

LOVE THERAPY

FOR

MARRIED COUPLES

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So many couples struggle within their marriages . . . The following material is written as a way to help put in perspective that most perplexing yet wonderful of all relationships. How can two people who decide to spend the rest of their lives together - no matter if richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, or whatever else happens through the years - accomplish that goal? It is a daunting assignment to be able to spend 40, 50, or even 60 years together with the same person. And all the while - or at least most of the time - growing stronger and closer as a couple, and still becoming the individuals we were each created to be. I am supposed to help my husband become the person he was created to be, and he is supposed to help me become who I was created to be. That is an incredible concept! How can that be? All married people know that almost as soon as the honeymoon ends, the task of becoming a compatible, caring, and committed couple - while continuing to develop and maintain our individuality as separate and autonomous persons - gets complicated. Personality differences, the stresses of daily life, problems and conflict in neighborhoods and communities, along with very real issues of power and control, begin to take their toll.

Here's a case study that many will relate to:

John and Mary Smith have been married for five years. Until their son was born 18 months ago, they got along really well and had few problems. However, going from a two income couple with expendable money, to a one income family with a lot more expenses, placed a serious strain on their budget. As the months went on their relationship began to bear the brunt of heated discussions relating to their increasingly unstable financial condition. One night the frequently revisited argument got really ugly; they hurled insults back and forth and berated each other's characters. The blaming and shouting got so loud the baby woke up and started to cry. Mary went to comfort little Johnny and John retreated into their bedroom slamming the door behind him. Mary spent the night on the daybed in Junior's room. The next day John got up early and went to work without telling Mary goodbye.

During that day John realized that he had said some unfair things to Mary. After all she really wasn't a spendthrift, even though she spent more money than his comfort level would allow. He decided that when he got home he would say he was sorry. His intention was to forgive and forget, but not to discuss the problem any more, as he believed that would only lead to more arguing.

At home, little Johnnie was fussy on and off for most of the morning. As she tried to console him, Mary reflected on the fun job, as a buyer for a large department store, that she had given up when he was born. John didn't want her to go back to work until Johnnie was in school. But living on one income was not easy, especially because John was so resistant now to anything that she purchased, other than food. And with that he made her give him an accounting for every dollar she spent.

By the time John arrived home that evening Mary was even more upset and depressed, having spent most of the day feeling sorry for herself. And she was still angry from the hurtful things he had said to her. Calling out a cheery "Hello", John was preparing to say he was sorry. But Mary did not recognize his intention - or even acknowledge his presence. Instead she busied herself with putting the baby in his stroller, and then walked right past John and out of the door . . .

In the vignette just described there were a lot of communication breakdowns. Some of them may even be familiar to you. What this couple did not realize - until their

fighting became so constant that they sought marital therapy - was that their feelings, behaviors, and thought processes were working at cross purposes with each other. Only when they were able to let go of their internalized fears and constraining beliefs, could they begin to really listen to each other and find workable solutions for their problems.

John Smith had grown up in a household with a distant, impassive, father, who often didn't pay bills on time. Although John's dad was a physician with a large practice, he gradually spent more and more time at the race track, gambling casinos, and drinking with buddies at the neighborhood bar. (John's mother couldn't or wouldn't intervene, or even complain. She had been raised by an extremely authoritarian father. He had ruled his household totally.) The embarrassment of having the electricity and the telephone service turned off from time to time had convinced John at a young age of the importance of having money in the bank, and not spending more than he could afford to pay off monthly. Anxiety and tension would grow in him when his and Mary's checking account dipped below a certain amount, causing increasingly frequent explosions of anger in him.

Mary grew up in a home with an alcoholic father, who because of his drinking, deprived his family of many luxuries and even necessities. Scrimping and saving was a part of life for Mary. As a teenager, she recalled having to use her baby-sitting money to purchase needed clothes and toiletries. She remembered almost missing her senior prom because she didn't have enough money to buy a suitable prom dress. When John screamed at her and told her they couldn't afford to buy something she thought they really needed, she was reminded of how often her father had disappointed her when she was growing up . . .

As a practicing marriage and family therapist, I have been educated and trained to help couples like the Smiths unravel the dysfunctions and dilemmas that all have in some form or another, at some time or another. I have also acquired much life experience having been married for 40+ years to my husband Tom. Other tools assist me as well: I have been a student of the Bible for many years. I have studied material from Bible expositors, as well as participated in various workshops and conferences (both secular and from a religious perspective) pertaining to marriage. I also incorporate into therapy materials taken from an earlier workbook that I have written, "Love Theory and Love Therapy", which is based on theories and ideas formulated by some of the most respected persons in the fields of psychology, counseling, and family therapy. In fact much of the following material is compiled from that book; it was the groundwork for these pages.

Today, more than 50% of marriages end in divorce. Well-intentioned but distressed couples like the Smiths, come to me and other therapists, in a constant stream for help with marriages that are falling apart. The growing frustration from being united with someone who is so very different, and so inflexible about making necessary changes, often makes them want to call it quits.

These couples remind me daily that the only "manual" most of us have studied is what we learned in our families of origin. Depending on the degree of dysfunctionality present there, we make greater or fewer mistakes in our own marriages.

Over our years together I have been growing in the process of letting go of old patterns and habits that served me and protected me in my parent's home. I have

gradually over time, learned from Tom how to be honest, truthful, and straightforward. These are traits that originally attracted me to him, probably because I was deficient in them, due to my personality and my position in my birth family. Tom is growing in tolerance and acceptance and patience as he goes on year after year with a wife, and in a family with a lot of limitations and pressures. Our youngest daughter, Kristen, has a developmental disability similar to Autism. The brain connections that facilitate sensory integration are impaired, causing her to have a lot of inappropriate and vexing behaviors, such as discomfort with most clothing and personal hygiene. She also has a severe speech and language disorder, an impulse disorder, and has poor social awareness and social skills. Kristen has been a tremendous challenge for all of us, but especially for Tom because of his penchant for order, control, and predictability.

Having a child with a disability puts a great strain on a marriage. This fact coupled with our growing disenchantment with each other's likes and dislikes, and personality differences, brought Tom and me to the place where we seriously considered going our separate ways. Counseling School and postgraduate studies in marriage and family systems theory gave me the skills and tools necessary to revitalize my thinking and our marriage relationship - with Tom's assistance, of course.

"Love Therapy for Married Couples" was developed out of this struggle and was designed to be part of a seven-week psychoeducational group work course. In order to simplify a very complex subject, the material is compiled into six values or concepts - in descending order of priority, and ascending order of difficulty - to help couples learn the truth of what it takes to have a successful marriage. Each week one concept is studied and discussed. In the workbook section in the back of this book, there are exercises that reflect each week's lesson for participants to complete. These consist of worksheets and questionnaires that will help to retain the material.

Just as at the end of the Love Theory, Love Therapy course, there is a two month break for couples to assimilate the material studied. At the end of that time another session is scheduled. Partners come together in the group to discuss what they have learned and how they have benefited from the material and the group process.

The foundational truth that this workbook and the course were developed out of, is unconditional love, or agape love, as the Bible terms it.

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

The challenge in marriage, as in all-important relationships, is how to love unconditionally. How in the world can I love unreservedly, someone who is unresponsive to my needs, demanding, annoying, and self-centered? (If those adjectives don't fit, feel free to fill in the blanks for your own spouse!) Nevertheless, it can be done... my husband Tom and I are living proof. That is why I have written Love Therapy for Married Couples.

Six Steps to Having A Healthy Marriage; or Six “C’s” to Unconditional Love

1. Construct a separate identity; be your own person.
2. Communicate respectfully; learn to listen.
3. Control feelings, behaviors, and beliefs; don't let circumstances control you.
4. Conflict resolution; learn to compromise.
5. Communal spirituality; share beliefs and values.
6. Cultivate intimacy; tend to the first five steps and like a well watered garden, intimacy will grow.

As mentioned before the information in this manual is designed to be studied chapter by chapter, week by week, as part of a seven-week group work course. Each chapter is only a few pages long, so as not to overwhelm the reader. They are packed with substance, however, and the workbook in the back of the book consists of exercises to be completed as homework each week. This way the material can be better assimilated and remembered.

