that I am as simple as a straight line: “Frankly Honey, if I’m not asking you for a sandwich then, yep, I’m in the mood”.

This is difficult for women to comprehend and results in the “boorish pig” label that is attached to men as ladies chat. For whatever reason, God made man to desire to chase after his wife.

It has always been this way! Remember the playground? When our Grace was in second grade, we would often ask her, after school, “how was your day?” She would reply, “It was great. We read books, did math, and played on the playground.” “What would you play on the playground?” “We would tease the boys until they started chasing us. Then they would chase us until we got caught.”

From the earliest ages, women loved to get chased and men love the challenge of catching.

The Bible gives us a great metaphor. Spiritually speaking, Jesus (the bridegroom) is always “chasing” His church (the bride). *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”* Revelation 3:20 NIV. It is the church that often takes a long time to “come around” to desiring that deep relationship with Jesus.

We understand this in the spiritual realm, and we need to see the correlation to men and sex. We don’t understand the “mystery” of

why Christ (bridegroom) is always chasing the church (bride). In the same way there is no explaining the “mystery” of why your husband has such a strong desire to chase you!

This does explain why sex, then, for a man is the beginning of being one. Whether consciously or unconsciously, a man’s thinking goes something like this: “WOW, was that great. I can’t believe this beautiful creature would actually want to have sex with me. She’s incredible, and I want to get to know her even better so maybe we can do THAT again.

### **True Confessions of a Happy Happy Man!**

Laura and I had sex last night. I don’t tell you that in some voyeuristic sick-o kind of way. I tell you that so that you will understand what I’ve been doing today while writing this part of the book.

Laura is away today speaking for a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group. We have just gotten back from one weekend retreat and are heading to another this Friday. The laundry is piled high, the dishes are piled high, and there is no plan for dinner. As I kissed her good-bye at 6:30 a.m., I decided that I was going to do the laundry, the dishes, and fix dinner today...why? Because I am a HAPPY HAPPY MAN!

There is NOTHING I wouldn’t do for my wife after we’ve had sex. I want to please her in every way possible. I want to get to know her better and pursue her so that, yes, we might do THAT again.

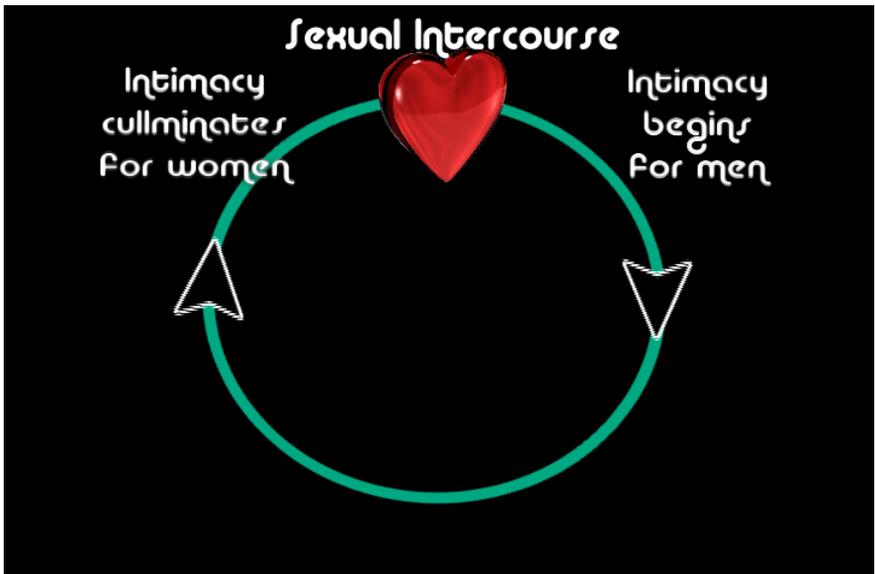
### **True Confessions of a Happy Happy Woman!**

While Jay’s “happy happy” day was the day after having sex, mine was the day of. You see, we had sex that night because it had been a good day. We had worked in the morning, together. We had a lunch date. We laughed, talked, and had a great day! For a woman,

sex is the culmination of being one. Here is an often heard cliché, that I think definitely applies here, “for a man, when all is right in the bedroom, all is right in the world. For a woman, when all is right in the world, all is right in the bedroom”. Do you see how that works? For a man, being one begins in the bedroom and then the rest of his world is right. For a woman it is just the opposite. Being one begins outside the bedroom.

Being one for a woman is a process. I liken it to kitchen appliances. Women are crock pots. They are slow cookers! You have to plug them in first thing in the morning and they take all day to cook! The process takes all day long. Men on the other hand are like microwaves- punch the right buttons and they are ready to go!

Again, we will discuss this further in chapter 5 as we talk about physical intimacy and its impact on being one. As we look at being one, we cannot overlook the primary way we express being one.



### The impact of holy sex on marriage

So then, how does holy sex—being one—impact marriage? In

every way. As couples discover the depth and satisfaction that comes from being one, life and daily routines take on new and exciting meaning. He no longer mows the lawn out of obligation, and she no longer cleans the house out of duty. We do these things in order to discover more of the mystery as we travel the road of shaping our marriage into what God intends. No longer is it Jay & Laura who happen to be married, but the marriage of Jay & Laura, a single entity designed in heaven, lived out for the Glory of God. So how do we achieve holy sex? How do we achieve being one?

## **The Intimacy Dance**

Dancing is one of the most intimate actions on the planet. It's why we don't want our teenagers doing it! Picture the scene: face-to-face, moving together, not saying a word, and yet knowing exactly what the other is thinking and feeling. That's intimacy.

The one thing we have found? The only way you can dance is if you are living in the moment. You don't dance in the past; you don't dance in the future; you dance right now.

A couple dancing can dance as two separate individuals stepping on toes, not sure who is leading, looking uncomfortable and awkward. Or, a couple can dance as two individuals who have come together intentionally, moving together as one, each doing their part of the dance seamlessly, meshed together, music in motion.

Fire dances too! We have all sat around a campfire entranced by the dancing flames. A beautiful ballet choreographed to perfection. Separate those flames by breaking up the logs and the flame soon dies. The same is true with the spark of intimacy. The five facets of intimacy are like the logs of a fire. As we intertwine our lives the flame grows and the fire burns brighter.

Time to set your marriage ablaze!

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How would you describe the difference between oneness and being one?
2. On a scale of 1-10, rate the success you have in your marriage of being one.
3. What would you say is the purpose of marriage?
4. In the previous chapter, Jay shared the story of Joe Schumer, discussing the difference between a priority list of God first and family second vs. God first, marriage second, kids third. Which priority list best describes you and why?
5. When do you feel most intimate with your spouse?

# 4

## Social Intimacy

### *Strike the match*

I (Laura) suspect many of us have never thought about being socially intimate with our spouses. In fact, in our survey we frequently received this answer “I’m not sure what you mean by Social Intimacy.”

We begin dating and we enjoy this person’s companionship. We have common interests. We are friends. Then somewhere along the line we fall in love. For some it happens quickly, for others over time, but we begin to discover that we’ve become more than friends. We become lovers. For some reason when this happens, very often, we cease being friends.

Here are some written answers to our survey question, “what keeps you from dating your spouse?”

- “Time mostly - not making our date time a priority.”
- “Making the time. We have it, just don’t make it.”
- “I usually spend my time alone, usually associated with work.”
- “Honestly, we use time (too many things going on) as our primary excuse/obstacle. But really the biggest obstacle is in not making it a top priority. I don’t think about it often to take the initiative to plan a date. She is way better at this than I.”

We stand at the altar and say “I do.” The marriage begins. Life settles in, careers, cars to buy, a mortgage and obligations. Children are born, more obligations. Careers take off, and responsibilities

rise. Suddenly we discover that our friendship as well as the time to nurture it no longer exists. Oh sure, we have friends, just not each other!

Here are some quotes from real people who do not feel as if their spouse is their friend anymore, again taken from our survey:

- “Often I don’t feel “socially intimate” because when he is with his friends, he is WITH his friends. We have talked, discussed, even argued over this matter. I sometimes feel “abandoned” by him even though we may be in the same room. He is trying to work on this, ONLY if I mention it...”
- “We have not been married very long but I think that it has gone down (friendship).”
- “Lack of feeling like it’s something we really want and/ or need to do for ‘Us’. We’ve been having a lot of family issues that have tended to push us apart. The early closeness we had is very shaky a good part of the time. Glad to say that things are improving and we are working on our problems instead of being pulled away from them.”

## **BEGIN SIDEBAR**

Love defined by the experts, children:

Carrie, age 5: “Love is when a girl puts on perfume, and a boy puts on shaving cologne, and they go out and smell each other.”

Crissy, age 6: “When you go out to eat and give somebody most of your french fries without making them give you any of theirs.”

Danny, age 7: “Love is when Mommy makes coffee for my Daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him to make sure it tastes okay.”

Emily, age 8: “Love is when you kiss all the time , then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. Mommy and Daddy are

like that. They look gross when they kiss.”  
Chris, age 7: “Love is when mommy sees daddy  
smelly and sweaty and she still says he looks  
handsomer than Robert Redford.”

## **END SIDEBAR**

### **Defining social intimacy**

What exactly does social intimacy mean? Following are some thoughts from people to whom we posed just that question:

- “I love to feel her touch and for her to feel mine in public. Nothing nasty, just the arm around the waist or, uh, she can pet my head, mm, love that. I’m more of a touchy person. Expressing my love to my wife is not something I have to think about.”
- “I’m guessing at what “socially intimate” means...I have felt surges of warmth and affection when Dave praises me to his friends in my presence. That’s cool!”
- “I think people can see that we are in love with each other. My husband is very demonstrative.”
- “When we have those “stolen” moments of sneaking off alone and just talking.”
- “When we go to Home Depot or Lowes and dream about our dream home and what doors and windows we want.”
- “Sometimes at dinner. Just looking into her eyes.”
- “When we are all alone, laying on the beach watching the water.”

We think of social intimacy as “dancing” through life with your best friend. It is the process of recapturing, rejuvenating, and enjoying a friendship with your spouse.

### **The initial spark**

When it comes to overall intimacy, the social intimacy facet is a good place to start because most of us, quite frankly, married our best friend. At least, that is who you thought you married! When

we date and eventually marry, we are looking for someone who we enjoy being with, doing “stuff” with. We usually date someone for an extended period of time because we have common interests. Of course, there is the physical attraction, but hopefully at the beginning we are focused on the social aspects of the relationship.

Laura grew up in a home with a diabetic dad and, as a result, ate meat and potatoes growing up. She grew up on well balanced meals without much variety. Food for Laura was simple and plain. I, on the other hand, grew up in a home where food is an event. It is to be taken seriously and always an opportunity to try something new: Hungarian goulash, Spanish rice, Austrian Steak soup. It didn't matter where it came from just how it tasted!

Within the first month of knowing each other we figured out this was going to be a struggle. “I don't like ethnic food”, Laura would say. No Mexican, no Oriental, no Indian, not even Canadian Bacon, for crying out loud! Then one day we are driving through the back woods of Georgia with no civilization to be found and we are starving. Finally we stumble across a mom and pop Mexican restaurant. It took a lot of convincing, but finally Laura agreed to go in.

The chips and salsa were homemade and the cuisine some of the finest to be found. Half way through the fajitas Laura said, “So this is Mexican?” You see it wasn't that Laura didn't like ethnic food. It was that she had never even TRIED it! Now Laura's tastes have been introduced to many of the fine foods from around the world.

**Socially intimacy begins by blending many of the interests of your two lives into one.** One area we had to blend was Jay's “international palette” with Laura's “cautious palette”.

Then you take the next step and marry this person with whom you have many interests. This person means more than your fishing buddies, or the girls you go shopping with. This person knows you

better than anyone else in the world.

We asked some people to share what social intimacy looks like when it is fleshed out:

- “We can be in a crowd and still be just the two of us.”
- “We both have a few things we do with close friends, but ultimately we enjoy spending our spare time together talking.”
- “When we are out having coffee or dinner in a relaxed atmosphere. The talk is deeper and we are totally tuned in to what the other is saying.”
- “When we are taking a walk and just talking. When we get time away from the normal routine.”
- “Spending more time listening to each other.”
- “Socially intimate? Why every day! It might be a shared wink across a crowded room or dancing alone in our kitchen or walking the dog in the darkness.”
- “We love to do the same activities. We like variety and to try different things depending on our moods at a particular time. “

Some of you are thinking, “That’s not us.” This is a great place to start for you too because you can come together socially as friends, without putting too much pressure on the other facets of your relationship. The problem we see in many marriages is that too many people believe marriage is a two-way street. If your marriage is a two-way street, then what you have are two cars racing past each other, zoom zoom. Can anyone relate? Our lives become so wrapped up in the day- to- day that we lose the social intimacy we once had.

Terry and Deb lived marriage like a two-way street, two cars going in opposite directions. They were brought together through a mutual acquaintance in college and enjoyed each other’s company. They were friends. They married, and life happened! They had no children, each had their own job and enjoyed many different hobbies. One hobby they had in common was golf. They enjoyed

golf together during the summer and lived separate lives the rest of the year. The separation was too much to overcome and their marriage ended. Outside of the game of golf they had lost their social intimacy, and it was not enough.

The other way a “two-way street” can go wrong is when two cars are on a collision course, zoom crash. We pass, we collide, conflict, kibitz, so we never spend time together, because we are constantly annoyed or upset.

**Marriage is not a two-way street, but a one-way street.** Not her way, not his way, but our way, the way God has designed for us. For people who struggle with that, we have devoted an entire chapter in our book *Make Love Everyday* to help couples define what God has created as “our way.” You and your spouse are wired differently from how we (Jay and Laura) are wired. You are wired differently from how your friends are wired. God has created a way that is unique to you. In *Make Love Everyday* we help you determine the mission and purpose that God has given you and your marriage to create your one-way street.

**Growing your marriage friendship: How to be socially intimate**  
We have all heard the maxim, “the couple who prays together stays together.” We would like to add, “the couple who plays together stays together.” Social intimacy is the foundation to a great marriage: playing together, enjoying each other’s company, taking a walk, test driving a car.

A simple way to build social intimacy into your marriage is to spend time together. It seems obvious, but for some reason, when we get married, we can forget to date. It can be a struggle to find time to spend together and nurture social intimacy.

### **A simple yet practical idea**

What happens with us is that Jay likes to do different things than I like to do, so when date night comes, we want to do something different. To overcome this struggle, we each wrote down our five

best dates (keeping within our budget, mind you). Jay wrote down his five, and I (Laura) wrote down my five. Then we meshed them to create a series of great dates.

Laura's five great dates:

- Shopping
- Going for a walk
- Shopping
- Joining a book group
- Shopping

Jay's five great dates:

- Dining out
- Golfing
- Dancing lessons
- Golfing
- Cooking lessons

We combined shopping and dining out, so we combined dinner out with a shopping trip to the mall. When we go golfing, while Jay hits range ball and practices putting, I browse the pro-shop looking for deals on shirts, shorts, and accessories. When we signed up for dancing lessons, we had to go shopping for tap shoes. One of the benefits of combining these dates is that we decided walking was a great form of exercise we could “throw in” to our golf dates.

Now it is your turn. Take your five great dates individually and then mesh them together. They will become your great date arsenal.

We are not asking you to be joined at the hip. We are not saying to totally disregard your personal interests, hobbies, and friends. What we are saying can be summed best with this quote from our in-depth survey:

*Movies, plays, dinner, walks... it doesn't matter, the important "what we do" is **spend time together focusing on each other** and*

*not the rest of the world.*

### **The Principle of Staying One Ahead**

One of my (Jay's) favorite characters Johnny Carson used to perform was "Carnac the Magnificent." He could magically answer the question in the "sealed" envelope by simply holding the envelope up to his forehead. The secret to Carnac's success was to always be "one ahead." Johnny would pre-arrange the answer to the first envelope before the show. After successfully answering the question before it was asked he would rip open the envelope and reveal the question. For example, Carnac would hold an envelope to his head and say "Barry Sanders." Then he'd rip it open read, "Who is Jay's favorite football player of all time"

Also on that sheet of paper would be the answer to the next question, as he held the next envelope up to his head he would simply remember from the previous paper "Chips and salsa," for example. Rrrrrrip. "What is Laura's favorite nighttime snack?" You get the point.

We see this principle fleshed out each year at our conferences as we will have roughly 1/3 of the couples attending sign up for next year's conference before they leave the current one. They are "planning" social time into their marriage. Staying one ahead is a great way to keep your marriage "tuned-up." So as you finish one weekend or night or even afternoons away, begin planning your next so you too can stay "one ahead."

### **Attractors and Detractors to Social Intimacy**

Each facet of intimacy is going to have attractors, those things that help that facet grow. Each facet will have detractors also, those things which hinder growth in that area. Children, work, time, money, friends, priorities are just a few of the detractors to social intimacy.

Harry and Donna attended every sporting event that their children were a part of. In and of itself, this is a great way to support your children. For Harry and Donna, it was the *only* time they spent together. They were so consumed with their children's sports schedules that they never had time left for just themselves as a couple. Barbara works full time outside the home. She comes home every evening and does the daily chores of the household, dinner, dishes, and plans for the next day. Barbara spends her weekends catching up on the larger household tasks, laundry, cleaning, vacuuming. Barbara feels as if she never has time to go out with her husband. Lori and John are saving to buy a home. They pay all their bills at the end of the month, and all the rest goes into savings. They don't want to spend the extra cash to go on dates.

Detractors to social intimacy include:

- Finances
- Housework
- Church
- Family needs
- Work load
- time
- Child care
- money
- energy
- eBay and other websites
- kids' sports schedules
- Health issues

Attractors to social intimacy include:

- "Date night"
- Couple friends and double dates
- Shared activities
- Developing mutual hobbies
- Adventures

- Day trips
- Doing even menial errands together
- Vacations, getaways
- Meals out

Ralph and Julie have been married for 41 years and are still best friends. If you asked if it has always been this way, they would tell you no. It has taken hard work and effort. As time has gone by and they have grown as individuals and as a couple they have realized the importance of doing things together, as well as with others.

I remember when I first met Julie back in 1987. Jay and I had just moved to Michigan and had been attending a local church in our community. The women of the church were going on a retreat for the weekend. Julie had become a friend of mine and attended the same church. I asked her if she was going, and she replied, “I have never been away from Ralph overnight”.

I laughed! In twenty years of marriage, they had never been apart overnight! It was right then, I knew I needed to make sure Julie got a life. She was going on that trip.

Julie went on the retreat that weekend and she had a blast; Ralph survived as well. Over the twenty years since that retreat, Ralph now frequently enjoys golfing weekends with Jay and the boys. Julie and Laura....you guessed it...they shop! Our friends now have an understanding of the balance between individual social pursuits and building social intimacy as a couple.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. On a scale of 1-10, from your perspective, rate the level of social intimacy in your marriage.
2. What first attracted you to your spouse?
3. What common interests do you have?
4. How often do you date?
5. What detractors can you identify in your marriage to social

intimacy?

6. What attractors can you identify in your marriage to social intimacy?

7. What would be your five great dates meshed together?

8. What is one way you can improve your social intimacy over the next 21 days?

# 5

## Mental Intimacy

### *The Embers glow*

We all can identify with the fact that we think differently than our spouse! For example, when Jay says “let’s go into the city”, he means, “Let’s go test drive cars”. I (Laura) think he means, “Let’s go shopping at the mall”! When I say, “let’s take a nap”, I mean, “let’s sleep”. Jay thinks I am saying, “hubba hubba hubba”!

Others who have recognized their differences put it this way:

- I am much more intellectually driven. I enjoy learning. He considers himself to be inferior to me in that area.
- I have more “book smarts”, he has more “street smarts”... we don’t connect much.
- My husband and I both have graduate degrees, but since he has been retired and is working two, fun, but not intellectually stimulating, jobs, we seem to have a widening intellectual gap.
- As we grow closer, we understand each other so much more
- He has become more aware of my needs, partly because there are less distractions & he has been educated of course by me - HA!
- Since the CYM conferences, we listen to each other more and respect each others views. We didn’t used to agree on

things at all (i.e.: raising children, politics, church, etc).  
Now we listen and respect each others views.

## **We're Different on Purpose**

It really didn't take me (Jay) long to figure out that Laura's brain operated very differently from mine. I remember moving into our first apartment and watching in amazement as she took her socks from a moving box and put them into her sock drawer. Her method of organization was similar to the way a tornado "organizes" a trailer park. She simply opened the box and threw them into the drawer. I was appalled and knew right away I needed to "fix" her.

