


Producing a Blockbuster Marriage:  
Writing Our Love Story

Focus on the Family's  
Hope Restored  
Follow up Resource

[HopeRestored.com](http://HopeRestored.com)



*This role is for you!*  
*Please audition*



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For more information on Producing a Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story, call Focus on the Family, at 1-800-A-Family.  
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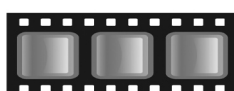
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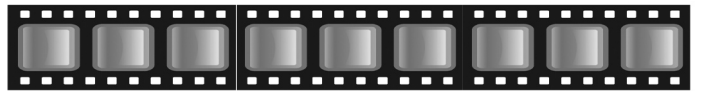
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*“This script you hold in your hand is a fifteen session study on how to live your love story in such a way as to lead you to a marriage you can be thrilled with. Regardless of what drama or tragedy has already occurred, this study is designed to help you take your story in a direction of triumph and celebration.”*



## **Prologue**







## "Quiet...and ROLL Tape"

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be on a movie set or set of a television drama and watch how the actors, directors, producers, and crew go about crafting a great film story? Have you ever wondered what a television drama of your life would look like? Well, here's your chance... at least figuratively. The study you hold in your hand is a script for taking your love story and turning it into a "Blockbuster;" the kind of television drama that leaves audiences reflecting for days on the impact of the story and its characters. You have an incredible story, a story filled with drama, humor, action and suspense. It is your own love story. It is the story being created with your spouse. The difference is not only are you the main character, but you are the script writer too. You are also responsible for the direction, look and feel of the story. What makes this love story especially challenging is your spouse is creating their love story too. Will the two of you collaborate to produce a blockbuster story of love and triumph or will the story falter and become mired in delays and neglect? You get to decide what your commitment and vision will be for this love story. You just might discover there is a committed and inspired actor in your spouse waiting to join the story. Together you can write an amazing love story unique to the two of you, and worthy of your own Academy Award. And, best of all, no one can take this story from you. It is yours, and your spouse's. Everyone who knows the two of you will in some way be impacted by the drama; and most of all, you will be impacted.

There is more good news. You don't have to write this script alone. Almighty God Himself set this story in motion when He created you. He not only sits watching it unfold but He is ever present to assist and guide you as you determine the next episode and its conclusion. He wants to be your "Executive Producer," empowering you to compose an epic worthy of the life treasure He has placed within you. In every way you consult His guidance you gain greater and greater clarity of His intent for you to live a story full of love, triumph and celebration. This script you hold in your hand is a fifteen session study on how to live your life in such a way as to lead you to a marriage you can be thrilled with. Regardless of what drama or tragedy has already occurred, this study is designed to help you take your story in a direction of triumph and celebration. Each of the studies is outlined as a different "episode" in the series, ***Producing a Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story.***

For some, reading these "episodes" (i.e. Studies) will be a continuation of an experience started as a result of participating in a Focus on the Family's Hope Restored Intensive Experience. Whether a four-day Couples Intensive or a three or five-day Marriage Intensive these "episodes" are designed to help Hope Restored alumni take the Intensive experience to an even deeper level. This "script" is an opportunity to follow your Intensive experience with more insight and change. For years now, we at Hope Restored have been trying to create ways to enhance our follow-up with couples who have participated in an intensive. This is an effort to provide our alumni with guidance to deepen and strengthen the experience they had with us.

## Prologue, Introduction

For others, this script is an opportunity to go deeper with concepts, principles, and insights you were introduced to in a seminar, conference or publication containing our model of marriage relationship recovery. We are thrilled to make this resource available to you as well. Use this “script,” (i.e. study) to enhance and maybe even transform how you go about participating in your marriage. If the language in places seems directed specifically to someone who attended a Hope Restored Intensive, please don’t be put off by this. Feel free to adapt the meaning to better apply to your experience as a conference attendee or reader of other Focus on the Family resources. Our sincere hope and prayer is that you will be deeply blessed by the insights and learning exercises offered here. Your love story is constantly evolving and being revised with each passing day. The guidance offered here is intended to assist you in creating a “Blockbuster” performance.