The six steps begin with self. Before I can become a contributing, caring partner, I must become a whole, well developed self. You will also notice that I am writing in the first person. The reason for this is that I am speaking to myself as much as to you, the reader. Through my own trials I have learned much of what I am imparting here.

The second step is about communication. That is the number one issue that brings couples to therapy. Learning to listen carefully and reflect back what you have heard is probably the most effective communication tool couples can acquire. Another important part of good communication is learning how to be noncritical and nonjudgmental, and how to give corrective feedback in a constructive manner.

Number three is about getting in touch with feelings and beliefs. Expressing feelings and thoughts in appropriate and genuine ways is something that is increasingly difficult for many couples as they go on in their marriages. Understanding the belief systems and feelings that influence thought processes is key to controlling and changing inappropriate and undesirable behavior.

Step number four is practicing conflict resolution. Learning to compromise is how we accomplish it. Most of us do this fairly well in business and with friends and acquaintances. But at home we tend to want our own way. Because conflict can be about power and control, the one with the most power usually gets his/her way.

Step number five is sharing our spiritual lives with each other. This is a very delicate undertaking, but the rewards are enormous and can be soul satisfying and everlasting.

The last and probably the most difficult of all the steps to having a satisfying, committed marriage is about cultivating intimacy. True intimacy is a challenging process made up of trust, vulnerability, and acceptance; first of self and then the other. It usually doesn't happen overnight. When the first five steps just described have been well practiced and learned, intimacy naturally begins to happen. Many people mistake sexual intimacy for real intimacy. Certainly sexual relations are part of intimate behaviors. But true intimacy covers much more.

Let's begin by discussing the construction of separate identities. It's called differentiation of self.

Chapter One

Constructing Separate Identities

In healthy relationships each person has a separate identity. This is a process that is supposed to develop in us as we grow to maturity. Infants identify with their mothers completely. It is a gradual learning process for babies to realize that they have a unique self that is separate from Mommy. That is a big part of what the “terrible twos” are all about, as the growing child realizes more and more that he/she can make things happen apart from his/her mother.

A young child’s strongest need is to develop a close attachment bond with his/her mother and other caretakers. Out of this trust a secure foundation from which to explore the world and develop relationships with others is formed. When Mom is unavailable because of mental illness, substance abuse, or overwhelming family problems, emotional attachment does not occur in healthy ways. This often occurs in dysfunctional families as children assume roles or identities that make the family system run smoother, but may not be at all reflective of their needs for becoming autonomous, self-regulating, adults. Those children may not be able to differentiate from others (usually mother) in the family. For example, in families where there is substance abuse, or other types of addictive behaviors, children may unconsciously select roles such as caretaker, peacemaker, and scapegoat. These roles may compliment the child’s personality; nevertheless, they do not meet his/her need for nurturance and security. Instead the child learns to take care of the parent’s needs in unhealthy ways. When the child reaches adulthood, he/she may be so unsure of and deprived of what he/she really needs that he/she will marry someone who is more like the abusing or neglecting parent than who he/she needs and wants in a mate. Or he/she may choose someone who is quite opposite the abusing parent, in order to escape having to endure the parental demands over again.

Persons who come from families where the relational and/or emotional systems were detrimental in some way are at risk for not becoming well differentiated. “Differentiation of self is demonstrated by the degree to which one is able to avoid having his or her behavior automatically driven by emotion.” Bowen (1978) This quote from Murray Bowen, who is considered by many to be the “father” of family therapy, defines one of the tenets upon which he built the first “systemic” approach to counseling. Through his personal efforts to disengage from the emotional reactivity within his own family of origin, he was able to develop a systems theory to define and resolve the problems that had been an integral part of his own family life.

Bowen’s idea of differentiation describes self-understanding and self-definition that does not rely on others to make one feel confident and capable. He discovered that he did not have to attack others or defend himself as he learned to ground himself emotionally, thereby enabling the development of appropriate and authentic emotional and verbal expression with family members.

The process of differentiating consists of developing personal and authentic emotionally engaged relationships with each member of the family and changing one’s part in the old repetitious, dysfunctional emotional patterns to the point at which one is able to state, calmly and nonreactively, one’s personal view of important emotional issues, regardless of who is for or against such a view. McGoldrick, Carter (2001, p. 289)

Low levels of differentiation are common problems in families, whether in a classic description like the one just quoted, or in patterns and personality traits like those that John and Mary Smith displayed. The good news is that we can learn to get in touch with our own emotions and thought processes, and the underlying belief systems that are reflected in our behavior. We can change those beliefs if they are disempowering or unhealthy in some way. This will be covered more extensively in Chapter three.

As God has designed us, most people are attracted to a person of the opposite sex who is very different from them. As mentioned earlier, my husband Tom is frugal, punctual, and organized. He also has tremendous personal integrity and loyalty, but can be hyper-sensitive to criticism because of a perfectionist, pessimistic, personality trait. I admired those qualities in him when we were dating to some extent, because I was lacking in them. I am intuitive, creative, and impulsive by nature. Over time, because neither of us had a fully developed sense of self before marriage, those initially appealing characteristics became contentious. Instead of learning to compromise and allow our differences to compliment each other, we became more and more splintered and polarized. I would get very hurt and disappointed when he would refuse to go places with me that had not been planned well in advance, or were appealing to him. He would get annoyed and even angry when I would make what he perceived to be a critical statement, spend money “recklessly”, (his perception, of course) or arrive late for an appointment. I began to think that he was trying to force me to change and he thought the same thing about me. I now understand that because we were so very young when we married, and because we each had not yet formed accurate, healthy identities, or fully differentiated from our families of origin, we each felt threatened by thoughts of having to change. I didn’t really know who I was apart from him, and yet I didn’t want to be exactly like him. I felt trapped. And Tom did too. As time passed, we both began to resist what we felt was the other’s attempts to force change. I wanted so much for him to appreciate the things that I enjoyed – like classical music. When he began to refuse to go with me to concerts or operas, I got resentful and found covert ways to get back at him, such as spending more money, instead of talking it out and finding ways to compromise. We grew farther and farther apart. We each retreated into ourselves, except for increasingly frequent explosions, and - usually much later - halfhearted apologies. Eventually we were just existing and cohabiting in the same house. It was then that I decided to go to counseling school as a way to find some answers. He was unwilling to try marital therapy.

As I studied psychosocial development, analysis of the individual, and family systems in graduate school, I began to understand from a psychological as well as a psychosocial perspective, the importance of having a separate identity from my husband. I grew up in an era when women were expected to take their husband’s names and live out their lives as wives and mothers. I have no argument with that concept. It is a noble calling to be a wife and a mother. But there is much more to life than just being someone’s wife and someone’s mother. I gradually was able to understand that each person needs to develop a unique identity in order to be completely satisfied and fulfilled in marriage. This is probably easier for men to do, as they are socialized to develop an identity as a provider and a wage earner, apart from family life. The

“feminist” movement has fostered widespread change in this arena for women. However, it is the calling and the nature of women to be mothers and nurturers. Finding a career or a profession that allows those of us, who want and/or need to fully satisfy our talents, gifts, and desires outside of the home, can be a challenging task that takes time and effort.

Eventually I began to see that rather than opposing our differences, I could look upon them as a gift from God to enable us to compliment each other and to develop character. One way my husband and I have become more compatible, was for me to learn from him how to be more time efficient and organized. And he is learning from me how to be more flexible and tolerant.

We each have to first discover what our own strengths, talents, and abilities are. Then we can express them in ways that are fulfilling to us as individuals. Subsequently we learn to compliment and complete each other’s abilities and strengths. This is very different from co-dependency, in which partners compete with each other in order to get their needs met in unhealthy ways.

In order not to reiterate material written in “Love Theory and Love Therapy”, I will now refer the reader to that workbook. However, I do want to repeat here the necessary components for loving self and others.