You see, God has a plan for socks. We serve a God of order. Even Noah collected animals two by two: a simple lesson for the sock drawer! Or so I thought. "That would simply take too much time," Laura responded in a tone that took me back to the snotty girls that picked on me in Jr. high. "So how do you find the right socks?" I inquired.

"Let me demonstrate," she replied. Laura proceeded to push and shove her socks into the drawer. The number of socks she was trying to put in the drawer exceeded the Fire Marshall's maximum capacity by at least 50 percent. At this point she stood back, flexed at the knees, and flung the drawer open. Socks flew into the air in a rainbow of cotton. She grabbed two that matched and shoved the rest back into the drawer. "See?"

"Yes, I see that you have two socks that don't match!" I toyed.

Without hesitation she retorted, "They match close enough for ME!"

Over the years I have tried in a variety of ways to show Laura how a sock drawer should look: neat, organized, and color coordinated. But to no avail. Once I even bought her one of those sock drawer organizers with the little boxes where you put one pair in box. The

devise is in her drawer to this day, drowning in a sea of unmatched socks.

Finally I realized that the way Laura kept her sock drawer was simply a function of the way her mind works. My mind is linear: step one step two step three. Laura's is random: steps, what steps? Neither way is right or wrong, just different, and **when we began to accept our differences mentally, we began to experience the joy of mental intimacy.**

Others who have understood the differences in each other talk about it this way:

- We have come to respect our differences of opinion, and enjoy the “intense fellowship” when we don’t.
- We both excel and find interest in different areas which is nice because then we can inform the other about what we’ve learned
- We complement each other in intellectual areas very well. He is a Bible scholar, and I’m an educator.
- I think we push each other to think outside the box
- Although I am a college graduate and my husband took technical training, I would definitely say he is smarter than I am. I would say over all we’re pretty much equal.

## A Couple Who Gets It

The Mental intimacy facet is not always thinking the same thing at the same time. It is not always agreeing on items of discussion. It is not even who is smarter than whom. Rather mental intimacy is your minds coming together in a connection that goes beyond intelligence or agreement.

Take Larry and Beth, for example, a married couple we

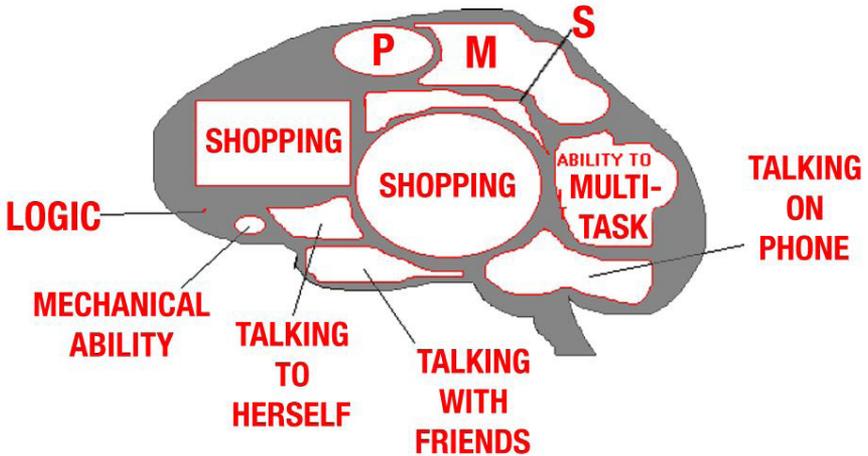
met at one of our conferences. Larry is a high school graduate. Beth has a master's degree in business. Larry went into the service straight out of high school. Coming out of the service, he had received training in computers that allowed him to pursue high-level computer jobs in the civilian world. Beth's master's degree has allowed her to follow her dream of owning her own business. Larry and Beth's differences in education have nothing to do with how intimate they are mentally. They read different styles of books, yet they share often about what they are reading and what they are learning. Larry and Beth both enjoy the computer yet use it for different pursuits. When a problem arises and needs to be solved, the two process the solution differently.

Larry and Beth are mentally intimate because they connect as people who are always trying to grow and learn in their own areas of interest. As they continue individually to grow and learn as people, they understand that the other is growing and learning as an individual, and they intentionally try to learn from each other.

## **Brain Scans**

We spared no expense for this book. We had our brains scanned so that you can see what's going on inside our heads. So, here's Laura's brain:

# LAURA'S BRAIN



It's not hard to see that a large portion of Laura's brain is consumed with shopping, but then as we move to the back, you can see she's really good at multi-tasking; she can do many things. Then along the bottom, we have a theme going here; talking on the phone, talking with friends, and then talking to herself. Someday she's going to be that lady at the grocery store walking through the aisle babbling to herself . . . oh wait, she already does that!

Laura does have some mechanical ability, but then you'll notice the logic "particle" in the front. Now across the top you see three random areas, the P area, the M area, and the S area. Normally these areas peacefully float around the brain, but every once in awhile, oh say, about every 30 days or so, the three of them lock in together, and the Laffoon household finds itself hiding the sharp implements!

So, let's take a look at Jay's brain scan:

# JAY'S BRAIN



Um . . . no explanation needed!

But seriously, if we're honest with ourselves and with each other, at some point in marriage, you have either thought, "I'm really a lot dumber than my spouse," or, "I'm really a lot smarter than my spouse." Some may have had both thoughts at different times.

Howard Gardner, the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard School of Education, is the author of over twenty books and is best known in education circles for his theory of multiple intelligences. He viewed intelligence as "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings." (Gardner & Hatch, 1989) We have learned it doesn't matter who is smarter or dumber, because mental intimacy is not about smarts. You and your spouse both have brains; you're both intelligent. In other words, **the issue is not how smart we are; it's how we are smart.**

## Defining Mental Intimacy

The following was written by a woman answering our survey.

“Eric never got the best grades in high school when we started dating. I never gave him the credit he deserved, assuming that he didn’t measure up. Over the years, I have come to respect his thoughts so much more than I could have imagined. My father is someone I have always gone to for advice. He seems to be wise in all areas of life. And I almost always follow his advice. When we were dating and first married, I would find myself arguing with my husband, siding with my father’s advice. We both generally tend to still value my dad’s advice; however, I want Eric’s insights first and foremost. And now there are even many times I don’t go to dad for a second opinion. Eric is very intellectually talented. It’s just not math and music like me. It’s politics, automotive, marketing, and business! I’ve come to respect him.”

**Mental intimacy is discovering, identifying, and appreciating the intelligence of your spouse.** The woman in the story above had to realize that her husband was intelligent, maybe not in the ways her father is, but in his own way. When she discovered his intelligence and identified the areas of politics, automotive, marketing, and business, she then was able to defer to him and respect him.

## Multiple Intelligences

Our job is to discover how our spouse is smart and then to defer to our spouse in that area—to be willing to say, “You know what, honey, you are more intelligent in this area than I and, therefore, I will set aside my pride and allow you to really take the lead in this particular area.” Gardner identified eight different types of intelligence, and we’d like to share these with you so that you can look at yourself and your spouse. By determining who has more intelligence in these different areas, we can learn to defer to the person and grow mental intimacy in our marriage.

**Linguistic intelligence** involves sensitivity to spoken and

written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively use language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically as well as a means to remember information. Writers, poets, lawyers and speakers are among those that Howard Gardner sees as having high linguistic intelligence.

More than likely, one of you is better with words than the other. You speak a little better, you read a little better, and you write a little better. You have linguistic intelligence.

## An airport friendship

We saw our friends Gene and Carol Kent as we were flying through Minneapolis. Since we both travel a lot on Northwest Airlines it seems to be where we see each other the most! Carol is a phenomenal communicator who is in high demand as a conference speaker. Carol makes a living because of her linguistic intelligence. Carol's intelligence is so strong in this area that she is able to make a living through speaking.

**Logical-mathematical intelligence** consists of the capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically. In Howard Gardner's words, it entails the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, and think logically. This intelligence is most often associated with scientific and mathematical thinking.

Now I'm going to be honest, this is the area where Laura needs some help. When I met her, she had had a checking account for two months and in two months she had bounced fourteen checks. She thought: "It's a bank, they have money, don't they?"

Here's where the whole pride thing comes in. She grew up in a family that believed the woman is always supposed to pay the bills, but we know that in our relationship, when it comes to numbers, I'm the guy. If she hadn't laid down her pride, that mental intimacy would not have begun to grow and our relationship would have suffered on many levels. Laura has laid down her pride and it's allowed us to have a more financially

secure future.

**Spatial intelligence** involves the potential to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas. This is picture smarts. You're great with colors, with dimension, all the things that go into creating a picture.

This is where Laura is brilliant! If you were to come to our house, you would walk into a home that is unbelievably decorated. The colors go together, the furniture, everything is placed just wonderfully, because she has an eye for space. Now, if I were to be full of pride and demand, "NO, I'm the man of the house, this is my castle," everything would be beige. How BORING! Because I was willing to lay aside my pride, our home is beautifully decorated and we have built tremendous trust mentally when it comes to decisions along these lines

**Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** entails the potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body to solve problems. It is the talent for using mental abilities to coordinate bodily movements. Howard Gardner sees mental and physical activity as related. Athletes have body intelligence.

As a chaplain for the PGA, I (Jay) see firsthand on a weekly basis people who possess this type of intelligence. Anyone who thinks that golf is a sport for non-athletes needs to join me on the course just once.

A typical day for these men is to rise at 6:30 and head out to the practice green where they'll stroke a few putts; then they're off to the range to warm up their full swing. After about an hour of stretching and warming up, they head out on the course for 18 holes of golf. After a lunch break, they go out to the range to work on a particular part of their game and then spend another hour or so on the putting green. Finally, late in the afternoon they continue to their hotel or the nearest gym to workout for an hour or so. They make their living with their bodies!

**Musical intelligence** involves skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. It encompasses the capacity to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. According to Howard Gardner, musical intelligence runs in an almost structural parallel to linguistic intelligence.

Our son Torrey has a high degree of this type of intelligence. He plays guitar and has been blessed with his dad's musical ear and his mom's manual dexterity. As a result, he can hear a song once or twice and be able to play it. Many nights we'll be watching TV when a commercial will come on with some great music. We'll challenge Torrey to "play that song" and before our show comes back on...viola!

**Interpersonal intelligence** is concerned with the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people. It allows people to work effectively with others. Educators, salespeople, religious, and political leaders and counselors all need a well-developed interpersonal intelligence. It is the ability to read people well.

Danny deArmas is a good friend and was one of the first people to really believe in the Celebrate Your Marriage ministry. Early in our ministry, Danny did some management work for us, and one of his greatest gifts was reading people. Danny's dad was Cuban; he had fled to the States from Castro's regime. Danny's mom was a US citizen. In their home Danny spoke Spanish to his father and English to his mother. He told us this made for some very interesting dinner conversations! Danny says his upbringing is the main reason he can read people so well. We will never forget one night Danny took us to Bongo's restaurant in Orlando, an authentic Cuban restaurant owned by musician Gloria Estefan. Our group of thirteen was told we would have about a 45-minute wait. Most of the group gathered in an area of the lobby, and three minutes later Danny came to report that our table was ready. He had stayed behind at the hostess station and somehow convinced the hostess to seat us promptly. Later I asked him how much money he had to slip the hostess. He was almost insulted and explained that he simply communicated (in Spanish, of course) how important it was for us to get seated soon. I still don't know how he did it, but we had the best seats in the house!

**Intrapersonal intelligence** entails the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears, and motivations. In Howard Gardner's view, it involves having an effective working model of ourselves and to be able to use such

information to regulate our lives. People with intrapersonal intelligence are introspective and thoughtful.

Our daughter Grace is blessed with this form of intelligence; even at a five years old she feels and thinks on a deep level. One night at the supper table she was complaining about everything from how her day went at school to her clothes not fitting right to what we were having for dinner.

I was fed up and slammed my hand on the table asking the question, “Grace, do you know there are only two types of people in this world?” I was about to sermonize the fact that people are either creators or complainers. You can’t be both, and if she kept complaining she would end up an old bitter woman!

No sooner had I asked the question Grace responded, “Yes, Daddy, smart women and dumb men!” I couldn’t respond to her inappropriate answer because I was on the floor doubled over laughing. Grace’s internal thought process is not only deep, but quick. Now, who taught her that answer . . . Laura!?

One of Grace’s favorite nighttime activities is to listen to an *Adventures in Odyssey* CD as she is going to sleep. One particular night before we put in the CD, Grace and I were having a discussion about one of her friends who is a very smart and creative young lady. She and Grace are two peas in a pod! Grace was struggling with the fact that at times she feels inferior to her friend.

The next morning after Grace got dressed and was having her devotions she informed me that she was no longer struggling with comparing herself to her friend. She shared with me that the *Adventures in Odyssey* story the night before was about two friends who were always comparing themselves to each other, and the lesson was that God had created each of unique. God has given us each our own gifts and abilities. Grace said that she had learned that she did not have to compare herself to her friend because God had given each of them gifts and abilities unique to each of them. She left the house a much happier and confident little girl.

Finally, **naturalist intelligence** enables human beings to recognize, categorize, and draw upon certain features of the environment. It “combines a description of the core ability with a

characterization of the role that many cultures value.” Folks with this kind of smarts love to be outdoors and in touch with nature.

I grew up in northern Michigan. Northern Michigan is an outdoorsman’s paradise. Virtually every season of the year held some type of fantastic outdoor activity, and the month of May brought out the morel mushrooms. These delicacies are found in the woods of northern Michigan in late spring and are almost as valuable as gold.

Willie Shoman, a friend of my parents, is a Native American and arguably the finest morel hunter on the planet. I will never forget the time Willie took my family to hunt morels.

Willie stood in one place and would fan us out in every direction. “Jim, there are five mushrooms ten feet to your right. Doyce, go over by that stump and look down to the left; you’ll see four there. Diane, there’s a couple by that fallen birch tree. Jay, take two steps forward, and you’ll see about eight of em.” “Where, Willie?” “Right at your feet!” “Where?” “Stop! You’re about to step on them!” He could see mushrooms from fifty feet away that I couldn’t see standing on top of them!

## Choosing to Learn: How to Be Mentally Intimate

One of our survey respondents wrote the following insightful comment. We have boldfaced the parts we want to emphasize:

I would honestly say that my spouse is more intelligent than I but over the years I have **discovered** that although he is a genius, there are areas that he has no clue about (although he can **learn if he chooses** to do so!) such as teaching a classroom of first graders! We have become **better listeners** and have become **more acquainted** with what each other is interested in and from there this area has grown. When you care about someone, you **choose to learn** about what interests them and then you **learn** about that topic so that you can have intelligent conversations about it or at least understand what the other is sharing with you as you listen.

Great advice. We cannot expect to become mentally intimate with our spouse without work. As this woman did, we have to discover our spouse's intelligence, choose to learn, listen, and become acquainted with their interests. We love that word "choose." **We have to make a deliberate choice to learn about our spouse, their interests, what makes them tick, and how they are wired.** Here are some others who realize how to be mentally intimate (again with our boldfacing for emphasis):

- It took my husband time to **realize** how isolated he was in his "ivory tower" environment. I also had to **realize** how our professions made him more isolated and I was **exposed** to things that were completely foreign to him and he had no chance of understanding without **explanation**.
- When we're traveling we often **read** marriage/parenting books aloud **together** and **discuss** them **together**
- She & I share almost identical values. I find it very easy to **talk with** her about most things. **I help her** understand politics, **she helps me** understand people.

## Attractors and Detractors

In this area of mental intimacy, the attractors and detractors could be one and the same. Let me explain. I (Laura) think that the biggest detractor to mental intimacy is the misconception that you have to have the same level of education in order to be mentally on the same page. Education is not the issue. The issue is our attitude about intelligence and our willingness to defer to another individual who may understand a concept better than we do. This is where attitude can be both a detractor and an attractor. If an individual has an attitude of superiority it will be a detractor, but if one understands multiple intelligences and has an attitude of deferment, this attitude can be an attractor.

Different learning styles can also be either a detractor or attractor. Jay and I learn differently. Jay learns by doing. I learn

by reading and then doing. When we were putting together a stand for our golf bags, I read the instructions through one time and explained the steps we were going to take to achieve putting this stand together. He began putting the stand together, and I continued to read and explain as we went along. We got the stand built by working together in our own styles and letting each other work and make mistakes.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale of 1-10, from your perspective, rate the level of mental intimacy in your marriage.
2. Identify the way(s) in which you and your spouse are intelligent. (Using Howard Gardner's eight multiple intelligences)
3. Identify the areas in which you defer to your spouse's intelligence.
4. What detractors can you identify in your marriage to mental intimacy?
5. What attractors can you identify in your marriage to mental intimacy?
6. In what new way can you defer to your spouse's intelligence over the next 21 days?

# 6

## Emotional Intimacy

### *Fanning the flame*

#### Why Emotional Intimacy Is So Important

The third facet of intimacy is emotional intimacy.

Over the years I have had the privilege of teaching a number of sales seminars for businesses. Clear communication is essential in sales. One basic fundamental of sales is this: **“People buy on EMOTION and justify with the FACTS!”**

Think about your retirement for an example. Why do you sock money away for retirement. *Fear* of being without income. *Hope* of an income in your golden years. Not wanting to be a *burden* to your children. All good answers and all emotionally based. Even the drive to be a *good steward* has a significant emotional basis. We buy almost everything on emotion and justify it with the facts.

The same is true in marriage. We “buy” into marriage because of the emotions we are feeling for our spouse. Then we justify (or sometimes don’t justify) staying with that person because of the facts. Maturing and nurturing emotional intimacy in your marriage creates a constant “buy” into the union. The “facts” of our marriage become inconsequential when we realize how emotionally connected we continue to become.

#### Emotional Intimacy

Often when we think of emotion, we think of our souls—the seat of our emotions. We cannot be one without sharing our

souls, and quite frankly this is what scares most of us men more than anything else.

The idea of sitting with my wife and “sharing” my emotions with her can bring shivers to my spine, and the spines of even the most sensitive men. The “sharing” of emotions is not necessarily emotional intimacy anymore than “sharing” football scores will make your spouse a football fan. Emotional intimacy occurs when you understand and accept your spouse’s emotional state. Notice we didn’t say you had to like their emotional state, just understand and accept it. I want to share a story with you that I think might help us understand emotional intimacy a little better.

We have a friend named Bill who didn’t get married until he was 42. He married a wonderful woman who had also never been married. They wanted to have kids right away, so they had a son within the first year. Then they waited a year and had another child, only the second child came out as two children, twins. By the time he was 45, Bill had gotten married and had a son and two daughters.

A couple years later Bill said, “Jay, when I was single, I used to think there is only so much time in the day, so if I save enough time for my family, then that will be what they need.” He continued, “What I’ve realized is that it’s not about time. We all have the same amount of time in the day. **I’ve learned it’s about how much emotional energy I have saved for my family when I come home at the end of the day.**”

It is so true. It’s hard to work in any line of business these days without exerting an incredible amount of emotional energy. When we come home, it seems we have very little left for the people who need our emotional energy the most. So my friend Bill told me point blank, “Jay, I have had to learn to keep a reserve of emotional energy so that when I come home, I’m not just there; but I’m engaging them as well”.

This happens to men as well as women. We have given of ourselves at work or home, and our emotional energy is gone. We come home, we turn on the TV or computer, and we are done connecting on an emotional level. Our emotional storehouse is empty and we need to replenish it, instead of saving it for those

who need it the most. Here are quotes from others who have made discoveries about emotional intimacy in their marriage:

- “As we grow closer in our relationship with Jesus our emotional relationship benefits.”
- “After the Celebrate Your Marriage conference we had a really nice heart to heart talk over dinner. I had never felt as connected, nor have I since, to him as I did during that moment.”
- “We are both widowed; sometimes memories come flooding back and you want to share them - sometimes you feel like that is all the memories they have until you realize that you do the same thing on other occasions.”
- “When I feel spiritually worn out she understands and helps strengthen me.”
- “We can connect easily if we pay attention to each other. We can get lazy and miss the signals that are there.”
- “I am learning to not say the first things that enter my mind. I am learning to think first before speaking. I need to be gentler with my words...less defensive...so that my husband will WANT to hear me.”

## Questions for Jesus

I (Laura) have a list of questions for Jesus when I get to heaven. The top one on my list is this: **“What happens to a woman when she turns 40?”** Because you see, when I turned 40, I got achier and crankier. And I think I got crankier because I got achier.

I had issues. I had eyelashes falling out and attaching themselves to my chin. That will make you cranky.

Before I turned 40, I was the laid- back one in this relationship. Jay was a little more intense, but that all changed

when I turned 40. I became this emotional fireball that could just explode at the drop of a hat. It didn't matter who dropped the hat or when, and it was different everyday.