The fifteen “episodes” (i.e. studies) in this series are designed for couples to study together. There will be a lot of direction and guidance for individual spouses through the studies but the overall intent is for husbands and wives to write their love story together. Your love story is a story being created collaborating with your spouse. While it is a story created together this study doesn’t demand your spouse to invest equally with you. By this we mean don’t be distracted or discouraged if your spouse doesn’t seem to be investing equally with you in the study. When both spouses together are studying alongside each other with matching commitment and enthusiasm the results will be fantastic. However, do not underestimate the power of writing your script on your own, even if your spouse acts their “part” differently from you. The scenes in this script are designed in such a way that an individual spouse can impact their love story dramatically, even if their spouse seems to be lagging behind in some way. Your individual commitment to make the most of this study will impact your spouse significantly, even if it is only in the fact that your spouse must adjust how they play their part because of how inspired you play your part.

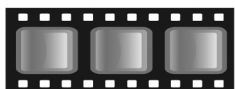
Take some time to consider the “Pre-production” discussions offered and then dive into the script itself. It’s time to give your love story the commitment and inspiration it deserves.

**“Ready...quiet on the set...ACTION!”**





*“Consider the reality that God wants to be intimately involved in how you go about writing your story. He has a vision and plan for your life and the closer your efforts to live out this story fall within His plan, the more blessed and fulfilling life becomes. Approach this study as an opportunity to collaborate with God, indeed allow Him ultimate authority on the direction and scope your love story takes.”*

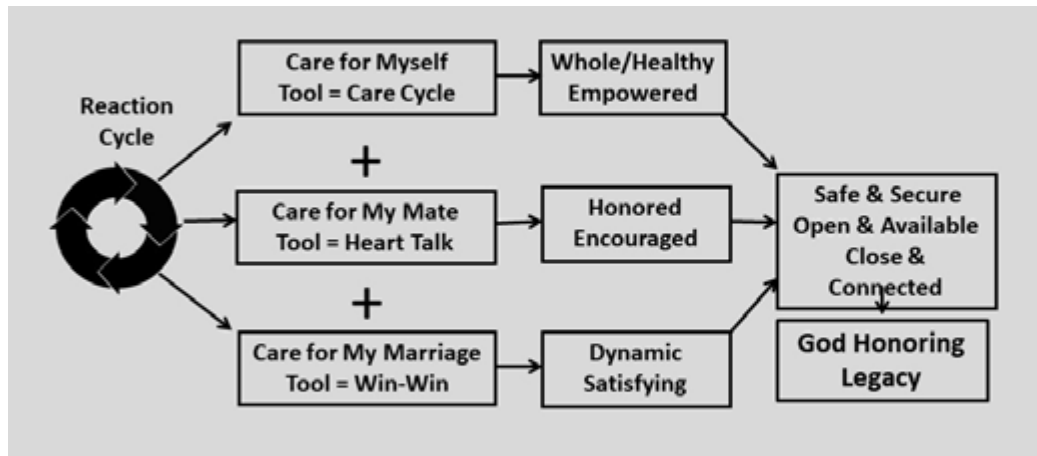


## **Pre-Production**





## Receipe for a Healthy Marriage



The above diagram illustrates the model of relationship recovery used by Focus on the Family's Hope Restored Intensive programs, events and resources. This model forms the framework upon which therapeutic interventions and teaching presentations are crafted by Focus on the Family staff. In considering looking at how one is writing their love story a review of the model is useful.

### The Pledge

Every married couple makes some sort of pledge to one another. It may occur in courtship, engagement or at a wedding but emotionally husband and wife pledge their commitment and fidelity to each other in some meaningful way. The promise sets the relationship on a path toward spouses knowing and being known, a path toward intimacy.

### The Reactive Cycle

At some point almost all intimate relationships recognize an emotional tangle of reactions and emotions. Sadly, for many married couples this cycle of fear and reaction comes to define the relationship, and spouses find themselves trapped. It can feel like being in a poorly written play in which the characters repeat the same lines over and over again with the result always the same; hurt and disappointment. It is in the midst of this destructive cycle many couples have sought Focus on the Family for support and guidance.

### Safety

At a Hope Restored Intensive Experience or through one of Focus on the Family's other events or products, couples begin to realize that in order to establish and maintain the intimacy they desire with each other, they must turn their attention toward making the relationship safe. This requires commitment to change and courage to follow through with relationship skills and insights spouses may not have possessed when they entered marriage. By seeking to create safety in the relationship for themselves and their spouse, husbands and wives begin writing their love story in a new direction. The dialog changes to conversation which allows for deep heart felt connection between them. The safety in the relationship releases each to be the persons God created them to be.