Loving Self:

In order to love my spouse unconditionally, I must first understand, accept, and love myself. That may seem to be an obvious and unnecessary statement: I must love myself before I can love others.

Think about it . . . It is a very important concept, one of the most significant ideas to be discussed here. That is why I am emphasizing it, strongly. People take this thought for granted, however. Of course I love myself, we say. Nevertheless, few of us take the time to really get to know ourselves so as to discover our natural talents and abilities, much less to determine what our needs are, and what our purpose is in life.

I cannot love others unconditionally until I learn to love myself. To love myself I must come to understand myself. To understand myself, I must learn to accept myself. I must also develop a strong level of self-esteem. Part of that is discovering and developing my strengths, talents, and abilities. There are some exercises in the workbook section, which will help you to consider your strong points and talents. Take the time to list these. Also write out your goals and objectives for the future, as they relate to your attributes.

To really know myself, I must spend quality time alone. In my years of observing others, I have noticed that many people do not really know themselves and accept themselves as unique and special human beings. That is probably because, like any other relationship, the only way for it to develop is by putting time and effort into it. Challenge yourself to find quality time each day for yourself, first of all. You will find that this is also a way to nurture yourself, by taking care of your needs for personal time and space. As each person is unique there is no “prescription” for doing this. Some people like to jog or bike, thus incorporating exercise with alone time. Others like to listen to music. I like to take long walks and bubble baths. The important piece is to get to know yourself - by experiencing your real self. And in fact, this is the only way we will ever develop true intimacy with another human being.

Self Esteem:

Personal attributes have a lot to do with self-esteem:

1. Good self-esteem is achieving a sense of competency and self worth through recognizing and developing strengths, talents, and abilities. Everyone has attributes that are unique to them. If we feel competent about those qualities we are likely to develop healthy self-esteem. This is the first of three necessary components to achieving a high level of self-esteem:

2. Good self-esteem develops through receiving appreciation and verbal praise from significant others. The second component is praise and appreciation given verbally and in other ways from parents and people we are close to. Without this affirmation we grow up feeling inadequate and lacking in self-esteem.

3. Good self-esteem is having a positive outlook on life, in order to view the unfortunate things that happen as being controllable in some way. This may occur by changing one's attitude toward circumstances that cannot be changed. The third component has a genetic component and therefore is more resistant to change. It has to do with personality traits. Some people have more critical, pessimistic, personality styles. This is not necessarily bad for it enables them to look at everything in life with caution and make careful judgments. But an overly critical worldview can limit one's ability to see the good in things. If you have a negative personality style you can learn to recognize it, however, and take steps to make some positive changes. Peyton, J. (2003)

So how do I develop a healthy, separate identity?

1. I must take responsibility for my own level of happiness and satisfaction and not look to my spouse to meet those needs. This means that I must have personal significance and nourishment in my life outside of my marriage. I must be differentiated from my spouse. When I am differentiated, when I have a separate identity, I feel calm, capable, competent, and centered - and I do not need to be co-dependent.

2. I must take steps to differentiate from my family of origin if necessary. This is done by initiating conversations to address issues from the past that have not been resolved. I must be sure to ground myself emotionally as I dialogue, so that I will not get drawn into reactive responding.

3. I must make daily time to get to know my God. Unless I develop a personal relationship with Him, I will never truly understand myself, and will not be able to discover the purpose of my life. As my Creator, He knows me better than anyone, and He created me for a reason and for a purpose.

4. I must learn to nurture myself in healthy ways. This means I take care of my personal needs, like making time for myself and the things I enjoy doing, such as hobbies and leisure pursuits.

5. I must develop good self-esteem and a healthy sense of personal value and worth through discovering my gifts, strengths, and talents.

6. I must cultivate the ability to grow and to change. This means I am adaptable and I am willing to try new things and new ways of doing things. (Especially if the old ways are no longer working!) This includes changing beliefs that are disempowering.

7. I must not let outside circumstances affect the way I think and feel inside in an ongoing way. This means I practice internal control rather than letting external events

or circumstances control my feelings, my behavior, and most of all, my beliefs.

8. I must have equal status in my marriage relationship. This means that each of us contributes to and receives from the other. We negotiate and compromise with each other.

9. I must be committed to my spouse and to the relationship by encouraging he/she to be all that he/she can be. I expect the same from my spouse. When this is not forthcoming, I ask for it, using “I” statements and a respectful tone of voice.

Loving Others Unconditionally:

Please understand – it is only possible to love others unconditionally when you first accept yourself and love yourself for who you are. This begins to happen after you have developed a healthy self-identity, and after your self-esteem has grown and become enhanced by feelings of self-worth, affirmation from others, and a positive outlook on life. If these things haven’t happened to you - if you still need approval and acceptance from others in order to feel whole and complete as a person, you have not yet arrived and can’t expect to be able to love unconditionally. This doesn’t mean you should give up trying. No. Just understand that you are still a work in progress. When those feelings of resentment and bitterness begin to arise in you, be aware of what is happening and give yourself some space. The truth is you were probably let down, or neglected, perhaps even abandoned or abused in some way as a child. Instead of getting your needs met and being nurtured and protected, you may have had to meet others’ unhealthy needs. If this was true for you, can you see how that would have caused you to grow up lacking in self-love? Can you see how that could even cause you to be extra needy and even demanding of your spouse’s love? Can you see how that might keep you from developing true intimacy with your spouse? Remember intimacy can only occur in a climate of acceptance, trust, and vulnerability.

In a profound and mysterious way, God has ordained that married couples are supposed to complete each other as they live together and conform to each other’s personalities and characters. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”. (Gen 2:24) This is not to say that two halves make a whole, as in mathematical computations. In marriage each must be a whole person first, in order to become a well-defined and completed couple. So initially, one and one equals two. Then in an incredible and amazing way, one and one can equal three! The miracle of birth promotes that equation. So one and one equals two, one and one equals three, and then - if we hang in and don’t give up - one and one can eventually equal one! As often as not young people marry before they truly understand who they are as unique human beings, therefore complicating the process of two becoming one - much less the enormous responsibility required for one and one to become three!

So in order to build a healthy marriage we must each be a whole person, having goals and expectations for ourselves beyond what we expect from our spouse and from the relationship. That is the first and most thoughtful step; the others build from that foundation.

Chapter Two

Communicate Respectfully

Communication problems are the number one reason couples get into marriage counseling. Why is that? The number one answer is that couples stop listening to each other. They don't really hear what the other is saying. In the beginning of our relationship my husband and I literally "hung on each other's words". We were so eager to know all about each other that we listened attentively and carefully. We also listened and spoke with sensitivity and respect. We attempted to be open and honest, and we were able to compromise when we disagreed. So what happened as the years went on? Life happened. Like every other couple, we were not able to stay on an emotional high. It is not human nature to do that. Ordinary life is made up of the humdrum and the routine. To add to that, patterns of power and control that had been part of our functioning gradually took over once again. Also stress and anxiety entered in from the many different events and circumstances that are part of daily living. To get to the point, we gradually stopped meeting each other's needs. And as happens with every married couple - we fell out of love!

Has this happened to you as well? If it has, all is not lost. You can recapture the magic, as Tom and I have done. First we decided to make some changes. We agreed that we both needed to do some things differently. The bottom line is - I have to make changes in myself. I am the only person I can ultimately be responsible for. I may think my partner needs to change. From my perspective I may believe that the problems in the relationship are all his fault, and if he would change, all would be well. That is rarely, if ever, true, however. In Family Systems Theory there is a term, circular causality, that refers to the fact that each person's behavior causes reciprocal behavior from the other. For instance, a wife nags her husband because he drinks too much. The husband drinks too much because his wife nags him. So who is at fault?