I speak to women and couples all over the country, and I continually hear this, "I just wish he were more emotional." My response is, "He is emotional, just not like you!" Jay and I are both emotional beings. God gave us all emotions. As men and women we express these emotions differently. In our marriage we often joke about Jay being more of a "girl" than I. He wears his emotions right out on his shirtsleeve, so to speak. I tend to hold mine in check.

## Chili, Anyone?

One of the biggest blessings of our job is our commute: thirteen to sixteen seconds from our kitchen to our library, depending on whether you are traveling up or down the stairs! As a result Laura and I will often share lunch together and our favorite lunches are almost always left-overs. We LOVE to cook and some nights I'm thinking about lunch the next day before dinner is even digested.

One snowy winter day Laura said she was going to go re-heat some chili we had made the night before. The cold grey winter day was made for chili, and my mouth began to water because as everyone knows, chili always tastes better on day two. Laura not only made the Chili, but created a nice little place setting for us with color coordinated napkins and placemats. She lit a candle and put out a plate of crackers and cheese.

One thing you need to understand about me before we go any further is that I can't handle food that's too hot. I'm not talking spicy, I'm talking Fahrenheit! I have a tender tongue.

Laura called me down for lunch. We said the blessing and I brought a spoon full of the delicacy I'd been anticipating to my mouth. Now, I'm not saying you could hear my tongue sizzle like a sirloin, but it sure felt that way. I instinctively dropped the spoon into the bowl and shoved the bowl away with full force. The bowl traveled two feet across the kitchen counter top and on to the floor

as I screamed at the top of my lungs “WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO, KILL ME?”

Laura sat slowly shaking her head sipping chili with a little smirk on her face. That smirk angered me even more and I retorted “ARE YOU JUST GOING TO SIT THERE?” “What would you like me to do?” she calmly replied. Emotionally I was convinced she was after the life insurance. Mentally I began to see the silliness of my actions.

Emotionally I’m pretty good at playing the blame game. When I’m upset, sad, angry or mad it is ALWAYS someone else’s fault! Obviously that’s not true. Certainly people can hurt or upset me, but my emotional response to that situation is completely my responsibility. My mother saw this coming from an early age when she made me memorize the phrase “My response is my responsibility.”

Back to the chili that was now covering the floor and half of the oven door. I quickly began to take stock of what had just happened and realized some hard cold facts. Laura had taken the time to make lunch. Not only did she make lunch but also created a lovely and romantic setting in which to eat. As I cleaned up the chili and made myself a cheese and cracker lunch (there was no more chili), it hit me like a Mack truck that my over-reacting had not only made a mess, it had “unplugged” Laura’s physical intimacy crock pot for that day!

We are all created emotional beings. How we express emotions, however, varies widely. Following are statements from people whom we answered the question, “Do you share your emotions with your spouse?”

- I don’t share much. I never have with anyone. I more often keep things inside.
- Share?? If I try to keep my feelings to myself, he finds a way to get me to open up.
- I share my feelings quite often, verbally. He has his emotions written on his face and tone.

- I find it's best to keep my feelings to myself. He is very sensitive and takes things the wrong way a lot of the time.
- I tend to share the negative feelings more often, when something is bothering me. He tends to share positive feelings more freely, but tends to withhold the negative feelings until there is a blow-up

## All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned from My Dorm Mother!

I (Laura) heard a phrase in college that I just love: **“If you were both the same, one of you wouldn’t be necessary.”** You decide which one (*wink, wink*).

Seriously, though, if you both had the same emotional make-up, the same mental make-up, the same social make-up, one of you wouldn’t be needed.

We can’t be the same. Ladies, you don’t want your husband to express emotions the same way you do. You married a man, so why complain when he acts like one? And men, her emotions are real, as real as the adrenalin rush you get when that big buck is in your scope or that fish just took the bait. In order to build emotional intimacy in your marriage, you must allow your spouse to be the person God created him or her to be.

## True Confessions

I (Jay) want to start by saying that the following is just my opinion. I have no data to back this up, no studies to cite, just my observations and reflections. **I believe that men feel emotions more intensely than women.** “WHAT?” you might be saying. Yep, that’s right, I believe when men “feel”, and the truth is they don’t “feel” all the time, but when they do it is on a deep level. Let me share some examples: Have you ever seen the joy and exhilaration of a man whose team just won the Super Bowl? Have you ever seen the anger and rage on the face of a man who’s lived

life on the street? You might be saying Jay those are extremes and yes they are, but every man identifies with those extreme emotions and their depths. It's why "Die Hard" movies are so popular.

Women attach feeling to everything. They "feel" all the time and as a result get their feelings hurt easier, enjoy the little things in life more, and generally don't understand how a man can't answer the question "Honey, how would you feel about chicken for dinner?"

Please don't get me wrong. **I am not saying one way is right and one is wrong**, I simply think a key component to building emotional intimacy is to understand these differences.

When asked, here is what some folks wrote:

- When upset, I call my behavior "processing"; she calls it sulking. Eventually, the dark cloud goes away and I open up more and more to share with my wife, how I have been feeling. The word I use to describe my feeling at this time to her would be that "I'm mad." On the flip side, words I use to describe positive emotions would be feeling "good," "Having a great day," or a wink her way and an "I love you."
- When I have had a terrible day with our son, when it gets to me, he knows that all I need is some support even when all I can do is cry. Tim and I really do connect, and it's these times when I know that God has given me my soul mate. It's not always like that but more times than most.
- I think with all marriages you change, I think that you have to through submitting yourself to the Lord; He changes you and you ask Him to teach you to be a better spouse. It may be trial and error but if you are willing The Lord directs you and so I think for Tim and I yes big changes have occurred as we talk. I think the most important change is that we have learned to talk and to listen.
- Here is the kicker: I know that he tries really hard but I just

have to let Christ fill in where he lacks. I love him very much but emotions are not his strong suit. I had a friend tell me once that you cannot depend on husbands for all of your emotional support because they are bound to fail miserably. That is why we have mothers and friends to turn to when we need a good cry, but I promised long ago that never again would any unkind word pass my lips about my husband to my friends and especially my mom. I believe in self-fulfilling prophesy: if you say it, it will happen or get worse. I made too many mistakes with that when we were young and first married. I love my husband too much to disparage him to others. If I get those feelings I go to my Heavenly Father in earnest prayer and I am comforted. Emotionally we are very different but I have learned to work with what we have.

- I share my feelings when I know that it is a safe time, like not during the commercial of his favorite TV show. I used to share everything with him and I have since realized that I do not have to. He doesn't care and it really isn't his job to care. The important thing is that he cares about me and if there is something that is important to our marriage or our family then those are the feelings I share with him. When some one made me feel bad at the grocery store or my mom and I get into an argument, those are the things I call my girlfriends about.

## How to be emotionally intimate

We discussed earlier that we are all emotional beings. We just express emotions different than the next person. I would even go so far to say that it does not necessarily have to do with whether you are male or female. I think it has more to do with your personality. I have met a lot of women who do not wear their emotions for the world to see and I have met some men who do! Each of us has a filter that our emotions go through. When we get

behind our spouses filter and see life from their perspective, we will understand their emotional make up more clearly.

John lost a dear friend, a grandparent, and a childhood friend all in one year. The obvious emotional filter that he was seeing life through was pain and loss. Jane, his wife, recognized this and allowed John to experience the pain and loss and understood when that pain and loss sometimes colored other situations in their life, like overreacting with the kids.

The summer before I (Laura) met Jay, my dad passed away. While it has been 23 years since then, I still get very worried when anything with Jay's health goes awry, even if it is just a cough! My emotional filter at these times is loss and the fear of losing my spouse as my mom did.

Another emotional filter that can permeate marriage is one of guilt.

Sally, from our survey shared, "... we moved back to this state early in our marriage and my former boyfriend was on my mind a lot; we had been intimate. I told my husband about so-and-so being on my mind..."

Guilt for the past, things done or not done. This emotional filter can destroy a relationship if the husband and wife are not open and honest about the situation. Guilt can hamper our emotional intimacy as well as other facets of intimacy. A woman feeling guilty for thinking of another man may not feel as if she is worthy of the love of her husband. A man feeling guilty for perusing a magazine he should not may not feel worthy of his wife's affection.

Sally shares her breakthrough. "As I shared my guilty feelings with my husband, he assured me it was normal due to the past sexual relationship." Because of his forgiveness and acceptance, "I never thought again about it."

A gentleman answering our survey describes his emotional filter of anger and pain in this way:

”My father, a preacher of 20+ years left my mom for another woman. No one seemed to understand me, but my wife. It was as if she felt every pain I felt. I love her for that.”

Empathy, feeling your spouse’s emotions is the beginning of emotional intimacy. It is not expressing emotions the same as your spouse but identifying the emotional filter that is occurring at a particular time and feeling the pain, anger, loss, guilt with your spouse.

## Rock Bottom

“Right now we aren’t even close to emotionally intimate. You see to my husband “Feelings” are like the “F” word. He grew up in a family that NEVER shared their feelings and ALWAYS kept emotions bottled up inside. Very stoic.

Every time I try to share my feelings he calls me a little girl or says I’m being a selfish B\_\_\_\_! I try to tell him how I feel about things and he says “I can’t help how you feel”. I just wish he would admit that everyone has feelings including him. It would at least be a start in the right direction. I’ve never felt so unloved.”  
Misty married 8 years

**Everyone’s filter is different and can change repeatedly with life’s circumstances.** Years ago Jay’s mom had cancer and was given only 6 weeks to live. God intervened and now 10 years later she’s still kickin’. That circumstance created emotional fear and sadness in all of Jay’s family.

Now, any time Doyce has an abnormality or needs a special procedure, all that fear and sadness flood back on Jay, his sister and particularly his dad. Recently, Doyce needed one of those procedures.

After the doctor's visit and his blessing on the diagnosis, Jay's dad offered to buy lunch. Out of the blue, no special occasion, it was simply an outlet for the emotion and anxiety that had been building over that procedure. Is Jay's dad a Christian? Yes! Does he trust that God is in control? Most definitely, but that doesn't negate the emotions we have as humans. Discover the emotional filter your spouse is using in a particular situation and begin to see level of emotional intimacy in you marriage rise.

## Attractors and Detractors

As I (Laura) read through our survey results I noticed one common theme when it came to discussing what attracted spouses in the area of emotional intimacy. Sharing, interest, supportive, listening, empathy, all words which describe communication.

**Communication is the key to emotional intimacy.** One survey respondent described this communication as being emotionally "naked" with each other. How many of us find it easier to be physically naked with our spouse as opposed to emotionally naked? Emotional nakedness involves vulnerability. It involves opening ourselves up to another person, even though it is the person who has promised to love honor and cherish us until death do us part.

Just last night, Jay and I were watching TV together. We were watching one of those police dramas, not one that would normally grab your emotions. This episode dealt with homeless mothers and children. At the conclusion of the show, I looked over to find my very normal, "masculine" husband with tears streaming down his face. He laughed a little as he wiped his tears. His vulnerability to allow me to see that this show had touched something inside him was an attractor for me.

In the same way there was a recurring theme in the survey concerning attractors there was also one concerning detractors to emotional intimacy. Avoidance, unaware, unavailable and

disrespect all point to one word, apathy.

- “Sometimes I don’t think my feelings matter.”
- “Sometimes, in all fairness, he doesn’t have a clue about my feelings or what to do with them when he does know.”
- “I internalize my feelings, makes for less stress.”
- “Sometimes... but more often he seems to feel that my feelings are vastly overrated or unmerited given the situation. At the very least he does not feel that he is responsible in any way, even though something he has said has hurt me.”

When a spouse shows a lack of interest, for whatever reason, this is a sign to the other that there is not concern. Apathy is the absence of concern or interest. I (Laura) have often tried to figure this out.

**Why would a spouse who has committed to love, honor, and cherish the other show unconcern or lack of interest in their lover’s feelings?**

Maybe we become comfortable with each other. It is like the man that said to me once, “why do I need to tell her I love her everyday? I told her when I married her. She should remember that.”

I know for Jay and I, it has only been recently that this has been an issue in our marriage and I attribute it to my emotions dictated by hormones! Jay had a pretty even-keeled wife until she hit forty! It wasn’t apathy as much as not knowing how to handle all the emotions he was witnessing at one time! Now if Jay had been apathetic towards me, he would have acted as if these emotional outbursts were my problem and had total disregard for me. Instead, he has sought to identify and try to understand what is going on in my world when “out of body hormonal experiences” happen.

## Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale of 1-10, from your perspective, rate the level of emotional intimacy in your marriage.
2. Identify the ways in which you and your spouse express emotions?
3. Think of the last “chili incident” you had in your marriage. What emotional filter were you utilizing to process at that time? What emotional filter was your spouse utilizing?
4. What common filters do you and your spouse utilize when processing emotion?
5. What detractors can you identify to emotional intimacy in your marriage?
6. What attractors can you identify to emotional intimacy in your marriage?

**What is one way you can accept your spouse’s common filter in the next 21 days?**

# 7

## Physical Intimacy

### *Hunka Hunka Burnin' Love*

#### The Ultimate Top Ten Survey

And the fourth facet of intimacy-----you knew we were going to get there---- is physical intimacy. We have a top ten list of scientifically verifiable reasons you should have sex, just in case you need them.

**Number 10** -Sex is a beauty treatment. Tests show when women make love, they produce estrogen, making hair shine and skin smooth.

**Number 9** -Gentle, relaxed lovemaking reduces chances of suffering dermatitis, skin rashes, and blemishes. The sweat produced cleanses the pores and making skin glow.

**Number 8** - Lovemaking can burn up calories piled on during that romantic dinner.

**Number 7** - Sex is one of the safest sports. It stretches and tones almost every muscle in the body. It's more enjoyable than twenty laps, and you don't need special sneakers.

**Number 6** – Sex cures mild depression. It releases endorphins into the blood stream producing a sense of euphoria and well-being.

**Number 5** - The more sex you have, the more you will be offered. Sexually active bodies gives off greater quantities of pheromones, these subtle sex perfumes drive the opposite sex crazy.

**Number 4** --Sex is the safest tranquilizer in the world.

Ten times more effective than Valium.

**Number 3** - Kissing each day keeps the dentist away. Kissing encourages saliva to wash food from the teeth and lowers levels of acid that cause decay, preventing plaque build-up.

**Number 2** - Lovemaking can unblock a stuffy nose. Sex is a natural antihistamine. It combats asthma and hay fever.

**And the number 1 reason you should have sex** - Sex actually relieves headaches! A lovemaking session releases the tension that restricts the blood vessels in the brain.

Gentlemen, I (Jay) am doing you a favor here. Next time your wife says, “Not tonight, Honey, I have a headache” you can reply, “Your in luck...I’ve got the cure”.

All joking aside, sometimes we just have to laugh because as we go through our marriage, physical intimacy is an issue. It’s something we struggle with and something we enjoy, but as married couples it is an issue, and in order to build physical intimacy back into your marriage, you have to communicate about the intimate issues in life.

## The Importance of Physical Intimacy

Real answers from real people on why physical intimacy is important:

- Uhhh... I like it, she’s beautiful and fun to be with
- I like to be held. I like it when my husband touches me when he passes by. I like to ‘soak up his atmosphere’
- Sometimes I just want to be close to him and feel loved.

- I love her like a fat kid loves cake. I've always been touchy. It's my love language.
- The physical part of a relationship that brings a man and a woman closer by means of touch, cuddling and kissing. Truly an important part of marriage!
- Sometimes physical pull, but other times it's my want to take care of him.
- Her sexy sexy body

## God's View of Sex

Hebrews 13:1-4 says this: "*God honors marriage. Honor marriage and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and elicit sex.*" (MSG)

Now, the first time I (Laura) heard this verse I was a teenager in youth group. Of course, our youth pastor was teaching us about not having sex outside of marriage. That makes sense, but my brain doesn't always work the same way everybody else's does. When recently I read "*God draws a firm line against casual and elicit sex*" I understood what elicit sex meant. It means sex outside of marriage or when you dabble in things like pornography. But that *casual* word was really throwing me off, and so I went to the dictionary. These are the words that I found with the word casual: careless, detached, unconcerned, and bored. Hmm. Careless, detached, unconcerned, bored. Could this be referring to sex within marriage? As I talk with couples all over the country, I hear this phrase time and time again, "I am bored with my marriage, I am bored with my spouse, I am bored with our sex".

We have a lot of experience with words like "bored" and "boring" because we have a 16-year-old. He says to me (Jay) things like, "Dad, I'm bored" or "Dad, this is boring." And it

drives me nuts! I try to instill in my son that boredom is not what's happening or not happening around him; boredom is a state of mind.

**The same can be said when we find our sex life boring. It's not our spouse, not our circumstances; it's a state of mind.**

Listen to folks who have become bored with their sex life within their marriages.

- He's afraid of rejection
- It runs in streaks. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that it's important to be affectionate. At times we are too busy.
- I don't feel any need in the physical area yet I am very physically affectionate.
- I know we don't "do it" enough and that's my fault. Either kids distract or I am too tired. I know this is a common excuse.
- As I get older I could care less.
- I'm more hands off because I've got a million other things to do.... except at your marriage conferences on Mackinac Island
- I gave up trying to initiate sex with my wife.
- He tries but I rarely give in. I tend to initiate so it's on my terms. This isn't particularly wonderful to him.
- I'm tired at the end of the day. I want to rest, I don't want any more hands touching me...even in the morning...I want time alone. I started to think of sex being good only in the arena of reproduction. When we wanted to get pregnant sex/intimacy was great.

- Over the years it has decreased because I am getting tired of being told no.

## **The Importance of Communication**

**Physical intimacy is the conscious desire to fulfill your spouse's sexual needs and the willingness to do so.** We understand that due to age, medication, injury, or illness it isn't always possible to fulfill the needs of your spouse. Without question, communication in this area of marriage is very difficult. That being said, when healthy lines of communication about your sex life are open, growth in the relationship and physical intimacy will burgeon.

**Defining “needs” versus “wants” in your sex life is critical to developing physical intimacy.** For example, I LOVE it when Laura puts something sexy on in the evening. Watching her prance around for a couple hours before we go to bed really revs things up. With a teenager in the house, however, this is rarely possible. So for me to tell Laura that I NEED her to dress that way would be unfair and unproductive in our efforts to build physical intimacy.

Over the years we have learned to communicate our true needs in the area of physical intimacy. I have let Laura know that there is a big difference for me between when she is “willing” and when she “wants to.” In my twenties, her being “willing” was all I needed because, quite frankly, I was only concerned about my desires. As I've matured, I do not desire to have sex with Laura unless she really “wants to” as well. I know that for both of us, the experience of lovemaking will be so much more satisfying if she is truly in the mood.

When she is not in the mood, do I always react with maturity and understanding? HECK NO! But I am learning how to respond and how to do those things the next day that will help her desire me.

A woman from our survey defines for us physical intimacy and

how it is so much more than just physical:

I read this in a book once so it is not my personal definition but I agree with it whole heartedly. She wrote that the body and spirit make up the soul of a person and true physical intimacy is not just the connecting of two bodies but the joining of souls, both physical and spiritual union. Two shall be one flesh, literally speaking. God created physical union and satan perverted it. It can be so much more if you can connect with someone on more than just a physical level.

### **What motivates a man?**

Paul and Andrea are a cute couple. They were high school sweethearts that married after Andrea finished college. Paul worked in Andrea's family business and as they settled into married life God blessed them with two boys. Two very typical, normal, and energy-filled boys.

A month or so ago Andrea joined one of those CD clubs. You know the kind; buy 15 CD's for \$1.00 and agree to buy three more at regular price. When the CD's arrived, Paul and Andrea looked through the stack to make sure they received the CD's they ordered and to make sure there were no "inappropriate" covers. One particular CD featured a woman on the cover wearing a strapless dress. Paul and Andrea determined that the dress wasn't obscene or too scanty. They placed that particular CD in the middle of the pile and placed the pile on the stereo.

A couple of days later, Paul wandered into the family room to find Jack sprawled out on the floor intently staring at something of which Paul could not see. After watching Jack lay motionless for a few moments, Paul walked over and saw that Jack was staring at the cover of the CD which featured the woman in the strapless dress.

No one knows or understands this deep inner desire men have for women, but the instinct starts young, and it is powerful. Maybe I'm strange, but I doubt it. Some of my most vivid memories from early childhood are day dreams that I had about one of my mom's friends. It wasn't dirty, it wasn't some Freudian fantasy. It was just me thinking about that "pretty" woman. It's instinctual.

Here are some typical answers from our survey.