## **Pathways to Safety & Security**

The three pathways that lead to safety out of the reactive cycle are where much of the work of change occurs for couples.

### **Power of One and Caring for Yourself**

These two foundational steps are primarily internal for each spouse. One's husband or wife may support changes in these areas but the changes are essentially within the individual. The "Power of One" refers to the principle of personal responsibility. This principle frees a person from the trap of being a victim. By taking personal responsibility for one's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behavior, they are empowered to take control over what they are most able to actually do something about -- how they show up in the relationship. The second pathway of "Caring for Yourself" has to do with the intention one makes toward being a good steward of the treasure God places in a person, the treasure of life itself. Committing to caring for oneself responsibly leads to the confidence that allows a person to risk being open and vulnerable so that intimacy can happen.

### **Caring for Your Mate and Caring for Your Marriage**

These two pathways are primarily relationship focused. "Caring for Your Mate" refers to the skill of making contact with another's heart while allowing one's own heart to be contacted as well. The skill of "Heart Talk" is applied here. Husband and wife disclose their longings, desires, fears and emotions with each other for the purpose of understanding and emotional intimacy. "Caring for Your Marriage" is the step of operating in the relationship with a "No Losers Policy" in a Win/Win Resolution. The No Losers Policy points spouses toward seeking win/win outcomes with each other in making plans, decisions, and strategies for the relationship. Spouses commit themselves to seeking outcomes they can both feel good about. In so doing their sense of being a unified team grows and their strength together intensifies to surpass what either of them could accomplish alone.

### **Openness & Closeness**

When the above pathways are pursued by spouses to create and maintain safety in their relationship, the experience of safety becomes more and more common, more normal. This is a dramatic transformation of the threat and dread associated with a relationship dominated by the reactive cycle. This experience of safety then allows husbands and wives to naturally begin to open themselves to each other and the relationship. This openness is not without risk because the threat of the reactive cycle is never completely eliminated. So vulnerability remains an element of being open. It is this vulnerability and openness then that makes possible the experience of intimacy.

### **Intimacy**

Like Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:25 "The man and his wife were both naked, and felt no shame." This is the picture of intimacy, a man and woman "naked" in all the ways that term could be applied and feeling no shame in the experience. To know and be known in a relationship where such knowing leads to greater feelings of belonging and significance is what most of us deeply long for in our marriages.

These then are the elements of our model of relationship recovery. These concepts, principles and experiences inform and guide most of our efforts here at Focus on the Family. It is our deepest desire to see the promise of a great marriage built, renewed, and restored in every couple we serve. This model will serve as a reference as you write your love story.

## How to get the most out of the “Writing Our Love Story” follow up program

Now that you are earnestly and intentionally investing in your love story, it is wise to pause and consider a few things that will help you get the most out of using this “Writing Our Love Story” resource. This resource is all about assisting you in building on the experience at your Hope Restored Intensive Experience or at a Focus on the Family Conference. The Intensive experience alerted you to what might be possible in your marriage and may have given you a running head start to taking your love story to a whole new place. This follow up study to your Intensive is framed like a television drama script. If your marriage is a love story then we want to help you turn it into a blockbuster! A story filled with triumph and celebration as you take your life to new places of integrity and vitality. This “script” or study will take you through fifteen “episodes.” Each episode will afford you the opportunity to explore and strengthen your understanding of the principles, skills, and insights from your Intensive experience. It should be a stimulating study with lots of discovery and growth. Indeed we believe couples who invest themselves in applying what they learned at their Intensive show the greatest gains and benefits.

Similar to a production team working on a drama series, it is important to attend to some pre-production or pre-study preparation. We want to invite you to begin using this resource even while you are still at your Intensive by completing this pre-production preparation. This is preparation that will position you to see the next 15 weeks deepen and strengthen the experience you had with us at Focus on the Family.



### **Direction from the Executive Producer**

If we follow this analogy of writing your love story like you were preparing a blockbuster television drama, then God might be regarded as the executive producer of this story. Consider the reality that God wants to be intimately involved in how you go about writing your story. He has a vision and plan for your life and the closer your efforts to live out this story fall within His plan, the more blessed and fulfilling life becomes. Approach this study as an opportunity to collaborate with God, indeed allow Him ultimate authority on the direction and scope your love story takes. By surrendering your love story to Him and allowing Him to impart His vision of the love story to you, you will give yourself and your spouse the best chance for a blockbuster marriage.