It may be helpful to point out here that any type of change will cause a reactive change in others in the system. That is a basic law of physics. And the change in others may not always be positive. In fact, the initial response in human beings is usually to try to force the "changee" back to the status quo or the state of homeostasis they were in originally. Nevertheless, one of the basic assumptions of Bowen systems thinking is that if one person changes his/her emotional functioning in the family, the system will eventually alter in a reciprocal manner. This is profoundly so because, as we individuate and become less emotionally reactive, we are more able to be our true selves with our significant others - and this allows them to be their true selves with us. (The Art of Intimacy, Malone & Malone, 1987)

In the workbook section there is an exercise called the "Couples Dialogue". This 3-step tool was designed to help couples learn to listen to each other more carefully, thereby getting both sets of needs heard and understood more effectively. Try it. I believe you will find it extremely valuable in overcoming communication problems.

Corrective Feedback:

Corrective feedback is very different from criticism. Its purpose is to encourage thoughtful self-examination through the feedback giver's attempts to express his or her perception of the need for change on the part of the receiver. Corrective feedback is always given from a constructive point of view. The speaker uses "I" statements and makes a positive comment first. For instance, Mary, the wife, might say to John, "I appreciate the fact that you are trying to be more affirming and are not criticizing me any more. I have especially noticed that you have not told me that I spend too much money lately. I am also wondering that you do not seem to be taking responsibility for your part in this problem situation. Help me understand why you left the house when I asked a question about our finances? I felt left out and devalued when you did that."

The first comment helps take the sting out of the second one. The second statement is more of an observation than an accusation. Using "I" statements and talking about how she is affected by his behavior, Mary is attempting to keep John from becoming overly defensive. Corrective feedback is an important component in resolving problems, and in developing intimacy. If I do not tell my partner what I find disturbing about his behavior unless I am angry or upset, the issue may never be resolved. (When I am angry or upset I tend to blame and insult. This only raises my partner's defenses. He is unlikely to respond in an open, accepting way.) It is also important to realize that self-understanding and self-love enable individuals to move beyond the need to protect and defend the self with one's spouse. Remember the discussion on differentiation in the introduction?

The above techniques allow partners to express their feelings without getting into arguments. When practiced regularly they can be very effective in learning to communicate more openly and genuinely. This can be a pathway to intimacy. When couples care enough to confront in love in order to resolve constraining issues, they are able to grow closer to each other. This is hard work however, because they each must work at staying focused and not let their defenses take over, or get sidetracked to less threatening and/or superficial topics.

"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding." (Proverbs 15:31)

Chapter Three

Control Feelings and Beliefs; Don't Let Circumstances Control You

When learning to communicate in more open and caring ways, couples often have to come to grips with disempowering belief systems that have become entrenched in them through many years of responding emotionally, instead of rationally.

Case example: Peter grew up in a family with a distant father and an extremely controlling mother. As the oldest son, he was expected to take on the role of adviser and problems solver. Because by nature he was a caretaker and a perfectionist, Peter was able to meet most of his mother's demands. However, his own needs for nurturance and acceptance were not met. As he grew up he withdrew more and more emotionally as he was forced to deny his sensitive feelings more and more. This was the only way he could escape what he thought were his mother's attempts to draw emotional sustenance from him. He felt smothered most of the time by her demands. Eventually the only emotion he was able to express was anger. The stress of carrying that burden caused him to move out of the family home when he was seventeen.

When he married Susan, who was a very independent and self-sufficient woman - but who also was very emotionally sensitive - he began tentatively to explore his more tender emotions, hidden for so long in himself. He was able to do this initially because her strength of character and her accomplishments as a successful small business owner made her "more like a man in a woman's body". She wasn't "weak and demanding and trying to suck the life out of me, the way most women do". In the beginning of their relationship, Susan's self-sufficient, capable side kept her softer, more vulnerable parts in check. Deep down, however, she craved love and affection from someone who wanted to spend quality time with her, something that had been severely lacking in her childhood. She longed for a husband who would take care of her and nurture her the way her father couldn't or wouldn't.

As the years went on and everyday normal stress began to wear on her, Susan wasn't always as caring and accepting and self-determined as she had been initially. She began to demand the attention and affirmation that she so desperately desired. Peter would see flashes of his mother's manipulative personality in her from time to time, and his learned pattern of withdrawing surfaced once again. By the time this couple presented for therapy, they had become entrenched into the old defense mechanisms that had served them well as children. For Peter it was emotional distancing, widely interspaced with periods of explosive anger, when provoked to the breaking point. Susan's learned response was clinging behavior and even hysteria, as she tried desperately to get him to come out of his shell. This had worked for her as the only child of parents who were overly involved in their family business, and who had little time for her. Peter and Susan had many years of practice to learn their defense techniques; they each had two failed marriages as trophies. These patterns combined with a real fear of intimacy for Peter and an overpowering need for closeness for Susan, was keeping them not just at arms distance, but in a hostile, even combative posture. Whenever one of them would feel anxiety coming on, he/she would automatically retreat into their "comfort zones" of choice, - avoid/retreat or advance/attack - as a way to reduce the anxiety. These methods succeeded in pushing them further apart, while keeping them from dealing with the real issues.

In therapy this couple came to understand that the real culprits were the

underlying belief systems that each of them held. Peter's belief was, "I can't let her get too close. She will take away my freedom and my self-sufficiency. I won't be able to be my own person." This was something he had worked very hard over the years to achieve. (When he was around his mother, he still felt threatened and stifled. When Susan acted like his mother those anxious feelings and thoughts would surface in him.) For Susan the underlying belief was, "He doesn't really love me. I am not worth loving. I am not a lovable person." Can you see how these beliefs could have affected Peter and Susan's relationship and could have been the cause of their growing estrangement?

Cognitive Behavior Theory is a theoretical framework that can be used to help people change unhealthy or disempowering beliefs. Albert Ellis developed a type of therapy that he named Rational, Emotive, Behavior Therapy (REBT), as a way to change irrational or distorted beliefs. (1977) (1997) By changing one's belief systems Ellis postulated, there will be a change in interactions with others over time. Most importantly, unless one makes conscious efforts to change faulty underlying belief systems, there will be no permanent behavior change over time. Ellis believed there are only 3 major categories of irrational beliefs:

1. I must be perfect. If I am not then I am no good at all, and I want to kill myself.
2. Others think that I must be perfect in everything I do. If I fail then I am no good and I want to kill myself.
3. Everything in my life must be easy and good and satisfying. If something is not, then I want to die, rather than suffer or face hardships.

Are you able to figure out which of the above three categories Peter and Susan's beliefs fall under? Peter's belief system is a give-away, of course. But what about Susan's? Can you guess which of the three, or which combination of the three fits her? Read on, especially if you are put off by the language of the three categories.

Changing belief systems is the most difficult part of behavior change.

First: Be in touch with the thoughts and beliefs that cause the unhealthy behavior.

Second: Be aware of and be willing to modify self-talk that perpetuates the irrational beliefs. One way to use self-talk is to deescalate feelings.

Third: Catastrophize; think of the worst possible result for your problem. This is why I listed Ellis' three categories. As you can see he has written the irrational beliefs in a catastrophic way. Check out which of the three categories your belief fits into. Get to the accompanying feeling state. When those emotions are present go through the necessary thought processes to downplay the feelings from anger to sadness, from rage to disappointment. This process will allow you to get in touch with your true feelings. When in touch with actual emotions, efforts can be made to change the underlying belief system to more positive, rational beliefs.

Fourth: Use the exercises on the ABCD's of behavior change. They are found in the workbook section for this chapter and will help you to determine if your beliefs are rational or distorted in some way. They can be the blueprints for profound and lasting change.

Fifth: This is where one's spiritual beliefs come into play. I believe that a deep abiding faith in God is necessary in order to permanently change wrong and/or unhealthy beliefs about oneself and one's world. (Peyton, 2003)

Observable behavioral change that is not accompanied by spiritual development may be especially vulnerable to recidivism. Behavior change that is manifested outwardly is a cue that personal changes are occurring for the individual. Without accompanying spiritual changes, however, the maintenance of these behavioral changes is difficult at best. Burke, Miranti (1995, P. 48)

Marriage is a “crucible” through which couples struggle to discover their identity as individuals, as well as who they are as a couple, and as a family. As evidenced by Peter and Susan’s stories, this can be a very painful struggle, especially for those without a strong sense of self at the beginning of the marriage. It is also a very difficult journey for those who have never fully differentiated from their families of origin. People who marry young, before they finish their educations and get a start in a career, and/or those who have a poor ability to regulate their own anxiety because of learned patterns of reactivity to the emotions of significant others are usually poorly differentiated. The good news is that the “crucible” is a normal, if not expected pathway in all marriages. When couples can come to understand this – resolving the identity challenge is a road we all must travel - when the emotional gridlock comes, (having the same repetitive arguments, over and over again) they will more likely be able to work through them, rather than give up or give in.