- Everything!
- Breathing!
- First physical touch - I think usually me. First mental touch (words, eye contact...) usually her.
- Thinking about her, looking at her, sleeping children - pretty much anything can motivate me, if it relates to her. Heck, this question motivates me.
- Impulse

## What Motivates a Woman?

Motivate is an interesting word. The dictionary defines it this way: "to move, to cause to act, to provide with a motive." So the question is what gives a woman motive to be physically intimate with her husband? I (Laura) personally like this answer from a woman who took our survey: "A lot of sleep and a vacation." I found it interesting as I read the surveys and as I have talked with women that **an uncluttered mind is the greatest asset to physical intimacy**. So the answer is easy, what motivates a woman is an empty brain. So, men, if you want a wife who will have sex with you everyday, marry an airhead! Seriously, though, make sure your wife's mental checklist is clear.

I ( Laura) found the following answers from our survey

interesting pertaining to what motivates a woman:

- Age has made it better
- Keeping the peace.
- Hearing Jay say at the Celebrate conference that men need sex about every 72 hours.
- My husband does the most (initiates). I try to consciously initiate more but he often beats me to it - I can't keep up with him.
- We were virgins when we got married so it has changed a lot and it just seems to get better and better.
- Generally the fact that I know he needs it...once I've made the decision to be intimate, then most of the time I am interested in intimacy as well. But I definitely don't need physical intimacy the way he does, and I'm referring to holding hands, touching, kissing just as much or more as I am referring to sex.

### **Let the sparks fly: how to be physically intimate**

In order to keep boredom from creeping into your sex life, we are going to challenge you with two very powerful words, “provocative” and “passionate.” Laura will challenge the ladies first.

Ladies, we have to change our state of mind. We have to become *provocative*. Now, some of you are thinking, “Laura, I can't do that. I'm a good girl, that's a bad word”. Well, again, I like dictionaries, so I looked it up. “Provocative” means “inspiring, motivating, interesting, exciting, refreshing, energizing and rousing.” To be provocative is to provoke. To provoke means to arouse, stir up, excite, stimulate. There is nothing wrong with any

of the words on this list. There is nothing sinful about any of these words. You can become provocative for your spouse within your marriage. Your husband wants you to excite him, to stimulate him! I get so tickled, and exasperated, with Christian women who forget that God created sex! He created us to enjoy each other. **God desires that you and your husband have a wonderful satisfying sex life.**

Here are some great examples of what it means to be provocative:

- Since the age of 35 my libido has increased and this made things much more fulfilling for both of us!
- Age has increased my desire. As I got older I found that I wanted physical intimacy more often. I think the kids being older and sleeping all night helped too.
- It feels good when we are intimate. I enjoy the regular kisses, hugs, and walking hand in hand. I need to find more motivation to increase the level of sexual intimacy beyond the easy day to day encounters.
- My wife is pleasant to our kids, and pleasant to me. She spends a lot of time working out and has a physically attractive body, but it is not her physical shape that attracts me. It is an attitude of joy.
- I realize he needs me to initiate regularly so he knows it's important to me too.
- She wears something revealing or when she says something with a little bit of zing to it.
- When we were first married, she would chase me around the house!

There are many challenges for women who desire to deepen their

physical intimacy with their husbands by being provocative. Here are two common issues for women in our culture.

### ***Problem One***

If you grew up in the church you were probably taught from an early age that sex was dirty. Or at least that thought was implied. I have met many women who took a pledge as a teenager to wait for sex until marriage. Now, do not get me wrong, that is a wonderful pledge to take. What happens though is that along with the pledge comes a teaching, whether verbal or implied that sex is dirty. I talk with these women who now are married and are conflicted. “Now I am supposed to see sex as pleasurable, created by God? I can’t just undo all those years of being taught sex was dirty!”

Debbie came up to me after one of our conferences; a young beautiful woman, early thirties. She shared that she had been married just over seven years and their sex life had never been spectacular. As I began to ask questions I realized that Debbie had been a teenager that was very faithful to her youth group pledge and to her Lord. As a young girl, she decided that she wanted to remain pure until her wedding night. Her youth group offered an opportunity to make that commitment publicly and Debbie did. She does not remember anyone ever saying the words, “sex is dirty”, but she does remember thinking and feeling that whenever it was a topic of conversation at home, church or youth group. When she met her husband-to-be, they decided as a couple that they would remain sexually pure until their wedding night. They did.

On the night of their wedding, Debbie can remember going through the motions and then feeling very dirty afterwards. She was sure something was very wrong with her. As she came up to me that day, I saw a young woman, desperately in love with her husband, seeking to find an answer.

The answer came in her state of mind. For years, Debbie’s mindset was wrong concerning sex. Sex is created by God for married couples to enjoy. Debbie had never understood that to be true, because she had never been taught that as a teenager. We

need to teach our young people that sex outside of marriage is a sin, and as such it is wrong and dirty. But at the same time we need to teach them that sex within marriage is dynamic, fun and exciting. Teaching one without the other is setting any couple up for disappointment and potential disaster.

### ***Problem Two***

Annie and Rob have been married for twenty-five years. Their firstborn has graduated from college and is soon to be married. Early in their marriage Annie and Rob faced some of the most difficult struggles any couple could face. The details aren't important; what is important are the little changes that made a big difference.

They spent the first ten years battling through their problems together. Through counseling and involvement in the church they began to take responsibility for their particular roles in their struggles. One of the simple yet powerful changes Annie talks about is the time her counselor made her go to bed for 21 straight days with dirty dishes in the sink. We know some of you women right now are cringing even at the thought. Annie did. You see, Annie is type "A," a career-minded self-confident woman who likes to "get things done." As a result if there were dishes in the sink or laundry to be done or a floor to be vacuumed those duties would take precedence over time with Rob. In fact Annie couldn't even think of being "intimate" with Rob unless everything on her "to do" list was done.

As a result, intimacy with Rob became just another "to do." Do the laundry. Do the dishes. Do intimacy with Rob. Many women reading this right now can relate, they are stuck in a cycle of habits that keep them from what they truly desire. Women want intimacy and passion and romance in their marriage, and yes your husband has a huge role in making that happen, but so do you!

The purpose behind the 21 days of terror Annie's counselor prescribed her was to help her realize how insignificant dirty dishes are compared to the health and well being of their marriage.

## Type “A” . . . What?

I (Jay) guess I’m just lucky. Laura tells me I am since I married a middle child. Kevin Leman, in *The Birth Order Book*, indicates that middle children are often good reliable spouses because they are accustomed to making both older and younger siblings happy.

Laura has never struggled with the “it has to be done” syndrome; in fact, I am probably more prone to that mentality. Don’t get me wrong, there are some nights when some task or issue is on Laura’s mind, and we are not going to do so much as sit down to watch TV until it is crossed off her mind’s list.

However, many are the nights when she’ll look at me and say something like, “I filled the sink with water to let the dishes soak, and I’ll finish them up in the morning.” Or “I know you need that shirt laundered by Friday, so I will do it tomorrow, just not tonight.”

Do you know what that does for me? It communicates volumes; it tells me that she is doing something intentional for me—no, for us. It reflects the fact that she understands her side of the equation.

What do I do in response? I run upstairs, shower, shave, put on cologne and my finest sweatpants and t-shirt. Make sure the kids are sleeping or going to sleep really soon, pour her a diet coke, get the crackers and slice the cheese.

## Desire Is a Decision

Earlier in this book we talked about the fact that for women intimacy is like a crock-pot; they take all day to cook. For men, intimacy is more like a microwave! This is the way God created us and we cannot change that, but we can work with what we have! What this means, ladies, is not only that our husbands have to plug us in and let us cook all day long but when they plug us in, we cannot unplug ourselves!

I have learned over the years that while I have a billion other things on my mind during the day, I must have my husband on my mind as well. **My mind is my greatest asset when it comes**

## **to my sex life with my husband.**

When Jay first started traveling as a speaker, he would be gone several days a week as well as the weekend. He usually returned home on a Sunday evening and would want to be greeted at the door with a big sloppy kiss. I on the other hand had been holding the fort down at home, taking care of kids every minute of every day; the minute he walked in the door I was done! It was his turn to give a bath or read a bed time story. And sex was the farthest thing from my mind.

Maybe your husband is home every night. Yet your day is still filled with meals, laundry, activities, bath time, bedtime, and tomorrow!

I realized as Jay's schedule and my routine hampered our intimate life that I had to do some mental preparation. I had to anticipate his homecoming. I had to focus my mind halfway through his absence on the fact that he would return home and he would want sex! What I discovered was that the more I focused on that, the more I desired to give him a big sloppy kiss when he stepped through that door. **Desire is a decision. Many times we have to decide to "be in the mood".**

In this quote from Debi, we see a woman who has made a cognitive decision to take time away from their kids and schedule in order to maintain a deeper level of physical intimacy:

- Having 2 kids and busy life with crazy schedules makes it difficult to be together. However, we took measures to have "alone time" shortly before coming to Celebrate Your Marriage Conference just this past May. It's only gotten better since the conference - it helped me realize how important it is to maintain physical intimacy even if I may feel too tired.

Susan had to retrain her mind. Her upbringing had predisposed her to negative images which she overcame in order to deepen her marriage relationship:

- The area that has changed is more frequent intercourse. This has been brought on by honesty in our relationship, a conscious attempt by me to want to please my husband and obey God as well, and viewing sex differently. (It's o.k. to do it and not only that - God expects me to do it often!!) This is a huge change for a girl who has been taught all her life that sex is wrong -suddenly you get married and then its o.k. and not a wrong thing and you are supposed to suddenly do it. Needless to say, our wedding night years ago was...well...I think you get the picture.) Also, as my husband has grown spiritually, it has brought us closer together and sex is better than ever - as God intends it to be.

## Passionate

Gentlemen, here's our word: we must become *passionate*. Now some of you are thinking, "What do you mean, Jay? Like a soap-opera thing?" Not really. Let's look at some words that help define "passionate". Such words include adoring, zealous, enthusiastic, eager, devoted, dedicated, committed. Most women would love to be with a man who is these things.

Men sometimes think they don't know much about passion, but here's the thing. I am a passionate golfer. If my friend calls me up, as he sometimes does, and says, "Jay, I've got an 8 AM tee time at your favorite golf course in northern Michigan," I think, "Okay, that's two hours away. That means I have to leave at six o'clock, but I want to get there and hit balls. That's 5:30. Oh, and I need some cushion time, that's 5:00. I also need to get up and take a shower, so that's 4:30 in the Blessed AM! 'I'm there, buddy!'" What are you passionate about? Hunting? Fishing? Cars? Woodworking? Camping? Whatever the hobby, we know a lot about passion.

When are we passionate about our spouses? We are passionate about our spouses when we are eager and enthusiastic to be with them. Devoted, dedicated, and committed to them. Gentlemen, if you start thinking in those terms about your spouse,

you will unlock the woman of your dreams. She will see how much you care for her, and physical intimacy will grow.

## Practice What You Preach

One of our teachings that really tends to turn heads is that we believe sexual intercourse is one of the deepest forms of worshipping God. See, told you . . . just so you don't think we are the only ones thinking this way, following is a survey response from a woman explaining a moment of deep spiritual intimacy with her husband:

OK don't be shocked, but I wish I could explain to newlyweds how good sex is when you bring God to bed with you--what I mean is know that it is by God's design that you are married and God gave you (the married person) sex.

In Romans we read: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.* Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

Worship is offering our bodies as sacrifices, unconditionally to a God we trust with our life. In marriage, when we offer our bodies, unconditionally to a spouse we trust with our love, we please God. Can we as husbands and wives have sex without bringing God to bed with us? Yes, but when we do we miss out on God's best for our physical intimacy.

Truly, in the purest form, love making between a husband and a wife is the "offering of our bodies as living sacrifices" in order to bring your spouse pleasure. If we are followers of Christ, and we "bring Him to bed with us", then we are making love which He created and in turn giving Him the glory, honor and praise due.

We have many friends who cringe at the thought of bringing Jesus to bed. We believe it is bred out of a cultural mindset that still considers sex as dirty and naughty rather than a gift from God.

**God created sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife for our enjoyment and pleasure! He created it and it is very**

**good!**

Mike and Linda understand that physical intimacy is sharing so much more than just their bodies. It is the sharing of Mike's entire person, physical and spiritual, mental and emotional, with Linda. Intimacy is that sharing of our entire beings with another person. When we miss the mark and share only a part of who we are, it is like eating chocolate cake with out the chocolate or the icing!

Don and Joann shared in our survey that physical intimacy starts for them long before the physical. Having fun together or deep conversation is the foreplay in their relationship. Again, we see that the sharing of friendship and conversation( social and mental intimacy) are the beginning to physical intimacy.

Shari shared that since her husband has become a Christian he is much more concerned about her when it comes to physical intimacy. He has lost that selfishness that desires only his pleasure and is more attentive to her needs and pleasure. In Shari's comments we can see that spiritual intimacy plays a large role in the fulfillment of physical intimacy in a marriage relationship.

When I(Jay) was 16, my mom and I were doing dishes together after dinner. That in and of itself was a miracle! I knew that my mom and dad were going thru a stretch of rough water. As we were washing dishes, I asked my mother if she and dad were going to get a divorce. Almost before the words got out of my mouth, my mother had swatted me upside the head with the dish towel! She responded to my question in these words, "Jay, if there is one thing I know, it is that your father and I will never get a divorce. You see son, Your dad loves Jesus more than he loves me."

What a powerful statement! When we love Jesus and love our spouse, physical intimacy will become more about the other person than it is about our desires or needs.

Donna shares in survey response that she is most responsive

to Ron, her husband, in the physical realm when she feels emotionally connected to him. This connection involves respect from him, relaxation, laughter, and verbal communication. She shared that even when she begins the evening not feeling “in the mood”, that this emotional connection can change her mood.

Donna’s response points us back to “desire is a decision”. In that section of the book, I (Laura) was talking mainly to the women about putting aside all the distractions of a day and deciding to desire your husband. Jay will tell me that for him, being “willing” to is not the same as “wanting to”. I would agree. Men, however need to understand that women will “want to” more if they feel that emotional connection to their husbands. The respect, the conversation, the laughter, may take some effort on their part to get the “want to” started!

As we can see in all these examples from our survey, all five facets of intimacy are so entwined that you cannot have one without the other and experience all that God intended for marriage.

## Attractors and Detractors

As we have seen in the previous section, physical intimacy is much more than the sexual act. The attractors involve all five facets of intimacy. Some are attracted by the friendship, others the conversation, still others by the emotional connection, and some by their faith.

In large part, for most couples we surveyed, physical intimacy has grown in their marriage. What began as just physical has become deeper on all levels of intimacy. Overwhelmingly, the most common attractor to physical intimacy, was not the outward appearance of a spouse but the emotional connection between a couple. However, outward circumstances were also an attractor. For example, dating, display of affection, working together, all outward circumstances that led to the connection which in turn led

to physical intimacy.

Health issues, busyness, and lack of understanding were the most common detractors. As we age and our bodies begin to need medications, etc. that can affect our sex drives. That is understood. However, physical intimacy is so much more, as we have seen, than having sexual intercourse. I (Laura) believe that as we age we can still have sexual intimacy in spite of what our bodies may be telling us!

Other health issues, illness, disease, are unfortunate realities of living in a fallen world. I know for some it is only for a season of their marriage and for others it is a lifetime.

My father, was diabetic, contracted polio at a young age and was crippled in his legs; in my lifetime, he had 4 heart attacks and 3 strokes. His illness was not just a season but a lifetime, and the life of my parents' marriage. Was it easy? Absolutely not. Yes there was stress, frustration and anxiety. Yet, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that my parents loved each other. The physical act may have been difficult (however they did produce 4 children! ) yet, the intimacy was still there.

Busyness and lack of understanding were also high on the list of detractors to physical intimacy. We as a couple have to make our marriage a priority. We will address this later in the book. Unfortunately, we make the choice, consciously or unconsciously, to allow busyness to creep into our lives.

The two most powerful words we can learn to say are “yes” and “no”. As a couple we have to decide what we are going to say “yes” to and what we are going to say “no” to. **We have to choose to eliminate the busyness in our lives for the sake of our marriage.**

Lack of understanding is a result of an inward, “me”, focus as opposed to an outward, other, focus. Laura is what I(Laura) am all about! I am mostly concerned with my desires, my wants, my needs, which can cripple our physical intimacy. It takes effort on a daily basis, to put me aside. I don’t do it well and I don’t do it all the time. Yet, I try! Jay sees that I try and respects that and is grateful. I may not get it right all the time, but the effort is seen and appreciated.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale of 1-10, from your perspective, rate the level of physical intimacy in your marriage?
2. In what ways do you think you and your spouse succeed at being provocative and passionate?
3. In what ways do you need to improve being provocative and passionate?
4. What detractors can you identify in your marriage to physical intimacy?
5. What attractors can you identify in your marriage to physical intimacy?
6. What is one way you can improve your physical intimacy over the next 21 days?

## 8

### Spiritual Intimacy

## *The Eternal Flame*

We all need to be spiritually intimate if we are going to be intimate with our spouses because spiritual intimacy is the foundation of all the other facets of intimacy.

We don't know where you're at in your spiritual life or if you even have a relationship with Jesus. Some readers may not have this relationship. That's okay for right now. We want to meet you where you are, but hopefully you will agree with us that all humans are spiritual beings.

Our daughter when she was five years old understood that she's a spiritual being, that there's something "bigger" out there. We remember one particular church service when our pastor was preaching a powerful sermon on the fact that in the cosmos, we are nothing but dust. We're insignificant in the grand scheme of the universe. At the end of his sermon, he raised his hands and prayed, "Oh Lord, even though we are but dust..." Gracie had been listening carefully that day and had her head bowed. As soon as those words came out of his mouth, her head snapped up and she asked, "Daddy, what's butt dust?"

### The Simplest Form of "Church"

Most would agree that church is the physical presence of Christ on earth. We, as husband and wife, therefore are the church here on earth. (We firmly believe this DOES NOT mean we use this as an excuse to refrain from corporate worship with other believers.) We can become spiritually intimate when we understand

what God has for our marriage.

Listen to the words of Jesus: “ *I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loose in heaven. Again I tell you, that if two of you on earth agree about anything and ask for it, it will be done for you by my father in heaven, for when two or three come together in my name, I am there with them*” Matthew 18:18-20 (NIV)

What do these verses have to say to married couples? One way to read them is like this: If you and your spouse agree upon anything, our father in heaven will hear you; if you ask for it in Jesus’ name, in accordance with His will, He will grant it to you in your marriage. Also, if you loose anything in your marriage; destructive habits, things that you know are not healthy for your relationship, and say “Lord, we want those out of our life, and if it’s in accordance with Your Will”, they will be loosed for you.

## Laura’s Financial Wizardry

Early on in our marriage Jay figured out that I was no financial genius! When we met I was sure that the ATM machine could keep track of my debits and magically record them in my checkbook! Thus, six weeks after graduating from college, I was overdrawn . . . fourteen bounced checks overdrawn.

So Jay’s lifelong challenge became to help me at least know how to balance a checkbook and pay bills in case the day ever came when I had to do it alone. After about 9 years of training he decided that I could at last be in charge of the family finances. It was an experiment that lasted one year.

Unbeknownst to Jay I was failing fast. But I was so determined to fix it, I refused to ask for help. So I sank deeper and deeper into financial trouble. At the same time, unbeknownst to me, Jay was planning ahead to give me a special gift for our 10 year anniversary. Whenever he would go out to speak, he would give me the honorarium to deposit and he would keep the travel expenses reimbursement checks and deposit them in a secret savings account.

On our tenth anniversary, the truth both of us had been hiding came to light. Jay gave me a check and said I could spend it anyway I desired. I bawled! Then I told him about my financial troubles! The miracle of the whole thing was that the amount Jay had saved matched to a penny the debt I had incurred in my unwillingness to ask for help.

Grace sprouted two legs and walked into my life in the form of my husband. Here he had saved for an entire year to give me a check, and I had been too proud to ask for help in my weakness.

We chose to “loose” this issue in our marriage. Jay forgave me. We quickly paid off the debt I had incurred by committing our financial decisions to the Lord.