### **Doing the Study alongside My Spouse**

Producing A Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story, is designed to be an individual study. Each spouse has been provided with their own individual “Script.” This is consistent with our belief that each husband and wife are responsible for their own participation in the marriage and are not dependent on each other for how they individually contribute to the growth of the relationship. It can however be a great enhancement to the study when spouses are progressing together through the respective “Episodes.” At several points during the study you will be invited to share your reflections and insight with your spouse. Your sharing is not limited to these directions. Spouses should feel free to share as much of the study with each other as they both mutually desire. If your spouse should want some space and safety around something sensitive addressed in the study please respect that while sharing with each other. With appropriate respect the opportunity to share more fully with each other will come in time.

## Taking in the Horizon

Every successful venture begins with a vision of some point in the future when the objective has been accomplished and the prize won. It is important to pause and reflect on what it is you are really aiming for in your marriage. This involves trying to look out on the horizon to see where it is you are headed and some of the challenges you are likely to encounter on your way there. Sometimes couples come to Intensives or conference with very modest goals. Other times couples come with high expectations of changes in their relationship. One of the benefits of an Intensive or attending a Focus on the Family conference can be the opportunity to examine our expectations about how marriage is supposed to be and discover how those expectations may be unrealistic or unhealthy. As a result of this process, spouses can modify their aspirations to be more realistic and attainable.



## Editing Your Love Story

Do you recall what your goals were when you first examined a Focus on the Family publication, or attended a Focus on the Family seminar or conference? If you participated in a Hope Restored Intensive Experience what did you state as your goals for the Intensive experience? Did those goals or expectations change during the experience? Take a moment and record what you recall your hopes were at the beginning. Were there even hopes you didn't express?

As you allow God to impart His vision to you, are you aware that He has been trying to get your attention? Do you understand what God wants for you in your love story?

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The word "Pre-Production" is centered in the middle frame in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

## Pre-Production

Now note what, if any, important changes were made in your goals as you progressed through the Intensive, conference, or some other Focus on the Family resource.

Take a moment and reflect on your experience with Focus on the Family services and resources. Recall how the publications, conferences, seminars or Intensive impacted you. Our prayer is that your experience was as meaningful and satisfying as you had hoped it would be. In preparing to study ***Producing a Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story*** take a few moments to consider the following questions and note your answers in the space provided.

What was your greatest take away from the publication, seminar/conference, or Intensive? What experience or piece of learning seemed to make the most significant impression on you?

What do you see as your next step? Where are you setting your sights to begin your efforts of change and growth?

## Pacing your progress following an Intensive, Conference or other resource

To get the maximum benefit from this ***Producing A Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story***, we at Focus on the Family want to encourage you to commit to progressing through the study a step at a time. A good routine to follow would be to study one episode a week, following the exercises and directions at the end of the “episode,” and journaling your experience as you go through each study. A week is a good period of time to allow for adequate reflection and opportunity to follow the exercises and directions.

Consider establishing a routine in which on the same day of the week at the same appointed time you read through the episode for that week and begin responding to the directions and exercises at the end of the episode. Use the rest of the week to reflect and follow up on any application of insights learned that week. Be sure to use the space provided to journal and record your experiences, thoughts, questions and feelings while applying what you learn from that week’s episode.

Some may feel they can progress more quickly through the scenes. We do not discourage this entirely. If you feel you can progress through the study more quickly than one episode per week, that’s fine. We simply would caution you that it is possible to go through this material too fast. This resource was prepared with the expectation that “actors” (“actor” means you -- you are the featured player in this your love story) would progress through the study with adequate time for reflection and application before going on to the next episode. Use your own judgment but let your growth and progress be the criteria for how fast you proceed through the study. Whatever best enhances your understanding and application of the learning is what should be priority.

A great supportive resource while progressing through ***Writing Our Love Story***, is the book by Robert Paul and Greg Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*. This book provides you with a fictitious Hope Restored Intensive Experience with Robert Paul and Greg Smalley as the therapists. It is a great way to review many of the concepts, principles, insights, and relationship skills covered in Focus on the Family services and resources. This book would make a good parallel to what you are studying while progressing through this ***Writing Our Love Story*** resource. Another excellent resource to use as a companion is the book *9 Lies That Will Destroy Your Marriage and the Truths That Will Save It and Set It Free* by Dr. Smalley and Dr. Paul.