Conflict is essential to growth in all aspects of life; shouldn’t it be so in marriage as well? Hollywood has perpetuated the myth of “living happily ever after”. Even though we know that no one ever does, we still expect it on some level in our relationships. Added to this dilemma is the reality that many people are attracted to mates who are their opposites. When the honeymoon ends and they begin to disagree about everything, an unhappy reality sets in. In addition, many individuals marry people who are much like the parent who they have unresolved issues with. They spend a lot of energy trying to take back what was lost in childhood.

However, as mentioned earlier, there is good news in this conundrum. Couples can learn to harness the crucible of marriage. And that leads us to Chapter 4 which is conflict resolution.

Chapter 4

Conflict Resolution

This topic covers many areas of distress in marriages. There are actually only four ways to resolve a conflict, and this includes any type of conflict.

1. I win - You lose
2. You win - I lose
3. I lose - You lose
4. I win - You win

An example:

Jack and Jane have a disagreement about how to spend some money that they recently inherited. Jack wants to spend it on some household repairs. Jane wants to put it in the bank and save it. They discuss it endlessly. They argue. The arguing gets nasty, even vicious. The arguments end on a sour note when Jack begins to curse and calls Jane spiteful names. Jack wins the arguments and Jane loses, but over time this conflict will resolve as a lose - lose situation; nobody wins. In order to turn this into a win - win situation, both of them will have to compromise somewhat. Perhaps they could make some repairs, on something they both agree is a priority, and then put the remainder in an account that would gain interest over time.

Does this story ring a bell with you? Have you and your spouse had disagreements that turn into arguments that aren't resolved? Have you ever considered why it has become increasingly difficult to compromise with your spouse, when in the workplace or with friends and acquaintances it does not seem to be so much of a problem? This gets to the fabric of disempowering belief systems. If you are feeling confused, reread chapter 3, and do the accompanying ABCD exercise in the workbook section, using a story from your life.

The vignette above also attests to the dynamic of power and control. Conditional love is how power and control begin in relationships. Patterns are set as family members, especially parents, exert power and control over their children and also over each other in subtle, and not so subtle, ways. Power and control always cause resistance, and resistance usually causes resentment. The resentment can turn into other negative feelings, which build up inside and can cause a whole range of emotional and even physical problems, if the hurt is not expressed in appropriate ways.

William Glasser, who developed what he originally named Reality Therapy (1965) states that as humans we are self-determining and are responsible for what we are doing, thinking, and feeling. He calls this internal control vs. external control. In his latest book, Choice Theory (1998) he describes how most people are not aware that they are either controlled by outside forces and events in their lives or else they themselves try to control others through manipulation, force, or a combination of these. Glasser believes this drive for power and control infects our relationships. As a practicing psychiatrist for over 40 years, he states that he is convinced that control/power is the basis of all problems that cause people to seek psychotherapy! Think about it. When was the last time you got angry and lashed out at a family member who either didn't do what you wanted them to do, or he/she tried to get you to do something you didn't want to do? That's external control theory, as Glasser has termed it. "I call this universal psychology that destroys relationships because it destroys personal freedom, external control psychology." (p.5) Glasser goes on to

describe his philosophy:

Control can be as slight as a disapproving glance or as forceful as a threat to our lives. But whatever it is, it is an attempt to force us to do what we may not want to do. We end up believing that other people can actually make us feel the way we feel or do the things we do. This belief takes away the personal freedom we all need and want." (p. 5)

If you agree with this thesis then you probably have experienced attempts for control from a significant other. If you are the controlling one, then it is likely that you have experienced arguments and/or fights with family members. Do you want to learn a better way? Do you want to get along in freedom and personal autonomy with those you care about?

Let's use a domestic scene already mentioned. Jack and Jane, (or John and Mary) had a heated argument one night. A lot of hurtful words were exchanged. They both went to bed angry. The next day at work Jack decided that he didn't want to be angry any more. He telephoned his wife with a cheery and apologetic hello, intending to forgive and forget, but not necessarily to discuss what happened yesterday. He got silence in return and then she slammed the phone down in his ear. What should he do next? He does have some options. As Glasser would say, he can make a choice to either remain in control of his feelings or to let his spouse's ugly mood affect his. How is he going to stay in control, if he chooses this option and his wife does not? And what has happened in their relationship over the time they have been together, to bring them to the place where they are battling with each other more and more frequently? They certainly did not start off their marriage this way.

Does all of this have a familiar ring? Think back to when you fell in love. You couldn't do enough for each other then. You loved each other so much that you overlooked problem behavior and even harsh words - if they were spoken at all. That was unconditional love! So where did it go?

The good news is - you can get it back. Unconditional love is a choice not a feeling. Did you know that? It may seem like a feeling during the first blush of love, but it is still a choice. The reason we feel happiness and joy at the beginning of a romance is because our mood state is euphoric. We are so caught up in wonder and excitement that our beloved is seen as perfect in every way. (Love, P. 2001) Recalling this time and this feeling state is a way we can begin to let joy come back to the relationship.

As mentioned earlier, resentment will turn into anger or some other unhealthy emotion if the one with most of the power exerts control over the weaker partner, and the feelings are not resolved in healthy ways. Trust and acceptance begin to be threatened. A new pattern starts to take place in relationships where these things are happening. Where there was once genuineness, openness and trust, defensiveness and tension take over. Our sense of feeling loved and cared for gets undermined. Our homes become war zones where we each begin to put on the armor of rude or distant behavior as a protection. Defense tactics that may have worked for us in childhood can become counterproductive and destructive in our adult lives.

Many persons simply do not understand that they have a fundamental human right and responsibility to freely choose their emotional response to other's behaviors and/or actions. No matter what my spouse, child, or other significant other says or does, I still have the right and the responsibility to myself, and to others in the family.

to choose to remain calm, not to lose control, and/or be controlled by what is going on externally. __

This brings up the other important issue pertaining to this chapter on compromising. The topic is forgiveness.

Without forgiveness no relationship can survive over time. Marriage is designed by God to be the most permanent and intimate of all relationships. Because closeness denotes openness and vulnerability and acceptance by it's very definition, there will be mistakes and failures and therefore a need to forgive one another. Probably the greatest failure in a marriage is infidelity. This calamity brings heartache and distrust, and forgiveness is very difficult in that situation.

Forgiveness is not just a decision, it is also a process. Depending on the severity and the impact of the wrong, the process may be shorter or longer in time. Making the decision and being able to forgive is a gift both to the perpetrator and also to the one who was wronged. The act of "letting go" is not only freeing for the guilty one, but it also is freeing for the pain and the resentment suffered by the wronged party. Only when I am able to surrender and forgive, am I able to really get on with my life. If you are in a place of "stuckness" because of not being able to forgive your spouse, or each other for a wrong, I hope you will consider marriage counseling. This may be the tool that will break up the log jam of unforgiveness for one or both of you.

Learn to Ask for What you Need

Another part of resolving potential conflict is to ask for what we need from each other. Too often I hear people, usually women, say, "He knows what I need. I shouldn't have to ask him". This is rarely, if ever, true. Couples who report the most satisfaction in their marriages are good at meeting each other's needs. The way they do this is to ask each other for what they need. If you and your spouse seem to be frequently in conflict it is probably because you are not getting your needs met.