## Defining Spiritual intimacy

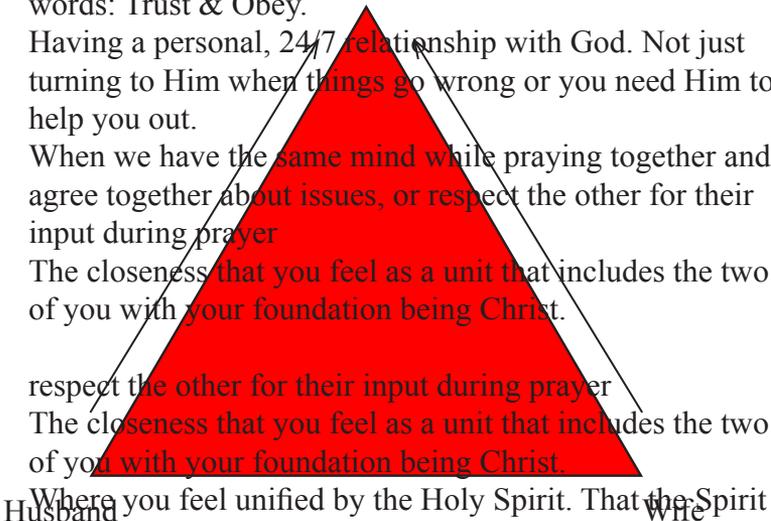
If one were to draw deepening spiritual intimacy it would look like a triangle. As two people in a marriage grow closer to the Lord, they cannot help but grow closer to each other.

**The process of becoming one spiritually occurs when a**

**husband and wife mutually commit to being conformed to the image of Christ.** Two amazing transformations happen in this process. First, I become more of the person God intended me to be. Second, I become more of the person my spouse truly needs me to be.

Here is how others define spiritual intimacy:

- Spiritual intimacy involves loving God and accepting Jesus as our savior. Living with JOY: Jesus, Others, You.
- I think that when we are intimate with God, it creates a “something” in us to love each other more, without saying a word or touching each other. It’s all from the soul.
- Being able to connect to one another through Christ
- We go to church and discuss our thoughts on the sermon, we discuss current issues and how they effect our lives spiritually and how we may differ in opinion
- When 2 or more people are “in-tune” with the Holy Spirit at the same time.
- For Joy & me, it is being able to sit down together & go thru a particular event (either in Scripture or in our lives) & know that we are on the same page. That God is in control.
- I think spiritual intimacy with God can be summed up in 2 words: Trust & Obey.
- Having a personal, 24/7 relationship with God. Not just turning to Him when things go wrong or you need Him to help you out.
- When we have the same mind while praying together and agree together about issues, or respect the other for their input during prayer
- The closeness that you feel as a unit that includes the two of you with your foundation being Christ.
- respect the other for their input during prayer
- The closeness that you feel as a unit that includes the two of you with your foundation being Christ.
- Where you feel unified by the Holy Spirit. That the Spirit



is helping you to grow in your walk with the Lord together. You share the same spiritual goals and values. Where you can love your spouse more selflessly because the Spirit helps you to give beyond your selfishness.

- We are emotionally and mentally as well as physically pure to each other. No outside influences, fantasies, etc. We talk about what a wonderful gift God has given us & how much we cherish it.
- I think that it has many levels one of which is a common belief in our savior Jesus Christ. I think when you can share your deep love for the savior and the work he has done in your life and have those feelings reciprocated by your spouse that to me would be true spiritual intimacy.
- Where you feel unified by the Holy Spirit. That the Spirit is helping you to grow in your walk with the Lord together. You share the same spiritual goals and values.

## Spiritual Intimacy impacts daily life

Robin and Jonathan were like any other couple when they first got married. Adjusting to the challenges of marriage made for good days and bad. Jonathan had been raised in a home where financial management was an important part of being a steward of all God had given them. Robin was more than willing to defer to Jonathan's plans.

**Early in their marriage they put forth a financial plan and literally dedicated that plan to the Lord.** Jonathan and Robin have never been what the world would call rich. Jonathan has a good job as an accountant but Robin does not work outside the home. Together they made three simple commitments:

1. The Lord gets paid first
2. Our savings gets paid second
3. We will budget our lifestyle based on what's left over

In nearly 20 years of marriage Jonathan and Robin have worked

this plan. They don't buy anything on credit, and their house is paid off. When asked about their financial "success," they cheerfully say it was a spiritual decision that had real-world implications.

## Opening the Rooms of Your Heart

God has offered us power, and yet so often we fail to use it. Those of us who know Jesus have the power that created the universe living within our hearts. This reminds me of when my friend Russ, put a furnace into my home a few months ago. Russ is a plumbing and heating contractor, and his guys installed a brand new furnace. He's talking to me about BTUs and CFMs and all this stuff I didn't understand. I asked, "Russ, will it heat my house?" He declared, "Oh boy, this is a powerful furnace. Feel the heat coming off of this right now." I replied, "Yeah, but will it heat everything?" He exclaimed, "Oh yeah, it will push a lot of heat." I responded, "But Russ, will it cover every room of my house?" He finally replied, "Only if you go through every room in your house and you open those little vents. Otherwise, no, it can't do its work."

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, those who have asked the Lord Jesus Christ to live within us, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to us. Jesus is waiting to warm every aspect of your marriage, every aspect of your heart. **We must pray and open the vents and allow Him to invade every aspect of marriage, making us mentally, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually intimate.**

## Confession Is Good for the Soul

We believe that beginning of spiritual intimacy starts with a simple yet powerful, biblical concept. We must confess our sins and our weaknesses.

*He who conceals his sins does not prosper,  
but whoever **confesses** and renounces them finds mercy .Proverbs  
28:13(NIV)*

*Therefore **confess** your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16(NIV)*

*If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1John 1:9(NIV)*

Clearly, there is spiritual power beyond our understanding when we confess. In marriage there are pivotal moments of confession. I (Laura) struggle with being selfish. I don't know why. Perhaps it is because I am the third of four kids and thought I needed to fight for equal opportunity. This created in me a "tit for tat, this for that" mentality in our marriage, which came to a head with the birth of our son, Torrey.

I was going to have to be home more, do ministry less, and I thought I was going to have to sit back and watch Jay have all the fun in life! My selfish nature would crop up and I would find myself irritable, bitter and resentful. I would launch into unexpected tirades. My loving husband would ask how he could help, what could he do? Then I realized there was nothing he could do to help me until I confessed that the root of my problem was my selfishness. The day I did it was as if a cloud was lifted from my life.

In marriage there are also recurring moments of confession. I (Jay) am a typical firstborn type A personality. I could easily live by the moniker, "it is my way or the highway". Early in our marriage, I demanded much from my bride without giving her grace to mature in her role as a wife. Unfortunately my demanding ways continue to crop up on a recurring basis. "Why is the laundry piled up?" "What are your plans for cooking dinner?" "Is this house ever going to get cleaned?" All the while failing to remember that Laura works full time as an author and speaker, as well as needing to give her time, love and attention to our two beautiful children. I find my self daily reminding myself to ask her forgiveness for my insensitive and demanding ways.

It is the beginning of unleashing the Holy Spirit's power in every aspect of our life. To whom do I confess? God has given you a partner with whom to share the innermost joys, struggles, and challenges of your life. It will not be easy, but the benefit will be immeasurable.

## We Just Don't Understand!

In the survey we gave, we asked many different questions about each of the five facets of intimacy that we have covered to this point: social, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. We also asked respondents to rate where their marriage is in relation to each facet on a scale from 1-10 (see appendix to take the survey). What amazed us was that many people would rate their marriage low (1-3) on all of the facets except spiritual intimacy, and then they would give their marriage a 10.

Here is the thing. **You cannot be intimate spiritually without it radically improving your intimacy in the other facets of your marriage.** This is where well-meaning people can totally misunderstand what intimacy in marriage is all about. It goes beyond what our minds have ever tried to comprehend before. Spiritual intimacy is so much more than attending church together and praying together. It is the meshing of all the facets: social, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual together in a way that intertwines you and your spouse heart, mind, body and soul.

If in fact you are becoming more like Christ everyday, you will become more aware of and in tune with the needs, wants, and desires of your spouse. As a selfless follower of Jesus you will desire to meet those needs, wants, and desires in a deep and real way as an offering to Christ and an example of *his* power to the world. So, let us be frank here. If you are rating your marriage high in spiritual intimacy and low in the other areas, you might want to take a closer look at what is really taking place spiritually, in your own life and in your marriage. Are you really experiencing the abundant life Christ speaks of, or are you merely going through the motions of an "institutional" relationship with Jesus?

## Through God's Power

God's power is here and now. He wants us to go through our marriage and open up those vents of social intimacy—vents of emotional, physical and spiritual intimacy. As we do, as we open those vents and use His power, we are laying our marriage down before Him. We're saying, "You know, it's not my desires, not my expectations, not my needs. Lord, take this marriage, take my spouse and make him or her into the partner I need, and Lord, take me and make me into the partner that my spouse needs." As you do that, the Lord will take your marriage and fashion it into a beautiful expression of love and unity.

May your life be a life of unbelievable joy. Jesus Christ said, ...*I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.* John 10:10 (NIV) We want to encourage you to learn to dance with each other, so that as you go through life, you dance along and celebrate every day.

"Dance then wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the dance said he, and I'll lead you all wherever you may be, and I'll lead you all in the dance said he." Jesus says dance people, dance.

## Attractors to Spiritual intimacy: quotes from our survey

The obvious attractor for couples when it comes to spiritual intimacy is a shared faith. Yet, the responses from our survey show not only a shared faith but serving together, worshipping together and praying together as huge attractors to spiritual intimacy.

All too often, married couples may believe that simply sharing the same belief system is intimacy. When in actuality, acting out this shared belief system is where the intimacy in the spiritual area of our lives grows.

I (Laura) as a college student had great hope for the future! I was looking forward to becoming a youth minister ( that was my course of study), marrying a man, raising a family, and all the hopes that a young woman has at that age. In a marriage and family course in which I enrolled, I distinctly remember the

professor giving us some advice. She said decide your **master first-** who will you serve. **Second, decide your mission-** what is it that you want to do with your life. **Last, decide your mate-** with whom will you choose to spend your life.

This made perfect sense to me because I knew that I had a relationship with Jesus Christ, He was my master. I knew I wanted to be a youth minister, that was my mission. The mate would be the last decision to make.

I truly think that in our western mind set we get this all backwards. We decide who we will marry many times before we have decided who we will serve and what our mission if life is. Therefore, after we marry and we make those decisions, many times we find that our mate does not hold those same decisions. In fact, often their choices are in conflict with ours.

One huge attractor for me when I met Jay was that he had chosen his master, and his mission and our choices were in sync with each other. We knew almost right away that ministering together was what we desired in our marriage.

Praying together was another frequent response in our survey. **Prayer is probably one on the most vulnerable intimate actions a couple can do together.** You are opening up your heart and soul before not only your spouse but also the God of creation! This is why this is difficult for some many couples to do. I ( Jay ) have had actually heard couples comment that it is easier to undress in front of each other than it is to pray together.

We have a small group of friend(couples) that meet once a week for accountability and prayer. At our meeting around Valentines Day, I (Jay) decided that not only were we going to spend time in prayer, but in directed prayer. I was facilitating the group that evening and lead the group in an exercise of praying specifically for their spouse. The prayer was to be one of thankfulness for our spouse. As a group, it was not an easy task to do. It was interesting to hear each person pray thanking God for their spouse. The interesting thing I noticed afterward was how

cuddly everyone was with their spouses! Prayer is an intimate act that is a great attractor to spiritual intimacy.

## Detractors to Spiritual Intimacy

On the flip side of these attractors are the natural opposites that are detractors: feeling disconnected spiritually from a spouse. Many survey respondents used the words, disconnected, separateness, and lack of togetherness. As we studied our surveys there are three basic issues in this feeling of disconnectedness: a spouse who is overly involved in church activities and has no time, a spouse who is a believer but there is no shared serving, prayer, etc. (as discussed in above), or the spouse who does not share the same faith.

A Christian married to a non-Christian (or unshared faith) is a difficult situation when attempting to be spiritually intimate. We have watched many friends in this situation. For most people in this situation, it is a constant battle to love as Christ loves. Those who succeed in this situation stay in the marriage and continue to pray for their spouse; love their spouse in a Christ-like manner, and remain committed to their relationship with both God and their spouse.

The other two common answers to detractors, are an over-involved spouse and a spouse who does not share in serving. These two seem go hand in hand. A lesson that has helped our marriage immensely is one Jay and I both had to learn. Many times, one has to say no to something that is a good thing in order to say yes to something great.

We believe one of the biggest detriments to a marriage is the church's separation of ministry areas. For example, walk into almost any church in America and you will find listed in their directory of ministries: women's ministries, men's ministries, single ministries, children's ministries, and youth ministries.

It is rare in America today to find a church that has a specific marriage & family minister, let alone a directed marriage ministry. On a given Sunday, families walk into church and immediately all split and go their separate ways. Church committees rarely have people serve as couples. Women's retreats, Men's retreats, events, etc all separate couples.

This is a direct reason we have established our Marriage Champion program. For more information on Marriage Champions see Appendix B.

Now, we are not saying that a couple should never be apart and attend events separately, or even do activities with friends. Do not hear us say that. What we are saying is that the focus of church should do more to bring couples together, giving couples the opportunities to serve together.

At one point in our marriage, I (Laura) was involved in two women's bible studies, taught aerobics for a group of women, served on the women's ministry committee, and attended a mother's morning out group. Did I have time for Jay? Only at night, and that was if I was not too tired from all my activities! Are these all good activities to be involved in? YES! But, I had to say no to some of these good activities in order to say yes to something better- my husband and our marriage.

## Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale of 1-10, from your perspective, rate the level of spiritual intimacy in your marriage?
2. Identify how you and your spouse express yourself spiritually?
3. Identify the common spiritual values that

you share as a couple?

4. Explain your relationship, as well as your spouse's, to Jesus Christ.
5. What detractors can you identify in your marriage to spiritual intimacy?
6. What attractors can you identify in your marriage to spiritual intimacy?
7. How can you deepen your walk with Christ over the next 21 days?

PART TWO  
Bringing all the Facets of  
Intimacy together

# 9

## Lose Yourself

### *Tending the fire*

Now you may be wondering, “How is this ‘being one’ going to impact my marriage?” This may sound silly, but the reality is that being one impacts every aspect of our lives. The reason it impacts every aspect of life comes about in the first action we must practice to be one: losing ourselves.

#### The Butter Putter

For me (Jay), one of the places it’s hard to lose myself- is when it comes to my golf game. I love golf, but normally if I’m going to invest-and that’s the word I like to use- in a golf club, I will talk to Laura about it. We make our budgetary decisions together, even when it comes to some of the smaller stuff, because we believe that is what it means to practice being one.

As I said, I am a chaplain for the PGA serving primarily on the Nationwide Tour, and was asked to speak at the Detroit Golf Show. This is the second largest golf show in America. After speaking at a prayer breakfast there, I had the privilege of walking around the show.

My friends and I were walking around the booths looking at different clubs. We came to this exhibit where they were selling putters. Putters. Oh, the most precious club in the bag is the putter. It is the club that can cure all evil things, slices, hooks, and duffs that happen in a golf game.

I began to stroke golf balls with this putter. It was so smooth. Smooth like butter, I call it my butter putter. It was mesmerizing, tantalizing. Without realizing it, I reached into my wallet and handed the guy \$140 for that putter. I’ve never spent that much on any club in my bag, but badabing badaboom, I

bought the putter.

Driving home, I was SO excited. I'm going to tell Laura about the putter, I can't wait for Laura to see my new putter...uh...er...oh NO, I forgot to talk to Laura about the putter. YIKES!

I must admit that if I would've discussed it with her before, asking, "Honey, I'm thinking about buying a putter or some other club. Is that okay?" she would've said, "You know, let's look at the budget. Okay, you can spend \$50." I had overstepped our agreement about spending without consulting her. Self had sneaked in, and instead of losing self, I embraced self.

## Making Decisions Together

I (Laura) am a shopper. Here is how being one has affected me. My mode of operation when my daughter has a dance lesson or piano lesson is to wander through Wal-Mart. I am just going to see what they have on the shelves. I don't really need anything when I go in, but when I come out, I have a whole buggy full of things that suddenly I needed when I was in the store. I go home and exclaim, "Look at all these things I needed at Wal-Mart?"

When Jay and I began to talk about being one and how it is going to affect not only the physical area, but the mental, social, and all the different areas of our life together, I realized I had to make a "Wal-Mart" plan. I decided, okay, before I go to Wal-Mart, I have to tell Jay what I'm going to buy. I must have a list. My desire to shop for needless items was hindering our ability to be one.

Some of you are probably thinking, "I don't like this. What do you mean, lose myself? I'm not a child; I can make decisions on my own!" You are right. We all can. However, **when we make the conscious choice to communicate about decisions and come to conclusions together, we become one.** So let's look to scripture to see how we go about losing the self.

Philippians, the second chapter, talks about an attitude that we should have. *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.*

Let's stop right there for a moment. Every one of us could type up that sentence and put it on our refrigerator. It would be a

great sentence to live the rest of our lives by, especially in marriage where it can be so difficult.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look, not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-11 NIV*

This passage of scripture says that Jesus made himself nothing. What did that mean? He was found in **human** likeness. So what does that tell us about us? We're all big-fat zeros. In the broad scope of the universe and eternity, we are dust. I think the writers of the scripture and God Himself as He was inspiring them had to have a chuckle or two.

## **The Role of Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is something that everybody struggles with at one level or another because of what we see on TV and magazines. I know this: throughout the creation story, when God created something He proclaimed, "That's good". He created the earth and the sun and proclaimed, "That's good". After separating the sea and the land, He declared, "That's good". When He designed the birds of the air, fish of the sea, He announced, "That's good." When He made the zebra, giraffe, and the duck-billed platypus, He said, "Okay, they're strange, but good."

But, do you know what God said when He made us? After He made man, after he made you, He said, "That is very good." I've got to tell you, I'm a lot like you. I wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and think, "That ain't very good". I've got more down here on my waistline than I want, less up here on my hairline than I want. Can you relate?

We all have poor self- image, and the reason, I'm convinced, is because of the world in which we live. Burger King says, "Have it **your** way." Ladies, you use L'Oreal because, "**I**m

worth it”. There’s even a magazine called *Self*, for crying out loud. Most of us spend the first 20-25 years of our life being told it’s all about you.

We’re told “You’ve got to get **your** education. You’ve got to find **your** job. You have to make **your** career. You’re even looking for what? **Your** spouse, and he or she is going to fulfill every one of...**your** needs.” Why? Because it’s all about **you**, baby!

In reality, if we’re going to be one, we have to realize that when we stood at that altar and said “I do”, we relinquished every right to self. Every right. So the question is this. Are you going to lose yourself? **Are you going to lose yourself for the sake of the marriage?** You are not losing to your spouse, rather, to the marriage. You are losing yourself so that you can be one and have a life that is built around exactly what God wants for you and your marriage.

*Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Colossians 3:5a*

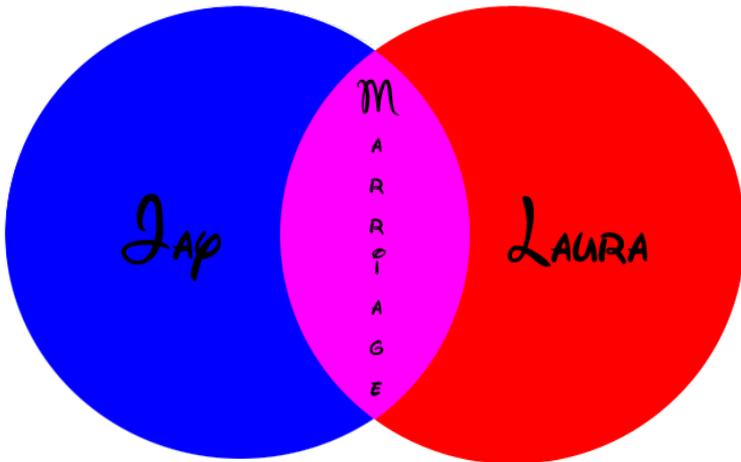
Simply put, we’re talking about the ego side of self; the “self”ishness, “self-centeredness that we all can display. In *no way* would we ever contend that you should quit being the unique individual God made you. You have gifts and personality that need to shine. But we have to put our selfish tendencies and desires aside for the sake of the marriage.

We have a diagram we want to show you to illustrate how we believe this comes together. So many of us look at marriage as, “Here I am, here is my spouse, and between us we have this thing called marriage.” That’s where it stops.

Because I ( Laura) am a color person, imagine the circles below as follows. Jay is blue. I am red. As any second grader can tell you that red and blue together make purple- so imagine the marriage circle as purple.