# Part One

In these first five “episodes” of ***Producing a Blockbuster Marriage: Writing Our Love Story***, we will focus on building your personal awareness and insight. Hopefully, the experience you had with a Focus on the Family service or resource not only opened your eyes to many things about yourself, your mate, and your relationship, but also whetted your appetite for more discoveries. Over the next five weeks we want to give you some practical insight and guidance for expanding what you are learning.

This can be an exciting time of discovery. It can also be threatening, even overwhelming, as you try to digest new ways of seeing yourself, your spouse, and your relationship. Remember this journey you are on has been committed to God and ultimately it is His purposes for you that you are seeking to discover. God is good and He has promised to lead us toward a full and abundant life. The challenge is to recognize where He is leading. These next five studies should help you get your bearings and be rounded in some of the basic themes needed for ***Writing Our Love Story***.



## "Now About That Reactive Cycle..."

*"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.", Proverbs 4:23*



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**SCRIPT:** *"Here We Go Again"*

**SETUP:** *The episode opens on a living room of a middle class home. A man in his forties, Rodney looks as though he was reading the paper and has stopped to respond to the woman, Cindy, also in her forties, who is standing near him appearing somewhat irritated as she is leaning over him. The action begins with Rodney quickly folding the paper and rising from his chair.*



**Rodney:** *(with clear irritation)* That's it! This conversation is going nowhere. I'm going out to the garage. We can talk about this later

**Cindy:** *(as a door is heard slamming, with clear frustration even some pleading in her voice)* But Rodney that's not fair. I'm trying to have a conversation with you. We need to talk about this. *(pause, there is no movement or sound from the direction of the garage where Rodney exited)*

*(now thinking out loud Cindy speaks with strong irritation)* Oh, that makes me mad. He does this every time. This is so stinking familiar, it's sick. I thought after going through that Intensive he would know better than to use that tone of voice with me. Yet here it is again just like before, that tone of condescension and judgment. Boy! It makes me mad! *(pause)* Okay, I need to gather myself here. Clearly my buttons are being pushed. Oh yeah, this is that reactive cycle thing they were talking about at the Intensive. Wow, I didn't think I would fall into it so soon and so intensely. I guess they were right about how deep and powerful this thing is between us. Now what did they say to do when a button gets pushed? Where are those handouts they gave us, I know I put them somewhere...



Sound familiar? The above scenario has been played out thousands of times for couples just like you. In this first study, we want to help you take a few more steps of self discovery regarding your reactive cycle. The better you know yourself the better equipped and positioned you are to make new, more effective choices. Your choices can lead to a Blockbuster Marriage.

When I become aware my buttons are being pushed, and I am reflexively reacting to those buttons, I want to first take a deep breath and ask, "What is it I'm feeling?" Beware of confusing anger with deeper level feelings. Anger is indeed a feeling, but it is most often a secondary feeling, a reaction to some deeper feeling. In the scenario above, Cindy's buttons are being pushed. She is most aware of her husband's tone of voice and what she believes that tone represents. She hears "condescension and judgment," suggesting she might feel judged and invalidated. Her anger is secondary to these deeper level feelings.

Here is an opportunity for Cindy to consider her own heart for a moment. Feeling judged and invalidated is no fun, to say the least. In attending to her own heart, Cindy has the opportunity to ask herself, "Is it true that I am not important, that my feelings have no value? Is my perspective really irrelevant?" She might even direct these questions to God, "Father, what is the truth about me in this moment?" Notice how these questions direct Cindy's focus more inward rather than on her husband's tone of voice and possible malevolent motives. The more she places her attention on what Rodney is thinking, believing, feeling, and doing, the more her buttons will be pushed and the more intense her own reactions. By redirecting her focus inward she would give herself the opportunity to choose a response based on deeper self understanding rather than simply reacting reflexively to his tone of voice.

Also in this moment is the opportunity to consider that her husband's tone of voice may not clearly disclose what is going on in his heart. She might reflect, "Let's see now, what have I learned about his reactions of judgment and condescension? Oh yeah, he often reacts that way when he is afraid of being controlled or excluded some how. Is it possible that he's feeling in this situation like I might be trying to control him or exclude him?"

Now Cindy is being curious about her husband's heart as well as her own. This internal process can create some space between Cindy's fear buttons and her reflexive reactions.