In dysfunctional families an aura of secretiveness and deception usually develops. This comes from a lack of trust and an unwillingness to be open and forthright. It is usually a defense mechanism, learned in childhood, as a way to protect oneself from family members who were emotionally distant or evasive about aspects of life. Or they may have been demanding or intrusive in other family member's privacy. It can actually become a theme that continues from one generation to the next thereby perpetuating a destructive pattern. Whatever the cause, duplicity becomes extremely counterproductive in marriage; instead of sharing our desires and dreams, we learn to be veiled and hidden with the persons who should be closest to us. This was a problem in several of the case studies mentioned here. Can you name persons who may have learned methods of deceit in their families of origin? The work of letting down defenses and becoming authentic can be very challenging, but is also very rewarding. It is precisely in these difficult places where we can help each other to grow the most and do the work of healing our childhood woundedness. As mentioned in the introduction, in some mysterious way we are attracted romantically to individuals who remind us in some way of the parent or caretaker who we have not resolved important issues with. I believe that God puts us together with mates who have characteristics in common with our own unresolved parental relations so that we can help each other to heal and move forward in compatible ways.

Chapter 5

Communal Spirituality

One's spiritual self is the core of one's personhood. Therefore it is vitally important to embrace this. Developing a strong sense of spirituality is precisely where many people falter. Most of us were raised in homes where we were taught about a particular religion. We learned traditions, rituals, prayers and other forms of worship. However thorough this training was, many never developed a personal relationship with a transcendent God. This is probably because spiritual development is a very personal, labor-intensive process, and one that we learn more about through modeling and practicing than through instruction. It is important to reiterate here that this book is not about religion, or my personal belief system. But it is very much about the spiritual part of every person that is the very core of one's humanity and soul. Without understanding who you are spiritually, what you believe, and how you connect with God, you will never truly understand yourself, and your special qualities as a unique person.

I encourage clients to begin to take their own personal spiritual journey by spending time each day meditating or praying to get in touch with God, as they understand Him. Obviously this is a long process and it can be tedious, especially in the beginning. I suggest 15 minutes a day as a reasonable amount of time at first, and I also invite clients to read whatever books on spirituality and religion they think will be helpful, and then to journal about what comes to mind as they spend this time. Some are more willing than others to do this, and therefore, once again, I want to emphasize the importance of the "quiet time". As with all building projects, the base of the foundation is the most important part. Upon the strength of the foundation the rest of the building will stand.

Mystics and writers through the centuries have asserted the importance of communicating on a daily basis with God, through meditation or prayer. I believe that without this commitment of time and openness to connecting there can be no meaningful spiritual development, and therefore we will miss God's best. The rewards are many: a closer relationship with God, a clearer understanding of self, an awareness of faults and areas needing change, the recognition of strengths, values, and beliefs, an increased desire to set goals and objectives, and a softening of our hearts toward those we may be estranged from, or have other relationship problems with. You can probably think of other areas that are pertinent to you. This might be a helpful way to start a meditation. Think of the rewards you will get. Write them down. Then explore each one on a given day to determine their particular benefits and how you might want to pursue them. A person's deepest self, his/her truest self is the spiritual self. Not to explore this is to ignore an important part of being human. (Peyton 2003, p. 15)

The following quote is what one author wrote to describe her experiences in "carving out" time for God each day.

I have noticed how different I am, depending on the way I begin my day. In the first scenario, my daughter goes to school, and I sit down with a good cup of coffee and *The New York Times*. I enjoy the coffee, the paper, and the morning time by myself. When I'm finished reading, I check my e-mail, dress, and go to work. This

is fairly enjoyable and fairly productive. But I realize it's guaranteed to maintain the status quo in myself and those around me.

In the second scenario, I carve out at least twenty to thirty minutes each morning to spend quality time with God. It takes a little more self-discipline but offers an immeasurably greater gift to my life. For during this time my mind is freed of mental patterns that would keep me tied to yesterday. I light a prayer candle and pray out loud, sharing with God my hopes and fears that day. I seek to atone for my own mistakes, and I seek to forgive others for theirs. Then I meditate silently, entering the deeper waters of the divine. I am a student of *A Course in Miracles*, as well as a Transcendental Meditator, but I don't think it matters what form our spiritual practice takes. What's very important to realize, however, is that the mind of someone who regularly practices prayer and meditation *is literally a different mind*. I know this is true of myself, simply from my own experience.

In what ways am I different? Certainly I am more serene, which affects all my interactions as I move through the day. Also, I think I'm *smarter*. I have greater insight, I view situations with greater depth, and my mind is not so cluttered with the meaningless preoccupations that bombard us each moment in this increasingly frantic world. My spiritual practice doesn't just make me *feel* better; I think it makes me a different woman than I am when I choose not to do it. Everything I'm involved with becomes infused with a peace I do not otherwise carry. It affects the reactions of people I meet and the outcome of situations I might not even know exist. (Williamson 2002 pp. 54-55)

Once I have begun my own spiritual journey it becomes of paramount importance to share this with my spouse. It is not necessary for husbands and wives to be the same religion, since one's spirituality is intensely personal and individual. However, shared spirituality is a hallmark of intimacy. Remember true intimacy consists of trust, vulnerability, and acceptance of self and the other. Having a strong spiritual life means that I have a deep awareness and trust in the presence and the power of The Almighty God. When both partners share their faith with each other, the strength of the couple bond grows stronger. "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken." (Ecc. 4:12)

My husband and I have discovered that praying together is the most intimate of all the things we do together. Praying together is a more intimate activity than making love, as we each gradually learn to open ourselves, with all of our fears, needs, and desires, to each other, and to God. Praying, in its deepest, truest sense, is about being real. Praying is about being who I really am before God. There can be no pretense when we are at prayer. It can be a very private endeavor between a couple, and it can also be a

shared family activity that teaches children the importance of connecting with God on a regular basis.

One's sense of the spiritual is a topic rarely discussed with others, probably because it is a very personal undertaking. Many couples do not know how to share their faith or their relationship to God with each other. A good way to begin is slowly, in whatever ways you can each retain a comfort level. Start by taking the questionnaire on spirituality in the workbook section, and then share your answers with each other. Saying a prayer together before meals is also a terrific way to begin. Most of us learned to do this in our childhood homes and so have a certain level of ease with this task. If you have children, you may already do this. You may also say prayers at night with your children before putting them to bed. This is another way to begin to pray as a couple. The key is to start small, in non-anxiety producing ways. As you grow more confident, the prayers can increase in complexity and length, with all family members taking part. More about this in the next chapter, which is about intimacy.

The importance of sharing spirituality and praying together cannot be emphasized enough. Along with the other four steps to more satisfying marriages, this can be used as a bridge to intimacy. For in the depths of our souls we all long for someone who we can be completely open and intimate with. In his book "The Mystery of Marriage" Mike Mason (1986) delves into this topic in amazing and startling ways. I will use the following comments that he has written as a segue to the last chapter, which is a discussion on intimacy.

"For one of the most profound ways in which the Lord touches us, and teaches us about Himself and His Own essential otherness, is through the very limits He has placed upon our relationships with one another. It is an enormous source of human frustration that our need for intimacy far outstrips its capacity to be met in other people. Primarily what keeps us separate is our sin, but there is also another factor, which is that in each one of us the holiest and neediest and most sensitive place of all has been made and is reserved for God alone, so that only He can enter there. No one else can love us as He does, and no one can be the sort of Friend to us that He is." (P. 44)

Chapter Six

Cultivating Intimacy

A profound definition of intimacy is described by a father and son team of psychiatrists who write in their book “The Art Intimacy” (1987)

Intimacy is derived from the Latin *intima*, meaning “inner” or innermost”. Your inside being is the real you, the you that only you can know. The problem is that you can know it only when you are being intimate with something or someone outside yourself.

They go on to say that “the outstanding quality of the intimate experience is the sense of being in touch with our real selves.” This means that we can only know ourselves when we are in an intimate relationship, and we can only have a truly intimate relationship when we truly know ourselves!