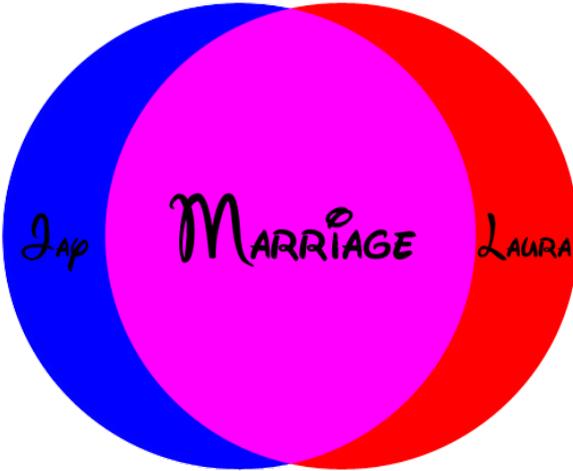


Some people will teach you that I am here, my spouse is there, and then there is a third entity called the marriage. No where in scripture do we find anything that supports this idea.



What we believe is the more you lose yourself in marriage, the more the marriage grows. As that marriage grows, you will

begin to understand exactly how God wanted you and your spouse to live. .



At some point you will become not you and your spouse who are married, but the marriage of you and your spouse. This is significantly different.



Some might look at this illustration and think we are asking couples to completely give up their individuality. In the final circle, if you were to take away any of Jay's blue or any of my red, you would no longer have purple. Therefore, in reality, what we are saying is to be completely who you are but do so in the context of growing the marriage.

## An Illustration

How does this flesh out? I (Jay) have to tell you, in our marriage, there is one very clear and unquestionable way that it fleshes out. I married a sleeper. Laura loves sleep, will sleep anytime she can, and sleep she will!

Laura is not a lazy person, she just loves to sleep. And if I wake her up while she's sleeping? Well, let's just say, that it is a very bad thing.

When we get the kids up for school everyday, we tag-team

it. What Laura has said to me is this, “Jay, we’ve got to wake the kids up at 6:40 if they’re going to make it to school on time. I’ll set the alarm and I will rollout at 6:40 and start them moving. Then I will go downstairs and make breakfast and pack their lunches. Now, what I want you to do is to sleep another 10-15 minutes and then make sure the kids are moving along.”

Contrast that to her nature (as a sleeper)? Her nature would be to say this, “Jay, when the alarm goes off, I’m going to kick you out of bed. You get the kids rolling, because I’m going to sleep an extra 10-15 minutes”. But no, she denies her desire to sleep. That’s her very nature; it’s who she wants to be, but for the sake of our marriage and family, she loses that part of herself.

In reality, I (Laura) am afraid of how the kids will be dressed if he gets them up first! (I am just kidding.) I have found that a lot of us view marriage as a competition, don’t we? Who works more? Who cooks more meals? Who puts more gas in the gas tank? Who cleans the house more? Who is right more often? Who is wrong more often? We keep a little score tab. And this approach is deadly to intimacy.

## The Big Book of RIGHT

I (Laura) am the third of four kids, so growing up I was never right. There were always four other people ahead of me: Mom, Dad, Sandy, Greg. Those people were always going to be right before me, so I decided that when I got married, this was my time to be right. I decided I was going to keep track of it, so I could prove how right I am and how often I am right. So I thought I’d buy a big old notebook and put a little label on the front of which read, “Laura’s Big Book of Right”. It was going to be a BIG notebook. Ok so I didn’t actually buy a notebook, but I had reserved an entire section of my brain to keep score.

I had plans for being right, all the time. Do you want to know how many times I’ve been right? Absolutely none; do you know why? Because marriage is not about who’s right and who’s wrong, who works more and who works less, who puts more gas in the gas tank, who takes care of the kids in the morning. **Marriage**

**is about being one, not about being right. God didn't call us to be right; He called us to be one.**

In Mark 10: 6-8, we read, *But at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one.* NIV The term “become one flesh” is actually the Greek word- Basar. I just love that word Basar, because it means “one flesh, one body, one person.”

## The “Yes” Woman and the “No” Man

Soon after we moved to Alma to work for Youth for Christ, Laura and I had our roles at church down pat. She was the “YES!” woman, saying yes to EVERYTHING that came along. At one point Laura was on the drama team, in the cookie ministry, a greeter, on the youth board, on a hospitality team, a nursery volunteer, and last but not least an aerobics teacher at our church's community center. All of this while working as a part-time youth minister, being a wife, and being a mom to a young son. You see, Laura gained much of her self-esteem from being “needed.”

I on the other hand was the consummate “NO” man. I said no to virtually every request that would get thrown my way. I had a commercial driver's license but would never agree to drive the children in the after-school program. I was a music major in college but would never sing in the choir. I ran a multi-staff youth ministry but could never think about running a church board. You see, anytime anyone from the church called I would have the word NO formed in my brain before the question could even be asked. I was very selfish with my time.

It was when Laura and I decided to create a family mission statement that we looked at each other and faced the music. We needed to “lose” ourselves in the area of church in order to build our marriage. How did we lose ourselves? Laura chose to give up most of the things that made her overcommitted, and I chose to give more of myself to the church in order to model to my wife and children what a follower of Christ looks like.

As we walked through this “losing” process, we found that Laura most enjoyed being involved on the drama team and that I felt singing was the best I could offer. Together we felt a burden for the youth in our church and decided to serve on the youth committee. Are we saying the other activities we were involved in were bad? No. **We simply had to give them up in order to do what was best for our marriage, what was best in order to make us one.**

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well you lose yourself in your marriage. List some examples.
2. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well your spouse loses themselves in the marriage. List some examples.
3. Describe how you view marriage. Is it three separate circles: you, your spouse, and the marriage? Or do you view it as two circles intersecting. Give examples of this being fleshed out.
4. Name one area of self that you have been holding onto which if let go, would grow your marriage.

# 10

## Love Your Spouse

### *Stoking the flame*

The second action needed to bring the facets together is to love your spouse.

We read the passage of scripture that says “become one flesh,” and we think the sex act, but this Greek word goes so much further than just sex. As we begin to lose ourselves, we begin to realize we have more opportunity to love our spouse.

To love your spouse, you have to ask yourself this question: ***What do I do every day to show my mate that they are my priority?*** Everyday. Some Type A personalities are already answering this question, thinking “I fill her gas tank, complete her ‘honey do’ list, I cook his meals, I take care of his kids, I clean his house, I iron his underwear”. But love is not a checklist. What is it that I’m doing everyday to show my mate that they are my priority? How am I losing myself everyday to express my love?

### Love in the Grocery Store

A day off! The weekend! What most of look forward to all week! Taking that time for yourself to do whatever it is that you enjoy! Jay’s travel schedule does not allow for many weekends at home. If he takes a day off it is usually Monday. Monday is my grocery shopping day. In order for us to do something together and for the sake of our marriage, he takes his day off and goes grocery shopping with me. Now I tell you, sometimes I secretly wish he wouldn’t, but it’s the thought that counts. He is thinking not about himself and what he wants to do, but about our marriage. Instead

of taking that time off for himself, he invests it in our relationship. That's loving your spouse.

I (Jay) have to tell you my true motivation. I travel most of the week for work. After a good night's sleep in my own bed, I'm refreshed. Laura's love language is quality time. (If you haven't picked up Dr. Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*, GET IT! It will open your eyes.) If I want my deep need for sexual fulfillment met, I need to commit some time to her. There is some selfish ambition (I really don't like grocery shopping), but I know spending time with her, to connect with her, she'll desire to connect with me.

What happens when we act this way is we begin to meet needs. While loving your spouse is not all about sex, sex is part of the equation. Some of you might be at an age where sex is not part of the equation. Medication, illness, or accident can affect that too. I'm not necessarily talking about sexual intercourse. I am talking about intimacy. Being and feeling close. **Even for those for whom sexual intercourse is not part of the equation, you still have to work at that closeness, that intimacy**, maybe even harder because it is a huge part of marriage and of love.

### **The One Reason Not to Have Sex**

We read in I Corinthians, the seventh chapter, a message from Paul on marriage,

*Now for the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way, her husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to pray.* I Corinthians 7:1-5(NIV)

You see, ladies and gentlemen, there is only one reason why physically capable couples should not be expressing their love for each other through sex, and that is so you can PRAY. Here's what's interesting, scripture lays out that my body is hers and her body is mine. I (Jay) win in our marriage. But here's what I find

interesting. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and the wife to her husband. Now again, a lot of us think that the wife's duty to the husband is to have sex. But guys, it also says that we are to fulfill our marital duty to our wives. Gentlemen understand this; your wife, for the most part, is not ready to jump into bed with you any old time.

From our work with couples we know that some women have a higher sex drive than the husband, but for most women that's not the case. In fact, studies show that most women need seven non-sexual, significant touches a day, and, no, patting her on the shoulder does not count. Guys, sometimes this is the way we "deprive" our wives.

All of life is a cycle. Summer, winter, spring, fall, day, night. What's amazing is that God has designed a holy sex cycle. This holy sex cycle, for a woman, really culminates in the physical act of sex. What you need to understand is that God in his sense of humor has put this together in a very interesting way. Guys, when that sex act occurs, that's the culmination for your wife. You've been kind, loving, tender, and as a result, those seven non-sexual, significant touches have put her in a place where she's ready to be one with you. Ladies, when you have sex with your man that is when he feels closest to you. It makes him want to be closer to you. He just can't believe that someone as beautiful and as loving as you would be this way. That's the start of the holy sex cycle for him.

Sometimes it feels like God's little joke on us, doesn't it? But it's not a joke. Do you know what it means? It means we need each other. What could be more beautiful?

## Laura takes it further

Now ladies, studies will show us that a man, again speaking in general terms, needs sex. We know that there are men to which this does not apply. **But a man needs sexual release every 72 hours.** That's every three days! Jay made it very clear that he is above average.

I know what you are thinking because I have been there

myself, “Every three days? I have kids, I have a house, I have a job. You have got to be kidding!” But here is a rhetorical question, ladies, so please don’t answer it out loud, because someone might wonder what you’re reading. Shouldn’t sex be enjoyable? Shouldn’t it be a pleasurable experience? Here’s another rhetorical question. Does your husband enjoy sex?

If yes was the answer to both questions, then why would we not do what it takes to make sure that our mate knows he is our priority? If a man, on average, needs sexual release every 72 hours, if we’re trying to lose our self and love our spouse, if sex should be enjoyable and if he loves the experience (duh), then why would I not make it a primary concern? Because, you see, this is what happens, and I’ve been there. Everything else comes before him: the kids, the house, the job, the groceries, and the laundry. Actually, those should come after him. Being one, making your mate your priority, effects every decision that you make, every thought you have, whether it has to do with sex or not. Losing yourself and loving your spouse affects every area of your marriage.

Now men, I (Jay) have a couple of questions for you; again they’re rhetorical. First, is sex enjoyable? And I don’t mean to offend anyone with this next question, but I think we need to be honest about this. Is sex more enjoyable when your wife is into it? I’ll tell you my answer: I think sex is much more fulfilling and more pleasurable than when she is just meeting my needs. So then why wouldn’t we as men do the little things necessary every day to ensure that she is in the mood? The kindness, the tenderness, the seven significant touches.

What am I doing to make my spouse a priority? It goes far beyond romance and sexuality.

## Discovering the “heart” of your spouse- words guy, time gal

Other than the wonderful romantic and tender moments we share, one of the best ways for me (Jay) to show Laura she is

my priority is to spend time with her. It really doesn't have to be anything special. If I drag my big behind off the couch and say "let's go for a walk" it screams to Laura "I LOVE YOU!" So the heart of my spouse is about spending time with me. Work time, play time, any time, just be with me.

I on the other hand am a words guy. It means the most to me when Laura says things like: "I love you" "I'm proud of you" "You're a great dad" When she takes the time and energy to verbalize those thoughts, it screams to me that she loves me.

**So what's at the "heart" of love for your spouse?** It may take some time for you to discover it, but when you do you will begin to better understand how you can easily and powerfully make your spouse a priority each and every day.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well you love your spouse. List some examples.
2. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well your spouse loves you. List some examples.
3. Give examples of how you show your spouse that they are your priority.
4. What is at the heart of love for your spouse? Give examples.

# 11

## Lift the Marriage

### *Burning Bright*

The Dutch have a word, “Naaien,” which actually means “to sew together so that it can never be separated”. Originally it was a term that sailors used to describe the way they sewed sails together. They had to create a strong bond so that the sails could withstand the strong winds and rolling seas of the North Atlantic.

This is also a great way to view marriage. We are sewn together in such a way that we can withstand the strong winds and rolling seas of life. **To lift the marriage simply stated means to make marriage the first priority outside of your relationship with God.**

When you lift your marriage after losing your self and loving your spouse, you begin to see a union that operates as one. We are “sewn” together in all five facets of intimacy. It’s no longer Jay and Laura, but the marriage of Jay & Laura.

The impact becoming one in our marriages is not some act of masochism where we’re just completely wiping out our personalities and completely disregarding who God created. No, it’s becoming exactly who God meant us to be—discovering, maybe for the first time, who God really intended us to be; because we are sharing our lives with the partner God designed for us.

Lifting the marriage is all about asking the right questions. You want to ask the right questions, not for yourself, but for the marriage. When you have situations that arise in your life, in your marriage, you have to deal with those issues by asking the right questions.

## Not You or Me, But We!

One of those questions could be, how are we going to discipline the kids? I grew up in a home where my mom always stated, “Just wait until your father gets home”. Now what did she mean? She meant, we are in big trouble when Daddy walks through the door because he is going to put the hammer down. Now I say that same phrase in my home, “Just wait until your daddy gets home”, but I mean something different. My kids know when they’ve done something wrong and they’re in need of discipline, it’s going to happen after mom and dad decide together what the consequence will be. With Jay’s schedule that is not always practical and, I have to make that decision right there on the spot. We know what to do when Grace has a big dramatic moment, life is falling apart, and everything is a crisis. She’s screaming at the top of her lungs and falling on the floor and kicking her feet, we know that she’s going to be sent to her room until she can get control of herself. That’s what we’ve agreed upon. That’s one of those questions we’ve already answered together, not separately, for the sake of our marriage.

It would do us all good never to say this phrase again, “Well, here’s what **I** think. Here’s what **I** would do.” We need to use the words “we”, “us”, and “ours” instead of “me”, “my”, and “mine”. Understand that it is a “**we**” question. What are **we** going to do about disciplining the kids? How are **we** going to make this decision?

A lot of times kids will play one parent against the other. For example, our son wants to spend the night at someone’s house. In his mind he thinks, “Dad told me that I have to mow the lawn and clean the garage tomorrow. I’d really like to go to Dan’s house tonight, but Mom doesn’t know I’m supposed to mow the lawn. I’ll ask Mom.” “Well Dad, Mom said ‘yes’”. Because we have talked about what’s going on in our household we know that on Saturday, we’ll have our 15-year-old working his tail off. “And yes, Son, you can go to Daniel’s and stay up late, but at 8 o’clock in the morning, you’re getting on the lawn mower, Dude. “We’ve made that decision.

Decisions that important, urgent, big, or small- you fill in

the blank. What are we going to do about (Blank)? What do we think about (Blank)? You know what the decisions are that you have to make everyday. Take the time as a couple to be unified. How are these decisions going to be carried out in your marriage?

We had just hosted a conference in Fort Wayne where we presented this material; we were trying to decide where we were going to go eat. Jay asked me, “Where do you want to go?” I replied, “I don’t care. You make the decision.” He looked at me incredulously and exclaimed, “Have you heard a word we’ve said?” I said, “Nope, obviously not”. I had to admit that I must not have heard a word we said at our conference! Maybe the decision you need to make is of more importance, like buying a car. I don’t really care what kind of car we have; as long as it’s the right color. “Honey, buy a red car, nothing else really matters. You can go make that decision”. When we tell our partner, “You just make that decision”, we’re being unfair leaving them to make that decision all on their own.

## Real life reveals the truth about being one

After a conference a woman came up to me and conveyed her story. “Laura, let me tell you what happened. My husband and I have always agreed that we’re not going to make a purchase over \$50 without consulting the other. The running shoes I needed cost more than I had expected to spend. I tried them on, they fit perfectly so I told the saleswoman, “I’m going to have to come back tomorrow because I need to talk to my husband.” The runner told me “Laura, the salesperson laughed at me, and said, ‘ma’am, you are ridiculous. Do you have to ask your husband about everything’ this woman still went home and talked to her husband. They agreed that it was fine to spend that kind of money, and she went back to the same store the next day.

She did consider going somewhere different because the saleswoman had made such fun of her, but she went back to the same store. When she walked in, the same sales lady greeted her at the door and exclaimed, “Oh my goodness, you came back. You won’t believe what happened. Your shoes are fifty percent off. You

left the store last night and my manager told me ‘All these shoes over here have to go on sale 50% off’, and I immediately thought of you”. My friend said, “Laura, God blesses us when we are one.” When we make those decisions together, God recognizes our faithfulness to His plan and He pours out the blessings, important, urgent, big, or little. We have to lose ourselves, love our spouse and lift the marriage.

**Lifting your marriage is not erasing who you are.** God made you the way you are. **The important thing is to mesh who you are with who your spouse is and become one single union.** Ask the question, what are we going to do? How are we going to make this decision? I know what some of you are thinking. “Jay, that is just not practical. I take care of the bills and work outside; she takes care of the kids. We’ve got it down, boom, boom, boom.” No, it’s not practical unless your goal is to fulfill God’s purpose for your marriage. He wants us no longer to be separate, but to be one.

Losing yourself, loving your spouse, lifting your marriage. Being one, the purpose of marriage. Is it practical? Is it possible? We would say “yes”. Our small town newspaper, *The Morning Sun*, in Alma, Michigan, ran a story about a couple we would like to share with you. They have proven to us all that this union is possible.

“When you walk up to Russell and Delia Hanson’s front porch near Elwell, Michigan, a sign says, ‘A nice grandma lives here with an old buzzard.’ It’s not true. The old buzzard, 93, is every bit as nice. Celebrating nearly 72 years of marriage, there is little the couple hasn’t done, seen, been through and rejoiced in together. Clearly the romance hasn’t faded after all these years. Do they have a secret to their successful marriage?” “For one thing, no one ever thought of divorce. Of Russell’s seven brothers and sisters and Delia’s fifteen siblings, everyone stayed married because that’s what you do. But Delia also said they did everything together. When he was out in the field, she was too. And he’d help with the housework, she said. We always worked together. He sweeps and washes and the windows. I think that’s what keeps us together, we always work together.

Delia said they weren't like some other couples they know, when they get mad, don't speak to each other for days, although Russell joked, they could do that too. Delia said they don't stay mad at each other. There are lots of ups and downs, there's always trouble." Do you hear that? 72-years, there's always trouble. "I don't care who you are, Russell said, all couples can stay married if they try." The Morning Sun, February, 2006

Friends, we don't want you to have good sex, we don't want you to have great sex, we want you to have Holy Sex, so that you can fulfill the words of Jesus, that you are no longer two, but one.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well you live as if your marriage is more important than you are. List some examples.
2. On a scale from 1-10, rate how well your spouse lives as if your marriage is more important than themselves. List some examples.
3. Is your daily mindset "I" or "we" as you answer life's questions?
4. What steps can you take to begin thinking more "we".

# 12

## Say “I Do”

### *A lifetime of sparks*

#### The Wedding Day

We all enter our wedding day with so many misconceptions of what marriage is really going to be. I (Laura) am a person who forgets a lot of things. Even before I hit 40, I forgot things all the time, so I always have to make lists of what I’m going to do. I was petrified, anxious, nervous, beyond belief on my wedding day. I thought, “What if I forget what I am supposed to do? What if I do something wrong?” So I made myself a list of three little steps: just walk down the aisle, stand at the altar, and look at him. Walk down the aisle, stand at the altar, and look at him. Aisle, altar, him. Aisle, altar, him. I’ll alter him, I’ll alter him! There we go, I had it figured out. I knew what marriage was all about: I’ll alter him!

#### Playing Twister

Many men get married hoping their wife will never change. Oh, she loves me, she’s young, beautiful, and she actually likes to make out with me. And many new wives think, “Well, I found one I think I can work with.” When I (Jay) got married, and I’m serious now, I thought God had given me a new play toy. I thought marriage was going to be one giant game of twister, you know what I’m saying? Right hand red, left hand yellow. That’s what I thought, but I will tell you, I soon learned that there were *rules* to the Twister game.

Let’s be honest, when we first got married, life and love were wonderful. We want to sustain that, but it’s difficult. We’re going to explain how to say “I do” every day in three very important aspects of life.