Once some clarity regarding Cindy's heart begins to enter the drama, then she is in a place to choose a response. A whole range of possibilities might exist that allow her to care for her own heart as well as her husband's heart.

***For example, when Rodney returns and they try to talk she might:***

- Ask her husband what he is feeling.
- Ask herself, "What do I want to happen right now? Where do I want this conversation to go?"
- Summarize what she speculates he might be feeling, "Are you trying to tell me you feel controlled and excluded right now?"
- State, "Right now I'm starting to feel judged and invalidated. Can we slow down and look more closely at what each of us is feeling?"

***Consider how the above responses make a different set of outcomes possible than if she followed her familiar reactive cycle. What happens if she:***

- Chases him out to the garage demanding they talk right now?
- Tries to fix it by asking, "Well what do want me to do?"
- Raises her voice and tells him to "Shut up and listen...?"
- Defends herself by debating some point with him she feels he is overlooking?

None of those reflexive reactions are likely to lead Cindy and her husband to a good place. Our focus in this study is on the initial steps someone like Cindy can take to attend to her own heart and to be curious about her husband's heart before she responds. Those feelings Cindy has, judged and invalidated, may actually have been with Cindy for a very long time. Upon deeper reflection, Cindy might recognize how events and experiences in her childhood contribute to her being "pre-wired" to feel judged and invalidated. Perhaps Cindy grew up in a home with authoritarian parents who demanded she "toe the line" and did not allow her to express feelings that challenged the family status quo?

If that were the case, it would explain a lot of why Cindy learned at an early age to be alert to others judging or invalidating her feelings on things. She probably learned to react the way she does as a way to somehow protect herself from those feelings.

*"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."*

*Proverbs 4:23*

This is a favorite passage for us at Focus on the Family because it so clearly and unambiguously states the imperative to know and guard one's own heart. These moments, like the one the character Cindy has in our script, are really precious opportunities to guard the heart God placed within us. To guard something entails both shielding and monitoring. My heart needs to be shielded, and it needs to be closely watched and attended to. Many of us have spent a lifetime ignoring our heart. During the Intensive or Focus on the Family conference you attended, you likely had several opportunities to reflect on the condition of your own heart and the hearts of others. When we become aware our buttons are getting pushed, it is the alarm signal to attend to our heart in some way. Use the directions below to see if you can become more familiar with your own heart.



## Editing Your Love Story

Try reflecting on the following questions to see if you can gain some insight about your own heart level feelings:

1. Describe briefly an event recently in which you were aware of intense feelings.
2. What were those feelings? Can you list the feelings in the layers they might occur within you?

3. What is the earliest memory you have of feeling some of those deeper level feelings? Where were you? How old were you? Who else was present?

4. How did those early experiences impact the way you approach intimate relationships like your marriage?

After spending some time reflecting on the above questions and jotting down some notes, don't be surprised if this reflection leads to some sadness as you ponder injury and disappointment that have occurred in your life. As scary as some of these feelings may be, they are only more powerful when we ignore them. Remember how the reactive cycle illustrates the way feelings can control our reactions in situations until we begin to acknowledge them and care for them. If you feel safe with these feelings, consider sharing some of your insights with your spouse during a "Heart Talk." (An outline for how to do Heart Talk can be found in the appendix at the back of this resource. It is also discussed in Bob Paul and Greg Smalley's book, *9 Lies That Will Destroy Your Marriage and the Truths That Will Save it and Set it Free*.) You could begin, after obtaining their agreement to listen, by stating, "I'm starting to understand some things about myself. I think the reason I... (fill in one of your reactive cycle reactions) is because I am really afraid of... (fill in one of those deeper level feelings). And, I think those feelings might be related to some things that happened earlier in my life, like... (share the story).

Remember to give your spouse opportunity to summarize what they are hearing from you, and give them clear signals when you see that they understand. The Heart Talk will be complete when you spend some time listening to their feelings as well. Your spouse will likely experience some emotion learning about you and your past. Give them a chance to help you understand their heart too.

This type of dialog can also lead to new discovery. Your spouse may have questions or ideas about some of your deeper emotions and where they come from. Keep an open mind. Often someone close to us like our spouse can help us gain significant clarity about our heart.

A horizontal film strip graphic with four frames. The second frame from the left contains the text "Episode 1".