Real intimacy is not achieved overnight. To become truly intimate couples must learn to trust each other completely. We must come to understand and affirm each other’s goals, hopes, and dreams. We must also learn to accept each other – with all our failings and faults – and we must grow to be completely open and vulnerable with each other. Vulnerability is about removing all of our defenses and pretenses - something we are all well practiced in - they protect us from being hurt out in the world. Vulnerability is about learning to be completely transparent with each other, as we grow in trust and acceptance of each other. This can be a scary process, however. In the beginning of a marriage couples conclude because they have become sexually intimate, they have achieved true intimacy. I call this period “pseudo intimacy”. Just because a couple can take off all of their clothes and be sexual with each other does not mean they know what intimacy is about. Satisfying sexual intimacy is getting to know each other’s bodies and sexual needs, in order to give one another pleasure. It is also about reciprocity and shared experiences. Satisfying sexuality is about two people coming together to create a new experience. It is not about pleasing oneself in a sexual way, while using one’s partner as a vehicle for this. Unfortunately our society encourages sexual fantasy, masturbation, and even pornography, while ignoring the genuine human need for giving and receiving love, trust, and acceptance in order to have true intimacy. Americans are socialized to think that it is ok to objectify women through men’s magazines, movies, and even T.V. Rarely are young people taught about God’s plan for human sexuality. His design for marriage partners is a lifetime of commitment, discovery, and enhancement of each other emotionally and spiritually, as well as in a physical way.

As Rick Warren describes in his book “The Purpose Driven Life” (2002)

The world thinks intimacy occurs in the dark, but God says it happens in the light. Darkness is used to hide our hurts, faults, fears, failures, and flaws. But in the light, we bring them all out into the open and admit who we really are. Of course, being authentic requires both courage and humility. It means facing our fear of exposure, rejection, and being hurt again. (p. 140)

In Genesis there is a description of how in the beginning the first man and woman were “both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.” (Gen. 2:25) When sin entered into the world, when they ate of the tree that God had commanded them not to eat from, they realized that they were naked and so made themselves coverings. This is a picture of how we humans have learned to cover ourselves, both literally and figuratively, so that others will not see us as we really are. We cover ourselves in order to protect ourselves, and to keep others, even our spouses, from knowing us completely.

As stated in the first chapter, God’s plan for marriage is for the two to become one. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) This speaks profoundly of the sexual union, but also of deep emotional intimacy that God has ordained for married couples to experience with each other. In the beginning Adam and Eve could be completely intimate with each other, because there was nothing between them to hinder this. Their shame came between them after they sinned, and that wonderful intimacy was lost. That was why they felt the need to cover themselves.

In true intimacy, couples have no hidden areas; nothing to hide from each other. They are able to be truly connected, as they appreciate, respect, and honor one another. Becoming one on an emotional level allows each of us to grow in ways that enhance the other.

A very wise pastor friend stated that there are four necessary components to developing real intimacy in marriage. He has suggested that contented couples:

1. work together
2. play together
3. pray together
4. sleep together

I would like to elaborate on these four things as I believe there is a lot of value in what he has said:

Working together teaches us about togetherness, which is a very important component in satisfying marriages. It also teaches us about sharing responsibility and power. Contented couples strive for a balance of power; neither partner is dominant or submissive. They negotiate and make decisions based on equality and fairness. Working together is also about conflict resolution and problem solving. It is about respecting your mates’ intellectual capacities and about continuing to learn and to grow one’s own intellectual abilities.

Playing together also teaches us about togetherness. This helps us to relax and enjoy each other’s childlike side; something that is easy to forget about as we get caught up in climbing the ladder to achievement and success in the world. As we struggle with the complexities of raising children, of making and managing money, and the various methods of achieving goals that we set for ourselves, we can forget to have fun together.

One way to play together on a regular basis is to set aside time each week for a date. It doesn’t have to be a formal date such as going out for dinner and a movie. It can be as simple as sitting together for an hour or so and watching a favorite T.V. show or video, or playing a game of cards. The important part is to prioritize the time and do something together. Taking a few minutes out of the day to call your spouse, just to tell him/her that you are thinking about him/her is another way to keep in touch, and to

keep the home fires burning. Another aspect of this is doing new things together, stretching one's interest to occasionally participate in events that your spouse enjoys, even if you would rather not.

Praying together, as mentioned in chapter 5, helps us to connect in a spiritual way. It helps us to become more trusting and appreciative and vulnerable with each other and with God. It actually teaches us how to be intimate through opening up with another human being in a simultaneous, humbling manner. It helps us to process and to refine our values, morals and principles. It also causes us to develop a common vision for the future. True intimacy through prayer is about creating a safe emotional environment. It is about setting appropriate boundaries. It is about owning and expressing feelings, and being respectful of one's partner's feelings and needs. Praying also strengthens that triple stranded cord talked about in Ecclesiastes 4:12.

Sleeping together certainly is about togetherness. It is amazing how many couples tell me that they no longer sleep together regularly. (This often has something to do with having children and allowing them to sleep with you, or getting in the child's bed in order to help him/her get to sleep. It becomes a habit that is not easily changed.) I suggest to conflicted couples the importance of sharing a bed. Sleeping together again, and even going to bed at the same time, can often be the beginning of a new period of satisfaction in your marriage. The big picture of sharing a bed is about sharing a home. It is about creating a living space that reflects both of your personalities and each one's likes and needs.

As we go on in life we do those four things on a daily basis. This is what the minutia of life is made up of after all: work, play, prayer, and sleep. These tasks are what the day is supposed to be made up of. Truly satisfied couples do all of these things together. The glue that holds them together is prayer.

I would like to add one other aspect to the list of traits for intimacy to develop. It's kissing. And not just a peck on the cheek to say hello and goodbye. What I am suggesting is spending five or ten minutes every day sitting together and kissing. Don't mistake this for kissing that is foreplay to sex. It's about maintaining your attraction for each other, from both a physical and an emotional perspective. It is a way to express your feelings about how you are still attracted to each other. In their book "A Married Guy's Guide to Great Sex", Cliff & Joyce Penner (2004) endorse this concept, that couples spend time every day (they suggest 15 minutes) kissing as a promising way to deeper intimacy - and better sex

As stated in the introduction, there is a hierarchy of behaviors in a step by step progression that lead to unconditional love. The last step, that of intimacy, cannot be achieved until the first five objectives are accomplished. For sexual intimacy to be truly fulfilling it must include and reflect all the other steps as well. Good sex is an integration of all that we are as a couple.

And so I would like to end this material in the way that I began it, with a statement about the solid self, the differentiated self. Remember the self that is differentiated is made up of clearly defined beliefs, convictions, and life principles. These concepts enable us to become "one" with our mates, while still maintaining our own sense of autonomy and self-identity. As Mike Mason has written in his beautiful treatise on marriage:

In marriage it so happens that the Lord has devised a particularly gentle (but no less disciplined and effective) means for helping men and women to humble themselves, to surrender their errant wills. Even the closest of couples will inevitably find themselves engaged in a struggle of wills, for marriage is a wild, audacious attempt at an almost impossible degree of cooperation between two powerful centers of self-assertion. Marriage cannot help being a furnace of conflict, a crucible in which these two wills must be melted down and purified and made to conform. Most people do not realize that this is what they are signing up for when they get married, but this is what invariably faces them. (P. 167)

To sum up what has been written here, I would like to reiterate my belief that marriage is a gift from God to men and women, that enables us to develop the necessary traits to become persons of integrity and stability and completeness. It provides us with the tools to present a nurturing environment and a loving legacy for our children and grandchildren. It especially teaches us how to have caring and sustaining relationships through the close connectedness and intimacy that only the uniqueness of the marriage bond provides. If we focus on the giftedness of each other and of God, and concentrate on learning and practicing the six C's to unconditional love, we will succeed in achieving the satisfying marriages that we all desire to have.

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LOVE THERAPY

WORKBOOK

**Chapter One:
Self Identity; Be Your Own Person**

List the 9 components to developing a healthy, separate identity. Be concise. Abbreviate

What are the three necessary components to developing good self-esteem?

What are you doing when you are the most satisfied?

Make a list of your talents and abilities and strengths.

**Chapter One:
Develop a Separate Identity**

Have you discovered your life purpose? _____ if so write it out in one sentence.

Write out what you would like to have accomplished at the end of your life. What is your vision for your life?

What personal goal or goals have you set for yourself this year?