## Say “I Do” to the *Concept* of Marriage

The first “I do” that we want you to say is “I do” to the concept of marriage. Earlier in the book I (Jay) told the story of how Laura and I met on a blind date. I wrote about the Atlanta Braves baseball game and how my heart leapt out of my chest when Laura grabbed my hand. Well, to be to be honest, at the time I really didn’t know it was my heart leaping out of my chest. I’m serious; I did not know what that feeling was. In fact, at first I thought it was the hotdogs coming back up for a second round. I found out later, because she told me, “That’s love, buddy.” But I couldn’t deny I had those feelings where my insides just wanted to explode with joy. We all remember those feelings; every one of us had those feelings with our spouses. You get married and then five, ten, fifteen days later the excitement fades. You realize you have to work at this thing called marriage.

Did anyone talk to you before you got married and tell you the truth? “Look, this is going to be hard work for you two. I know you don’t believe me now, but it is.” I wish somebody would’ve slapped me upside the head and told me that I would have to work at this thing. It would’ve solved a lot of issues in our marriage. Unfortunately, many of us just don’t like work, so we think it’s time for a change.

Technology is making many tasks in our culture so much easier. With the click of a mouse key we can now accomplish tasks that only a few decades ago would have taken hours. When we have problems with the technology all we have to do is ask “Tech Support” for help. It’s simply not that easy with marriage. We can’t write Tech Support for help.

### Tech Support:

Recently, I upgraded from girlfriend 7.0 to wife 1.0. I soon had many new issues as wife 1.0 installed herself into all programs and now monitors all system activity. Applications such as Golf 18.0, Football 4.0, Hunting and Fishing 7.5 and Racing 3.6. I can’t seem to keep wife

1.0 in the background while running my favorite applications. I'm contemplating going back to girlfriend 7.0, but the uninstall doesn't seem to work on wife 1.0.

Help!  
Troubled

I imagine Tech Support writing back, as follows:

Troubled,

This is a very common occurrence. Many men upgrade to Wife 1.0 imagining a utilities and entertainment system. Wife 1.0 is an operating system and is designed by its creator to run everything. It is impossible to delete, uninstall or purge the program files from the system. I recommend keeping wife 1.0 and working to improve the situation.

The best course of action, is to enter the command, C:\apologize, because ultimately you will have to give the apologize command before the system will return to normal. Wife 1.0 is a great program, but requires much maintenance. Wife 1.0 comes with several wonderful support programs such as Clean & Sweep 3.0, Cook It 1.5 and Do Bills 1.2; however, be very careful how you use these programs.

Improper use will launch the program Nag Nag 9.5. Once this happens, the only way to restore the performance of wife 1.0 is to purchase additional software. I recommend flowers 1.2 and diamonds 5.0.

Good luck,  
Tech Support

Aren't we glad that God did not create marriage as a computer to be fixed, but as two human beings to explore life together?

God created marriage. Do you ever ponder what life

really was like for Adam and Eve? When God created Adam, He designed everything before man. First came all the birds of the sky, fish of the sea, gasses, stars, moon, and all that stuff, and then he created man.

After creating Adam, God declared, “that is very good.” After He created man, God stated, “I can do one better.” So He created woman! See, God has a sense of humor!

When you think about Adam and Eve and realize they were the first married couple, they never doubted, did they? Adam never looked at Eve and thought, “Hmm, do I think she’s all I need? I’m not real sure. Hmm, what if she could be better this way or that way?” And Eve never thought about Adam, “Hmm, I might need to train him a little more.”

Neither one of them doubted. **They knew they were enough for each other.** They trusted in God, the creator who made them both, and acknowledged, “I know that my mate is all I’ll ever need.” **Saying “I do” to the concept of marriage means full acceptance that your spouse is all you need.**

The first action is to say “I do” to the concept of marriage. How do we do this? How do we keep that passion alive?

The concept of marriage is about creating passion, closeness, and desire. There’s a great passage of scripture that we find in 1 Peter 3:7. We read this: *Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives. (NIV)*

I’d like to keep that verse in your mind for a minute. I want to point out to you some very important ideas here. Re-read what it says: *be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect . . . .* I believe that I need to love my wife, but I also need to respect her. It’s not one or the other. She also needs to love me, and respect me. It’s not one or the other. We’re human beings. We live off of both love and respect.

It’s the next part of this verse that a lot of people have problems with: *be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner.* That’s a touchy passage, because some men have taken that as, “She’s the weaker

vessel, I'm the stronger vessel; so therefore what I say goes. It's my way or the highway".

I just don't read that here. Some ladies have problems with being called the weaker vessel. It's not saying here that you're weak; it's just saying you're the weaker of the two. "Well, I'm a strong, independent woman." Let me tell you what, I'm married to one of the strongest, most independent women on the planet, but she understands this passage of scripture.

What this is saying is actually an honor to you ladies. Why? In the Greek, the phrase "weaker vessel" is actually translated "fine china". Think about that. Ladies, how many of you would have a problem being compared to fine china?

Gentlemen, let me just ask you this question. If we were to walk through an antique store where there are many fine pieces of art and pottery, and we were to take one piece out of the china hutch and I were to say to you, "Sir, this piece of china is over 100 years old. It's very delicate. Here, you can hold it." How would we as guys react to that? Some would say...No thanks!!!! But if we had the courage take it, how would you hold and care for that piece? We would hold it gently, hold it tenderly, not abuse in any way that piece of fine china, and we would respect its value. Guys, this is how we say "I do" to the concept of marriage. Realize that God has given you a piece of fine china. She's to be treated with respect, tenderness, gentleness, and care. And as you do, the passion, closeness, and desire will increase when you see her for the wonderful person she is.

## Men Are "Fine," Too!

Ladies, I (Laura) think we all would agree that there are times in our husbands' lives that they also are like fine china. They always need to be treated with love and respect, but there are times when they are defeated by their lives, their jobs, their circumstances. They need to be treated with that precious care.

I can remember when we were leaving the ministry Jay had known from the time he was born. Through the first ten years of our marriage we had worked in this ministry side-by-side. Then a

time came when we felt like God was calling us to do what we're doing now.

But to leave the ministry that his family was entrenched in, step out on faith and do something totally different was scary. For about a year, Jay went through a lot of turmoil and transition. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt what the Lord was calling us toward.

At one point during this transition our son Torrey and I were taking him to the airport. Our habit at the time (this was before 9/11) was to walk with him to the actual door of the plane, kiss him goodbye and watch him board. This particular occasion, as we drove the hour to the airport, we discussed this transition period of our life. We were reflecting back on everything that had been going on that year. As I kissed Jay goodbye, I told him, "Honey, I just want you to know how proud I am of you." We walked away.

Later that evening he called to let us know that he had arrived in Miami safely. He said, "Laura, you have no idea what you did to me." Nope, no clue. I kissed you; what else did I do? He answered, "Laura, in the ten years we've been married, never once have you told me that you were proud of me." Shot to the heart. There are going to be times in a man's life when he needs to be treated like fine china, with love and respect. I need to be considerate and to love and respect and say the words that he needs to hear. That's how you say "I do" to the concept of marriage.

## Say "I do" to the CIRCUMSTANCES of marriage

If you have a teenager in your home, or if you remember when you were a teenager, you recall what dating is like. We have a teenager in our home who has decided that girls are too expensive and too confusing. Can I (Jay) get an Amen? What happens in American culture is that we grow up and learn the dating game. Dating is disposable. Here's my girlfriend this week. Oops, I did something wrong. Here's another girl next week. Oops, I did something wrong. Oops, here's a new girl today. She lasts a day, tomorrow, someone new. Dating teaches us that people are disposable, that relationships are disposable. Taken to its logical

(or illogical end), marriage is disposable.

When we say “I do” to the circumstances of marriage we are saying that there is no circumstance in our marriage that will dictate the commitment level of the relationship. I’m going to say that again. **There is no circumstance in your marriage that should dictate the commitment level you have to your marriage.** When you said “I do”, you said “I do” to the circumstances of that marriage.

When we worked for Youth for Christ, we hosted a marriage workshop at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. We met a lovely couple by the name of Lucy and Paul Keller. When we met them, they had been married for fifteen years. A year into their marriage, Lucy was involved in a very serious car accident and became a quadriplegic. Paul said “I do” to the circumstances of marriage. When he stood at the altar and said “I do”, she was standing on both legs. Fifteen years later, she was in a wheelchair, but he was continuing to say “I do”.

Early in our marriage, Laura had a spending problem that put us in significant debt. Now, I could’ve stood there and condemned her, “Lady that is your problem. I am so upset with you. You’ve got to get your act together”. But I realized that it’s not her issue, it’s our issue.

A survey produced by the Barna Group revealed that in the church, five out of ten men have a serious pornography problem. This means half of men in the CHURCH. I’m going to be honest: I believe that in our modern society every man battles against pornography. You can’t turn on the TV without seeing sexual images; you can’t open a magazine without seeing things that a man should not see.

As we’ve worked through this issue in our marriage, Laura could have stood back and said, “You’re a gross pig. I can’t believe you”. She would’ve been right. But my pornography problem was not my pornography problem. It was **our** pornography problem. We both had to take steps to ensure that we would battle against it.

The first thing she did was ask, “What can we do, Jay?” I replied, “Honey, the first thing we need to do is turn off that show you like so much. You know, the one called Baywatch. All the girls

are in bikinis, and I can't see that.”

When you get married, your spouse's problems are your problems and vice versa. The joy of marriage is in battling those problems, conquering them through the strength and trust in the person of Jesus Christ. That, my friends, is saying “I do” to the circumstances.

## Examples Paved the Way

Fortunately in our lives, we had two great examples. Jay's parents are wonderful examples of growing through the circumstances. A number of years ago, Jay's mom broke her leg between the knee and the ankle in ten spots. Her bone was shattered. The doctors told her that as little as fifteen years prior to that, they would've had to amputate her leg at the knee because the break was so severe.

Instead they put her in a device called the “External Fixator.” It consisted of two metal plates with pins sticking through her leg. Her leg looked like a pin cushion with pins sticking out, holding the bones in place. My father would get down on his hands and knees, twice a day, everyday, to clean those pins. I watched him work meticulously for hours on end. The doctors told my dad it would take six weeks, so he committed to it.

The bones of the lower leg are known as “dumb bones.” Well, I guess so because those six weeks turned into nine months. Twice a day, everyday, my dad cleaned the pins. Finally the doctors declared my mother whole. And if she were to walk through the door of your house you would not see her walking with a limp or a cane. What you would see is a walking miracle. Why? Mom and Dad walked through it together.

Chaz told me a little bit about Laura before our blind date. Her dad had died only a year ago. When I asked how, he replied, “Everything! He had polio as a child; he was diabetic, and in the last three years he had four heart attacks and three strokes.”

Yet, in spite of all this, Laura's mom never said, “Oh no, not now. Heart attack #2, I could live with that, but heart attack #3? No, I'm done.” She stood beside him, went to work, paid the bills,

did whatever it took to make it happen. When you say “I do” to the circumstances of marriage, it changes you, and it changes you for the better.

Our good friend, Thor Ramsey, says this: “One of the best things every couple in America could do to help their marriage would be for the two people to look each other in the face and say these words, ‘Divorce is not an option.’” **For every couple, there are three options when trouble comes: divorce, healing and reconciliation, or living miserably.** When you say “Divorce is not an option,” you limit yourself to healing and reconciliation or to living miserably the rest of your life. That’s not a difficult choice. Again, it is working through that restoration that makes life so exciting and builds intimacy.

## Lesson on an Airplane

When I sit on an airplane, heading home from an event, I just want to crawl up in my own little cocoon. Laura calls me an on/off switch; most of the time I’m pretty high energy, but there are times when I’m off. The airplane ride home is a quiet time to recharge my batteries.

One time I was sitting next to a lady who chattered incessantly. By giving her short, one-word answers, I was trying to communicate, “I don’t want to talk.” She didn’t get the hint.

Finally I broke down and engaged her in conversation. After finding out what I do for a living, she commented that she was divorced. She continued, “Well, you know, I was young and I really regret that I did it. I have a couple of kids, 14 and 12, and I divorced my husband when they were very young. I now have friends who come tell me they are considering divorce. She asserted, “When my friends tell me that, and there are kids in the house, I smile at them and say, ‘Okay, I just want to let you know what it’s going to do to your children, okay? If you want a good illustration of what the divorce you’re contemplating is going to do to your children, take a baseball bat, stand your children up and hit each of them ten times as hard as you can, the last time, in the head, because I know first hand what divorce does to children.’”

‘Don’t tell me children are resilient. Yeah, they’re resilient to the fact that daddy lost his job, and we might not have enough money right now. That’s okay, mommy and daddy, we’ll do what needs to be done. Yeah, children are resilient to dad’s job getting changed, and we’re going to have to move. You’re going to have to leave your friends. Don’t want to, but okay. Children are not, nor ever will be, resilient to mom and dad parting ways.’” I didn’t realize I would be getting such a graphic picture from a first-hand witness.

Say “I do” to the concept of marriage and rekindle the passion that God gave you. Say “I do” to the circumstances of marriage and allow the Lord to help you become who you were intended to be by walking through daily life together.

## Say “I Do” to the COVENANT of marriage

Say “I do” to the covenant of marriage. A covenant is different from a contract. In America we believe heavily in contracts, but unfortunately we sometimes think of marriage as a contract. A contract is something that has a beginning and an end between two people. A covenant is something that has no end, for eternity, and is said before God in the sight of God, with the blessing of God. When you stood at the altar and said, “I do”, you made a covenant, much like God made with Abraham, when He said, *“Abraham, I’m going to make you the father of many”* Genesis 17:4. You are reading this book as a result of that eternal covenant that God made with Abraham. A covenant is for eternity.

We partner with a lot of worthwhile organizations; one of them is called the “Covenant Marriage Movement.” We encourage you to go to [www.covenantmarriage.com](http://www.covenantmarriage.com) and check them out. A statement on their website reads, “Too many people today view marriage as a legal contract. Contracts are based on rights and responsibilities and are motivated by self-centeredness rather than unconditional love. A legal contract is necessary to begin and likewise end a marriage, but a covenant is more than a contract. It is more than a legal document, declaring a state

of interdependence. I need you, and you need me. The value of a covenant marriage relationship, as opposed to a contractual marriage agreement, lies in a person's understanding and acceptance of God's intent for marriage and the importance of His presence in that marriage."

The following story comes from a woman who understands God's intent for her marriage even in the midst of a trying situation.

BEGIN SIDEBAR

### **A Story from Our Survey**

At the core of being one is having the same belief about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and their priority in our lives. The outgrowth is involvement in doing ministry together. Furthermore, we both try to live out the same beliefs that we profess; we also share experiences together (worship, ministry, biblical training of our children).

About 3-4 years ago my husband revealed a sin to me that he had kept hid for many years. After he obeyed God and told me and asked me to forgive him (how thankful I am that he was repentant), our marriage blossomed in all areas - God did it all.

It will sound strange, but here goes, the first thing God brought to mind regarding really being one with my spouse was the first time we had sex after my husband repented and I had also forgiven him. It was as if God had said "Be joined together for this is my gift to you." I am sure this sounds weird to be talking sex here but I actually believe it was a reward that God had given us for being obedient and also an act of worship as we had pledged to stay together and honor God in our marriage. We have had other times as well when we have had to make difficult decisions so we have prayed separately, and together, and fasted to find out what God really wanted us to do. There are times when my spouse is revealing to me how he is battling the old nature/flesh and I understand it completely but with a different life example - he knows I get it and we

have that understanding - it is an intensely intimate thing as it's not something everyone else can necessarily relate to or what you would share with just anyone. I know my spouses most intimate sin challenges.

END SIDEBAR

## When All Is Said and Done

One of the radio stations that helps to promote our marriage conferences ran a contest to pick a winner of a free conference and hotel stay. Contestants were asked to answer this question: What is your most memorable date? I'd like to share with you one of the responses from a woman: "The most memorable date with my spouse was October 8-9, 2005, when we attended a Celebrate Your Marriage conference. Jerry had a backache as we traveled to Mackinac Island. We laughed, cried, and held each other throughout the weekend. We had a magical, romantic, fairytale weekend. We returned with a renewed love for each other. On December 9, 2005, sixty days later, Jerry went to be with the Lord. What we did not know then was that Jerry had small cell lung cancer. It was only thirty-one days from diagnosis to death. I love and cherish the memories your conference gave us. Jerry smiles from heaven."

The story does not end there. When we emailed Louise to ask permission to use her story she gave us this response: "Jerry and I had our photos taken by the hotel photographer as we went to dinner that evening. We had the photographer take one picture of us with my 35 mm. The hotel photographs turned out absolutely terrible. The week of Jerry's death, my daughter took the film in to be developed. The photo of the two of us was beautiful. The crazy thing was, I knew it would be. Why I don't know, but I did. I knew God would give me a photo of the two of us on our last date."

That is saying "I do" to a covenant that lasts for eternity. Whether it is for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, it is till death do us part. That is how you say "I do" to a covenant of marriage.

Say "I do" to the concept of marriage, that wonderful,

ooey-goey, passionate feeling you have for your spouse. Say “I do” to the circumstances. No matter where you are on life’s journey, the ups and downs, ins and outs, say “I do” to walking through them together as ONE. And say “I do” to the covenant of marriage, till death do you part. Here’s the stark reality of life. Chances are, one of you, someday, will stand over the casket of the other.

As Laura and I have talked about this I’ve told her that if I go first I want her to throw a party! I want it to be fun. Why? Because I’ll be looking down from heaven knowing I beat you all.

I don’t want people walking by my casket saying silly things like “he looks so good” . That makes no sense to me. I do want people to know the single greatest accomplishment I had in my life so I’ve asked Laura to simply place a sign on my chest.

I started my life with Laura with the words “I Do!” I want the world to know and that sign to read “I DID!”

That is our prayer for every one of you.

Blessings,

Jay and Laura

## Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. What were the circumstances when you first knew you were in love? How did you feel?
2. How do you keep that feeling alive?.
3. Share a time when your marriage encountered rough or rotten circumstances.
4. What principles or practices did you employ to get through that time?
5. Describe your view of a covenant marriage.
6. How do you say “ I do” each day?

## Survey results

The following results are from a survey given to over 2000 married people at various Celebrate Your Marriage conferences throughout the country.

### About those who took the survey

The typical couple who took our survey were in their mid-forties and had been married for almost twenty years. Our range in age was quite broad from 20 year olds to octogenarians. Number of years married was similarly broad in range from newlyweds to those married 60+ years. Finally, our survey looked very much like our country with many 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> marriages as well as blended families.

### On average each day I think about Sex \_\_\_\_\_ times.

Our survey indicates that men think about sex nearly two and a half more times a day than women. The women in our survey held consistent throughout the age ranges with around 90% indicating they think about sex 1-2 times a day.

Men, however vary greatly with 86% of men in their 20's and early 30's thinking about sex 5-10 times a day. This drops to 67% for men in their late 40's and early 50's.

While these numbers may not surprise most people it is important to note that many of our struggles in marriage come from unmet expectations. Early in our marriage, Laura and I faced this situation as I tried to communicate to my "Dixie Darling" the longing I had to be sexual with her.

Laura thinks in pictures, so I challenged myself to come up with a word picture that would appropriately describe my desire to be sexual with her. Here was my “brilliant” idea. “Laura, to me, sex is like the air that I breathe”. To which she promptly responded: “Then we’d better find you an oxygen tank.”

Over the years we had to learn to understand and accept our different views on the frequency of sex in our marriage which resulted from the amount of time each day we thought on the subject. In our work we find that in about 20% of the couples the woman has a higher sex drive and subsequently thinks about sex more than her husband.

## All Ages: When I think about being sexual with my spouse, it brings me joy.

60% women, 84% of men answered at some level of agreement. For the most part, men enjoy sex. Our findings indicate that most men who answered this question to the contrary were experiencing sexual rejection from their wife.

Bob and Barbara had been married for 12 years, had two kids and on the outside appeared to be happily married. Behind the bedroom doors however a different story played out.

Barbara had been brought up in a very strict home and was taught both by her parents and her church that the primary purpose of sex was procreation. Any thoughts she had about the joy of sex and it’s role in building a strong marriage were quickly quelled by her nagging childhood and adolescent memories.

Bob confessed that in their marriage he was lucky to have sex with his wife once every two months. Usually after a lot of begging and pleading. As a result of the infrequency, their moments of intimacy were just that...moments. This heaped guilt and anguish on the

relationship.

It wasn't until Barbara, through her own Bible study began to read Song of Solomon and realized that not once in her upbringing was this book of the Bible actually taught or explained. For Bob this was the light at the end of the tunnel that gave him hope for their marriage.

Change wasn't quick, and Barbara's past rears it's ugly head from time to time, but the frequency and quality of their sex life has them both saying that "thinking about being sexual with each other" brings them joy.

## There are many roadblocks to our sex life...

74% and 76% respectively of men and women agree or strongly agree that there are many roadblocks to sex. This is backed up in our in-depth survey with the resounding answers being money, time and children labeled as the primary roadblocks.