## Episode 1

This is about understanding yourself more deeply. You are probably a lot more complicated than you give yourself credit for. This is not a bad thing, but part of the complexity God designed into you. It is all part of the adventure of living in an intimate relationship like a marriage. Note below how the Heart Talk went and what you feel you might have gained from it in the way of deeper self understanding.

Record below any observations or insights that emerged when you and your spouse had a Heart Talk about your Reactive Cycle:





## Safety

*"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity". Proverbs 17:17*



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**SCRIPT:** *"Three Sides of Pamela"*

**SETUP:** *The episode finds Pamela sitting at a table on the patio of her home under an umbrella. There are two small children playing in the yard but Pamela is deep in thought. As the dialog begins to unfold, duplicate Pamela's appear in the episode representing different sides of Pamela. Pamela is having a conversation with several different emotions all being felt at the same time.*



**Pamela #1:** *(holding what looks like a cell phone bill in her hand, with a tone of confusion)* I just can't believe this, how could he after all we have been through? This can't be. He promised he would never call her again. What does this mean?

**Pamela #2:** *(angry and self righteous)* I'll tell you what it means. It means he is a liar! He always has been a liar! And, this is just further evidence of it. He never meant those promises about ending the affair. He's too weak and selfish to stand up to that woman. He is back in it and lying just like before.

**Pamela #3** *(calm and soothing)* Now, wait a minute, there may be an explanation for those calls. After all they do work at the same place. There are only two calls and they're separated by more than a week. Maybe there is some explanation. You know what happens when you start assuming and jumping to conclusions without all the information.

**Pamela #2** *(angry and insistent)* It's no use, this whole thing is a waste of time. The smartest thing to do right now is to gather up the kids and go stay with your parents. That'll show him. He needs to know we mean business!

**Pamela #1** *(still holding the cell phone bill)* This looks really bad, but it is true I don't have all the information. I need to talk with Richard before I make any decisions.

**Pamela #3** *(supportive)* That's it. Take your time. You are already not reacting like you would have in the past. Remember what you learned at the Intensive. You need some space to calm these buttons (looking toward Pamela #2) before you choose a response.

**Pamela #2** (*becoming more intense*) Are you crazy? The whole reason you're in this mess right now is 'cause you didn't leave him when you had the chance. What about taking care of yourself? They talked about that at the Intensive too you know.

**Pamela #1** (*gathering herself as if she is making a decision*) I know this looks bad and I am scared of what it may mean. But I want to do this differently. Even if it is as bad as it looks, I can still choose to leave. But I will do it calmly and with conviction, not as some panic reaction, like a "crazy" woman. (*pause*) Just like I learned at the Intensive, I will take solid hold of my heart here and not let my wellbeing in this situation be determined by Richard. I am scared, but I am strong, and I will take care of myself in a way that gives us every chance of recovering as a couple. I love Richard, and I am choosing to continue to love him, in spite of this evidence that he may have betrayed me again.



Is Pamela doing the "right thing"? What if Richard has been talking on his cell phone with the woman he had an affair with? These are dangerous waters for Pamela. This is a critical challenge to the progress she and Richard have made in recovering from the trauma of infidelity, brought on by Richard's affair. How can Pamela be safe in this situation? It looks like she is trying to be careful and reason with herself as to what her options are, while acknowledging how afraid she is. There are at least two sets of options available to Pamela. The first we see demonstrated in the above script. Pamela is responsible to guard her own heart. During Intensive Couples Therapy at the Focus Marriage Institute we frequently spend a good amount of time helping husbands and wives become more attentive to their own heart and find how they can create safety for themselves. One of the ways this is illustrated is with a small teddy bear. The bear represents a heart of indescribable worth and immense vulnerability. This "life treasure," our heart, was placed within us by God Himself. Further, we are expected by God to be good stewards, or managers of this heart he has given us.

My first responsibility is to be a competent steward of this treasure. A steward is someone who is responsible for something of value that is owned by someone else. Further, a steward protects and invests in the treasure placed in their charge. God is the creator and ultimate "owner" of a human life. He has given you and me the responsibility of caring and managing the treasure represented by the human heart. So, my first option in creating safety for this heart given to me by God is to remain in constant contact with it. This means I don't ever let go of it entirely. In an Intensive this might be illustrated by keeping one's hand always on the bear, symbolic of maintaining contact with one's heart. In a healthy relationship, this heart is always moving, sometimes far extended toward my spouse so they can make contact with it. Other times held close and protected, but my hand is always in contact with my heart. I never <give> my heart to someone, but frequently choose to <share> my heart.