1. Goals should be specific.
2. Goals should demand the best from us, but not overly stress us.
3. Goals that are not written down are easily forgotten.
4. Goals need deadlines to be effective and to track progress.
5. Goals sometimes need to be adjusted.

Signed _____

Date _____

VALUES INVENTORY

VALUES	DEFINED	PRIORITIZED
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Altruism	Goodwill and charity	1
Aesthetics	Appreciation for beauty, nature, and harmony	2
Cooperation	Living in harmony with others	3
Creativity	Developing news ideas or things	4
Education	Appreciation for learning	5
Equality	Equal opportunity for all	6
Faith	Loyalty to one's beliefs	7
Family	Caring about parents/children/significant other	8
Freedom	Free choice of thoughts and actions	9
Health	Emotional/physical/spiritual well being	10
Honesty	Truthfulness and openness	11
Integrity	Behavior consistent with one's beliefs	12
Justice	Fair treatment	13
Love	Strong personal attachment and caring	14
Loyalty	Devotion to someone or something	15
Pleasure	Seeking enjoyment or gratification	16
Power	Having influence and the ability to act on it	17
Purpose	Meaning and direction	18
Recognition	Gaining respect and admiration	19
Relationship	Caring connections with others	20
Respect	To feel or show honor or esteem for	21
Security	Being certain, sure of something	22
Success	Knowing you have achieved something	23
Wealth	Accumulating things of value	24
Wisdom	Mature understanding of life/insight	25

After you have prioritized your values, please list the top five and the bottom five below. What themes do you see with the top five and also with the bottom five values? Your values are an indication of life goals and objectives.

Top Five Most Important Values	Least Important Values
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

Chapter Two: Communicating Respectfully

CONSTRUCTING A *COUPLES* DIALOGUE

SENDER: The one who wants to send a message must take the initiative and say:
“I would like to have a Couples’ Dialogue. Is now okay?”

There are two reasons why one might want to have a *Couples Dialogue*

1. You are upset about something and want to discuss it.
2. You want to discuss a topic that you think might be “touchy”.

RECEIVER: It is the receiver’s job to grant a Couples Dialogue ASAP, now if possible. If not now, set an appointment time so that the sender knows when he/she will be heard.

1. **Mirroring:** “What I heard you say is...”

When there is a natural pause, the receiver will say two things:

- a) **“Am I mirroring you accurately?”**
- b) **“Is thee anything more you would like to say about that?”**

When the sender has finished sending and the receiver has mirrored everything, then go to step 2.

2. **Validation:** “You make sense.”

“You make sense” must be said. You may want to preface it with something like: “I am listening to you carefully and I understand what you are saying.” But you must say the sentence: **“You make sense.”**

3. **Empathy:** “I imagine you might be feeling...” or **“I imagine you might have felt...”**

Then you must make some guess at what the sender is feeling. Feelings are stated in one word (i.e. angry, confused, sad, upset, etc.)

If your guess entails more than one word it is probably a thought “You feel that you don’t want to go with me.” This is a thought, not a feeling.) Also, one never knows for sure what another person is feeling. Therefore check out your guess by saying:

“Is that what you are feeling?”

When the sender shares with you other feelings, mirror back what you heard.

Then inquire:

“Are there any other feelings you are having?”

Then mirror what is said.

When the receiver has gone through all three parts (mirroring, validation and empathy) then he/she says:

“I would like to respond now.”

Then switch roles and the receiver now becomes the sender.

Chapter Two

Communicate Respectfully; learn to communicate

Understanding Each Other's Belief Systems

What underlying sets of beliefs were prominent in your family of origin? What was good about them? What was bad about them? How do they affect your life in the present?

Are those beliefs something you want to pass along to others? If no, why not? If yes, why?

What themes or patterns are reflected in those beliefs? Do those themes show themselves in your beliefs, behaviors and interactions with others today?

What themes or patterns are present in your current family today?

What disempowering belief system(s) is getting in the way of marital satisfaction for you today?

**Chapter Three:
Controlling Feelings and Beliefs - The ABCD's of Belief Systems**

Activating Event:

Write story: _____

Catastrophize; think of the worst possible result for your problem, circle the correct category:

1. I must be perfect. If I am not then I am no good at all, and I want to kill myself.
2. Others think that I must be perfect in everything I do. If I fail then I am no good and I want to kill myself.
3. Everything in my life must be easy and good and satisfying. If something is not then I want to die, rather than suffer or face hardships.

Consequential Feelings:

Write the feeling state you were in when the activating event occurred.

Decisive Behavior:

Write your reactive behavior. What did you do when the activating event occurred?

Belief System:

What were you thinking that caused you to respond the way you did?

Date _____

**Chapter Three:
Changing Disempowering Beliefs to Empowering Beliefs**

Activating Event:

Write belief that caused the decisive behavior: _____

- Debate:**
- 1) Does this belief conform to objective reality?
 - 2) Does dwelling on this belief foster life?
 - 3) Does dwelling on this belief help me meet my goals?
 - 4) Does dwelling on this belief keep me out of inappropriate conflict with others?
 - 5) Does dwelling on this belief keep me out of inappropriate conflict with myself?

Feeling Goals:

Behavior Goals:

Renewed Belief:

Date _____

Chapter Four:
Practicing Conflict Resolution

SEVEN WAYS TO CONTAIN CONFLICT

C Control your emotions. Do not let outside circumstances affect your inner state of being. (Inner control vs. outer control) Stay centered on what you want to accomplish – resolution of the problem. Cool it. The acrostic will only work if you are in control.

O Own your feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Stay calm. Use “I” statements and talk about how you are perceiving the conflict.

N Never call your partner names. Shouting and cursing are no no’s too. Keep the discussion lighthearted by making jokes. Don’t blame or find fault.

T Think through the situation. Think rationally. What do you want to accomplish? You want a win/win solution. How can you make that happen?

R Remember that “I” am not as important as “we”. Remember the best solution to a conflict is a win/win solution. This way you both win.

O Be other centered, not self-centered.

L Love each other unconditionally. Try to understand your partner’s position. What does he/she need, want, think, or feel. It will put you in an empathetic place and enable you to present your position better.

Chapter Four:
Conflict Resolution; Learn to Compromise

In what ways are you and your spouse different?

What themes or patterns run through your recurrent arguments?

How do you usually resolve arguments?

In what ways are you and your spouse similar?

What do you enjoy doing together?

What are you doing when you are the most satisfied together?

If you could change one thing in your spouse, what would that be?

How would your spouse answer the above question? What one thing would he/she like you to change?

What disempowering belief system(s) keeps getting in the way for you and your spouse?

Chapter five:
Communal Spirituality

My Spiritual Profile

1. What does spirituality mean to me?

2. How does my sense of spirituality give meaning to my life?

3. How does my spirituality express itself in my daily and weekly life?

4. Am I able to discern spiritual growth in me presently from where I was at the same time last year? In what ways have I noticed change?

5. What is my understanding of life after death?

6. Do I use my faith and/or spirituality to lean on when adversity or problems come up? How do I do that?

7. Do I feel the presence of God in my life in an ongoing way? Have I ever had such an experience? If so write in a few sentences what that was like.

8. Does my relationship with God need improvement? In what ways can I make that happen?

9. Do my spouse and I share spiritual values? In what ways are we the same and in what ways do we differ spiritually?

10. Will I commit to developing a deeper relationship with my spouse that will enhance my understanding of God? What will that commitment look like?

**Chapter six:
Cultivating Intimacy**

Compatibility Profile

Write out a list of 10 things that you each enjoy doing. Compare lists.

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**
- 6.**
- 7.**
- 8.**
- 9.**
- 10.**

**Chapter six:
Cultivating Intimacy**

What mutual goals do you and your spouse have for this year? _____

Share with each other the goals you have written on this page and the previous one.

Spend some time discussing and developing a vision for yourselves as a couple and as a family, if you have children. Write that out in the following space. Reread it every few months and refine it as you go. Once a year revisit what you have written and adjust it, if necessary.

Signed

Date

Signed

Date