Sam and Patti home school their 4 children, and Sam works the night shift in order to help out with the schooling. To say these two facts present roadblocks to their sex life is an understatement.

Sam and Patti have tackled these roadblocks head on with two very practical ideas. First, Patti and her friend Sue, who also home schools frequently set play dates for their kids to get together at one house giving the other mom (and dad) some alone time. Further, Sam and Patti make it a habit to "steal away" three or four times a year for just a night or two.

While these ideas worked for Sam and Patti, the key for any couple to successfully tackle their road blocks is to work together to create a plan that fits your lifestyle and situation.

## Sexual desire is a decision...

Over half of women, 64%, and less than half of men, 38% believe that desire is a decision. This shows the difference sexually in men and women. For women it is a thought process and for men it is somewhat instinctual, no thinking involved.

We believe this is one of the significant differences for a majority of men and women. While there will be some women for whom sexual desire is instinctual and some men that desire must be a decision, by and large this is a process women generally struggle with.

I know it was for me (Laura). Early in our marriage I couldn't believe how often Jay was "in the mood". At first I thought he was abnormally over sexed. But as I listened to other friends talk it became clear that this was an issue for many of the women I knew.

What changed for us was when I fully began to understand what sex does "to" and "for" my husband. I conducted a little experiment with myself. I decided I was going to go the extra mile in our sexual relationship and make desire a decision.

I would regularly focus my attention throughout the day on Jay and what a wonderful man he is. After the kids were I in bed I would bathe, rub good smelling lotion on my freshly shaved legs and put on something that made me feel sexy. I was amazed at how these simple actions changed my mood.

Now don't get me wrong, this isn't an everyday experience. But the longer we are married the more I can pick up on the subtle cues that occur when Jay "needs me" to be there for him sexually. It is at that point that I make desire a decision and take the necessary steps to meet his needs.

## I communicate about sexuality issues with my Spouse...

Interestingly enough, in the under 25 age bracket, 61% talk about sex daily or weekly. This diminishes to 36% in the 56+ age bracket.

It is not surprising that communication about sexuality diminishes with age, much like the proclivity for sex. However, communicating about sexual issues is critical to a healthy marriage relationship. It is said that if you can't communicate in the bedroom you'll not be able to communicate in any other room of the house.

Men and women must learn to communicate in caring and mature ways not only about frequency issues but also the ways in which we can please each other. Communicating in a respectful and tactful way can unlock romance and passion allowing for a deeper more fulfilling love making experience.

22% of our respondents only talk about sex once a year, with 5% never talking about sex. No doubt this is a formula for disaster and disillusionment in a marriage. Even if a couple is not having sex because of age, medication, illness or injury it doesn't preclude the need to talk about sexuality issues that exist in every marriage.

## I feel comfortable sharing my desires with my spouse...

Less than half ,43% women, 44% men, are comfortable sharing their desires on a regular ( frequent, often) basis. 19% seldom or never feel comfortable.

John and Connie have been married for over 40 years and to look at them you would say they had a great relationship. John frequently bought flowers or a card for Connie. He held the door, and helped her with her coat, treating her like a queen. Only one thing was wrong with this picture, the words “I love you.” Had not come out of John’s mouth for years.

One day out of the blue, John confided “I wish I could tell Connie what she really means to me. I wish I could put into words the way I feel.”

Growing up, John was taught that “real men” don’t share their feelings, especially feelings that express love or romantic emotion. John had been wrestling internally for years with the voice of his father and his father before him. As John began to grow older he confessed he didn’t want this life to end without taking the steps necessary to verbally communicate his deep love for Connie.

Through much thought and prayer, John won the battle within. He went to the local flower shop, bought a dozen roses, addressed the card to Connie, but wrote nothing on the inside. He drove home and delivered the flowers to his bride. When she opened the card she was a bit confused.

At this point, he took her by the hand, looked her square in the eyes and began to communicate all the feelings he had for her and his desires for their marriage in its later years. He finished with those 3 little words that mean so much. “I love you”.

**I discuss sexuality issues with my friends...**

71% of women 39% men discuss sexuality issues with their friends- **hold this thought as you proceed to the next question.**

## I see talking with my friends about sexuality issues as a violation of my marriage covenant...

64% of men feel it is a violation, 56% of women. At age 56+, 81% of men, and 73% of women see this as a violation.

At first our purpose in asking these questions is based on our belief that our culture has made it fashionable to discuss intimate issues openly. Much of what takes place in the bedroom between a husband and a wife needs to stay in the bedroom. Most of us would find it repulsive to even think about bringing another person into to our marriage bed, yet we readily bring other's opinions into the marriage bed.

While it is difficult to talk openly and honestly with a member of the opposite sex about sexuality issues, it is in this conversation that a husband and wife find sexual freedom and fulfillment.

In most relationships, ours included, one is more sexually adventurous than the other. As we have grown in our marriage, Laura has learned when to tell Jay "ain't no way".

On the other hand, we want to make allowance for practical issues that men and women face. For example, I ( Jay) have a small number of close male friends who have agreed to ask each other the tough questions about lust, pornography, and masturbation. This discussion is not a violation of the marriage covenant but is done to make the marriage bond stronger. In the same vein, I ( Laura) have a couple of friends who are struggling with the challenges of menopause and the strain it places on their marriage bed. Their conversations are about frank and practical ways to meet these challenges.

In conclusion, we would challenge you to ask the question, " Is the discussion I am having with my friends helping me love my

spouse more, or does it more closely resemble an afternoon TV talk show?"

## My feelings influence my ability to be sexual...

95% of women, 61% of men agree

Laura and I love to tease! We love to poke fun at each other in good-natured ways. Early in our marriage, I started calling Laura, my “left-handed freak of nature”, because she is left-handed and does freaky things. For instance, she frequently opens doors into her head. Ask how that can be? For a left-handed person living in a right-handed world, it is easy!

I ( Jay) know when I have a crossed a line from endearing teasing to hurting her feelings when she says, “that was mean.” As a man, my male friends can call me short, fat, bald and ugly, and I will give it right back. In any marriage, when we cross the line and hurt feelings we put up a barrier to intimacy.

## My spouse values my feelings regarding our sex life...

85% male 92% female agree.

## I value my spouse’s feelings regarding our sex life...

93% male 96% female agree.

These two survey questions and the overwhelming positive responses give us great hope. As couples identify, respect, and honor each other’s feelings it builds a healthy foundation for a

growing sexual relationship.

## Rank your level of satisfaction with regard to sex in your marriage...

45% female and 47% of males rank 8 or higher.

21% female and 15% male rank 4 or less

By far the most popular answer was “10” in all age categories.

\*However, it is our experience most respondents had a romantic (sexual) evening the night before taking this survey so perhaps this is a bit skewed.

## Rank your spouse’s level of satisfaction in regard to sex in your marriage...

59% of women rate husbands satisfaction 6 – 10,

62% of men rate wife’s satisfaction 6-10.

13% and 10% respectively give it the highest level of satisfaction.

See comment above\*.

## My expectations are \_\_\_\_\_ compared to my spouse’s expectations....

26% of respondents indicated equal expectation levels towards sex, which indicates somewhat healthy communication in this area. Communication about expectations are a key to a healthy sex life.

The Wilson’s love to work in the yard together. Spending a sunny afternoon mowing raking and pruning is not only great recreation for them but a time to connect as a couple.

As they have aged, Joan, nearing 60 has felt the hands of time sap her stamina. She can no longer “keep up” with Rodney in the physical exertion department.

They shared a story of a wonderful afternoon filled with time together in the yard. Joan could see “The Spark” in Rodney’s eye which communicated to her that he was going to want to continue this fun filled afternoon with a fun filled evening of romance.

It was at that point Joan had to communicate her expectations to Rodney. “Dear, if you are expecting me to have any energy later on tonight, then we need to let the rest of the lawn work wait until another day”. With that simple statement, Rodney put away the lawn tools and sent Joan in for a nap!

Communication about sexual expectations may not always be that simple, however with time can be a wonderful way to meet each others needs.

Further information from this question indicates 55% of men showed greater expectations compared to only 15% of women. This statistic trends closely with national averages which show men have a higher sex drive than their wives.

**My sexual relationship with my spouse affects my relationship with the Lord...**

Only 56% see our sex life affecting our relationship with the Lord.

While ...

**My relationship with the Lord affects my sexual relationship with my spouse...**

74% agreed that our relationship with the Lord affects our sex life.

We believe this is strong support of the idea that Christian couples do not see the correlation between their sex life and their spiritual life. How can I expect to have quality quiet time with my Lord when I am not having quality quiet time with my spouse and vice versa.

We Americans compartmentalize so well! We simply don't see how one area of life can impact every other area. Let's use a simple illustration like caffeine. Caffeine is a wonderful stimulant that helps millions of people wake up in the morning! However if taken in excess quantity, Caffeine can negatively impact us mentally, physically, and yes spiritually, by causing our hearts and minds to race too fast to focus on the Lord.

In the same way, our survey gratefully showed that our walk with the Lord impacts our sex life. Similarly our sex life impacts our walk with the Lord. Healthy sexuality involves focusing more on the other person than on yourself. This is a basic of our tenet of our faith. Therefore a healthy sex life can make us more like Jesus in the same way that an unhealthy sex life can make us less like Jesus.

We do not find it ironic that this passage of scripture, *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him, Colossians 3:17* (emphasis added) is the prelude to some of the most prolific writing concerning marriage found in scripture.

I believe marital sexual issues are a problem in the church...

**85% of those Responding agreed or strongly agreed. We must begin to address this issue in our churches.**

## I believe marital sexuality issues are being properly addressed in the church...

85% of those responding do not feel the church is properly addressing marital sexuality issues.

Our research indicates that marital problems are an issue in the church. We are seeing trends indicating Christian marriages are divorcing at rates similar to the national average. This trend should disturb virtually every follower of Christ.

We must confess for many years we felt as if the church did not care about marriage. However, after numerous conversations with pastors from virtually every denomination imaginable we have come to the conclusion that yes, the church does care about marriage it is just not sure what to do. The good news is that this problem is solvable.

In our conversations with pastors, we have found that most couples who struggle, share some common themes:

- “ We are Christians we are not supposed to have problems”.
- “ Your proposed solution requires too much work”.

And for many second marriages:

- “ If I would have known marriage was this much work, my first marriage probably would not have ended in divorce”.

We believe that the church along with the millions of couples who follow Christ are now seeking practical, real world application to grow their marriage. This is why we are extremely excited about many emerging marriage initiatives similar to our Marriage

Champion program.

Much like the “youth ministry boom” of the 1960’s and 70’s, and the emergence of men and women conferences and movements of the 80’s and 90’s, we firmly believe that the American church is on the cusp of a new and exciting way to educate, enrich, and equip marriages.

## Take our Survey

After conducting and evaluating our survey research on “Intimacy” we had a bit of a revelation. It occurred to us that the problem with most books on intimacy is that, much like our survey, they focus solely on the physical side of the relationship.

After much research, prayer and looking intently at our own relationship we developed the concept of the 5 facets of Intimacy. The fact that intimacy is experienced and can be deepened in 5 significant areas of a marriage relationship.

To assist us in writing this book we asked people to take an in-depth survey on line to share with us their perspective on the different facets of intimacy in their marriage.

Below are the questions we ask online. As you read these questions and ponder your answers, we would invite you to go to [www.w](http://www.w) and take this survey as well. Your answers may be used to help us help others in future books, workshops and conferences.

## In Depth Survey

## Mental:

1. How do you and your spouse connect on a mental level?
2. In what ways do you and your spouse mentally stimulate each other?
3. Do you find that you find that you and your spouse differ mentally?
4. How do you best learn?
5. How does your spouse best learn?
6. Describe a moment when you felt mentally intimate with your spouse, i.e. it was as if we were thinking the same thoughts.
7. When given a specific subject matter, i.e. sports, politics, parenting, I know what my spouse is thinking \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the time.
8. On a scale of 1-10(low-high) rate your mental intimacy with your spouse.
9. Over the years of your marriage, how have you seen this area change?

## Social:

1. How would you describe you and your spouse's social life?
2. Are you compatible socially or do you find that you prefer to do you "own thing"?
3. How often do you date each other?
4. What do you do when you date?
5. What are some obstacles that keep you from dating more?
6. Do you have more friends as a couple or individually?
7. Do you spend more time in social settings alone or with your spouse?
8. Describe a moment when you felt mentally intimate with your spouse?
9. On a scale of 1-10(low-high) rate your mental intimacy with your spouse.
10. Over the years of your marriage, how have you seen this area change?

## Emotional:

1. How do you and your spouse connect on a emotional level?
2. Do you share “feelings” with each other on a regular basis or do you find that you keep feelings inside? Why?
3. Does your spouse empathize with your feelings? ( I feel what you feel)
4. How do you share feelings with your spouse? Describe the words you use when sharing feelings
5. How does your spouse best learn?
6. Describe a moment when you felt mentally intimate with your spouse?
7. On a scale of 1-10(low-high) rate your emotional intimacy with your spouse.
8. Over the years of your marriage, how have you seen this area change?

## Physical:

1. Would you say you’re fulfilled physically in your marriage? Why or why not?
2. Are you more touch-feely or more hands off?
3. Is your spouse more touchy-feely or more hands off?
4. When physically intimate, who generally initiates the encounter?
5. Has health, injury, or age had an impact on your physical intimacy? How long? In what ways?
6. What motivates you to be physically intimate with your spouse?
7. On a scale of 1-10(low-high) rate your physical intimacy with your spouse.
8. Over the years of your marriage, how have you seen this area change?
9. Define physical intimacy?

## Spiritual:

1. How would you describe your spiritual life? Your spouses
2. Define spiritual intimacy?

3. How do you stay spiritually intimate with your spouse?
4. Do you pray together? Worship together? Read scripture? Have the same views on tithing? Fast together? Serve together?
5. Describe a moment when you felt spiritually intimate with your spouse?
6. On a scale of 1-10(low-high) rate your spiritual intimacy with your spouse.
7. Over the years of your marriage, how have you seen this area change?

## Appendix A

### A note from the Authors

In Chapter One, we shared how we are passionate followers of Jesus. That statement means different things to different people: to some it means organized religion to others it means “they’re spiritual” and to others they can only think in terms of how they were raised in faith. As a result, we thought we’d briefly share what following Jesus means to us.

Let’s start at the beginning: a very good place to start. We believe that there is a God who created heaven and earth, and that He did so in 6 days, resting on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Did those days look like our 24 hour time segments, we don’t know, but we do believe there is a God who made everything.

What’s interesting is how He made everything. The Bible says “He spoke” and the sun, stars, earth, sea, and creatures of

all kinds came into being. That being the case, we are looking at one amazing God if all He has to do is speak and the universe is formed.

Now what He did next is very odd. For His final creation, He did not speak. Instead He reached His hand down and from the dust of the earth created this creature, then He “breathed the breath of life” into man and in turn gave man something He gave no other creature, an eternal soul.

God’s design for man? That he would live forever in the presence of God himself. That first man however had a choice, and when he chose sin over God, that nature began to be handed down “genetically” throughout the generations all the way to us. The challenge for us then is that this “genetic” nature (written deeper than any microscope can probe) will eternally separate us from God whose intent was to live with us forever. To the man imposed problem of sin, God chose a supernatural response in the person of Jesus.

Jesus Christ, the God/man born of an earthly mother and heavenly father, lived a sinless life and claimed to be God incarnate, God in the flesh. He proved this not only by the way He lived and the miracles’ he performed but by conquering death and rising from the grave.

All of this was done so that sin might not separate God and man anymore. Jesus’ perfect life, death and resurrection were God’s way of showing Grace. Grace simply put is: not getting what we do deserve. We all deserve separation from God (hell) because of the sin of our first father (Adam) but because of the work of Jesus we are spared that separation.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Simply put life is a journey with one of two destinations; heaven, eternity in the presence of God, or hell eternity separated from God. There is only one way to spend eternity with God. Receive the Grace of Christ

and choose to follow Him daily. How does this journey begin? With a simple prayer of repentance.

If you have never received the Grace Christ offers and would desire to do so, we would invite you to pray this simple prayer in your heart and begin a journey with Christ today.

“God in heaven, its (your name) and I realize right now that sin in my life stands between me and an Eternity with you. God I wish to turn from that sin and ask the Grace found in Jesus to cover that sin. I long to follow Jesus and live forever with You. Amen”

The journey following Christ is not simply praying the prayer above. It involves maturing into the spiritual being that God intends you to be. Is it easy? Yes, and no. Easy in that God is ready to assist you each and every day through some very practical and yet mysterious ways.

First the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that when we receive His Grace that he will send His Spirit to live with in our hearts and guide our daily lives, so listen to His voice. Second, is His Word, the Bible. It is a blue print for life; immerse yourself in it so as to better understand His way. Finally, in other believers. Where can you interact and learn from other believers? Its called the Church. Yes, we believe that corporate worship and praise are critical to the maturity of anyone following Christ. You cannot do it alone.

So do we do a perfect job of following Christ every day? Not a all, we are still human, still prone to the old “genetic” code of sin, but with Christ’s help we strive to mature into the people God intends us to be.

If you have further questions about what it means to follow Jesus email us at [info@celebratenet.com](mailto:info@celebratenet.com) .

## Appendix B

### Becoming a Marriage Champion

In talking to Pastors and Ministers across the country, we have found that there is a deep need for couples who desire to champion the cause of a marriage in their:

- Home
- Church
- Community

In response to this need, we have developed a web-based program designed to inspire, train, and equip couples around the country “to champion” the cause of marriage.

This program is putting resources and tools into the hands of hundreds of couples who are impacting the world for Christ through strengthening marriage and families.

For more information, or to become a marriage champion, visit [www.celebratechamps.com](http://www.celebratechamps.com)

### About the Authors Jay & Laura Laffoon

Jay and Laura Laffoon believe marriage was meant to be a full contact party! Jay and Laura give couples permission to celebrate, and show them how to live with respect, ceremony, and festivity.

The Laffoon’s unique and motivating seminars have been shared throughout the United States and Canada. Their presentations are full of humor, real life experiences, and Biblical truth. Couples walk away challenged and enriched.

After meeting on a blind date in 1984, that fun-filled evening in Atlanta, Georgia has turned into years of marital celebration. Ministering together in Youth for Christ for 15 years, the Laffoons gained tremendous insight into marriage and family issues. Jay and Laura will encourage, inspire, and challenge you to Celebrate your Marriage™.

Jay grew up in Petoskey, MI and attended Taylor University, graduating with degrees in Biblical Literature and Music. Jay served as an Executive Director in Youth for Christ for 15 years. He is a certified instructor with Dynamic Communications International. Jay was twice named an “Outstanding Young Man of America”.

Laura grew up in Atlanta, GA and graduated from Belhaven College in Jackson, MS with a degree in Social Ministries. She too is a certified instructor with Dynamic Communications International and received Youth For Christ USA’s Presidential Award for excellence in Youth Ministry in 1997.

Jay and Laura live in Alma, MI with their son Torrey 17 and daughter Grace 10.

They founded Celebrate Ministries, Inc in 1995.



## YOU CAN PUT *the* SPARK BACK *in* YOUR MARRIAGE

Did you realize that knowing the true purpose of marriage can rekindle the fire in your relationship? In *The Spark*, the founders of one of the country's fastest-growing marriage conferences offer that... and more.

Jay and Laura Laffoon tackle the biggest obstacles to intimacy in marriage with an irresistible combination of humor and wisdom. While many people think intimacy is all about sex, the Laffoons identify five facets that are vital to a healthy marriage. Men and women approach intimacy differently, but understanding the differences can result in greater closeness and a deeper appreciation of each other.

The Laffoons fearlessly share their own experiences, as well as informative, real-life stories gleaned from their survey of more than two thousand married couples. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter help you develop positive action steps to ignite your marriage and keep the flame burning.

Whether you're seeking to better understand your spouse or hoping to recapture lost magic, your relationship can reach another level with this practical guide.

**"This book should be required reading for every married couple!"**  
-CAROL KENT, speaker and author, *A New Kind of Normal*

**"If you're ready to gain some serious warmth and light in your home, read this book."**  
-JOHN TRENT, president, The Center for Strong Families; author, *The Blessing* and *The 2 Degree Difference*

JAY AND LAURA LAFFOON met on a blind date in 1984 and their brief courtship has since transformed into a daily marital celebration. Now they've been presenting comedy infused marriage events for more than 20 years!

Together, Jay and Laura have written numerous books. They live in Michigan where they founded Celebrate Ministries, Inc. in 1995.