Right after I realize I have within me a heart placed there by God as His "life treasure," and I am responsible for being a steward of that heart, I realize my spouse has a heart as well. And, my spouse's heart is also God's "life treasure" placed in them. It also is of indescribable value and is immensely vulnerable. So, the second way I go about creating safety is the manner in which I position myself toward their heart. I want to take a posture toward their heart indicating I understand its value and vulnerability. My posture suggests I am prepared to honor and respect the vulnerable treasure that is their heart. When I do this well it encourages my spouse to trust me and open their heart to me. This offering of their heart is a gift and it is a privilege for me to make contact with them. Let's look at how Pamela and Richard attend to their hearts as the next scene picks up with Pamela trying to approach Richard in a way that honors his heart as well as her own at this dangerous and vulnerable time.

**SCRIPT:** "We Need to Talk"

**SETUP:** It is now later in the day. Richard is home from work, sitting in an easy chair, remote in hand, surfing the channels. Two children are coloring on the floor.



**Pamela:** *(walking into the room, the cell phone bill in her hand, folding her arms across her chest, with a serious tone)* Richard I need some time to talk with you.

**Richard:** *(looking up with concern, shutting off the TV)* Sure, this sounds serious. Should we go in the other room? *(Richard gets up out of the recliner, and the two of them walk into the kitchen and sit down at the table.)* What is it? I can tell you're upset about something.

**Pamela:** *(taking a deep breath, and looking as though she might cry)* First, let me just say I feel like the last few months have been the best of our whole married life. I know in the past when I was afraid I could come at you with guns blazing and I really don't want to do that right now. I'm trying to come to you in as safe a way as possible. I want to be conscious of your heart just as much as I'm aware of my own. *(with nervous laughter)* And, right now my own heart is bordering on panic.

**Richard:** *(leaning forward with concern)* Wow, this sounds big. What is it? What has you so worried?

**Pamela:** *(bringing the cell phone bill from under the table)* We got your cell phone bill today. There are two calls on the bill from Rachel. *(Richard takes the bill, leans back, studying the bill he sighs heavily, Pamela continues with tension rising in her voice.)* You promised you wouldn't ever speak to her again, and if you did you would tell me so we could talk it through. I'm really trying hard not to panic here. What can you tell me about this?

**Richard:** *(running his hand through his hair, with sympathy)* Oh, Pamela, I can see how this looks and why you would be so scared. To tell you the truth I'm trembling right now myself. Everything that is running through my head sounds so defensive and guilty. I so much don't want to react like I used to and immediately go on the defense. I am so sorry this happened. If I were you I would be so mad right now. As lame as it sounds, I don't know how these calls got on there. I promise you, I haven't spoken to Rachel since we got back from the Intensive. Even at the office when I see her, we don't speak.

**Pamela:** *(anger starting to build)* How can you say that? That's her phone number isn't it? How can I believe you when this is so much like before when you were lying all the time?

**Richard:** *(calm)* I know, I know. I don't blame you for being upset. This looks really bad. It's ok. I may be able to explain it if I can just think through these dates. *(pause, Pamela is looking out the window, near tears, Richard is studying the bill)* Can I have a few minutes? Let me get my appointment book and check these dates and times. *(Richard, leaves the room and returns with what appears to be an appointment book)*

Let me see. *(Looking at the bill)* This call was made at 1:13pm on the twelfth. *(looking at the appointment book)* I was in the office that day, but... *(pause)* wait a minute, I also keep notes on where my team members are. On the twelfth, Joe was on a sales call, I remember he went with Rachel on that call. He needed someone from her department to go. Let me call Joe. *(Richard picks up his cell phone and dials a number)* Joe, this is Richard. Hey sorry to bother you at home, have you got a minute. *(pause)* Thanks. Say I was looking at my cell phone bill. Do you remember going on a call last month to A&G Limited? *(pause)* Wait a minute, I'm

going to put you on speaker. *(Richard presses a button on his phone and Joe's voice is heard)*

**Joe:** Yeah, I remember calling you right after lunch 'cause I needed to check some numbers with you before we went back into the meeting. I remember it because I forgot my cell phone and I borrowed Rachel's. The same thing happened the following week. I can't seem to remember where I set that thing down. It was a good thing Rachel had hers. I know I called you at least twice on her phone. So, you probably got two calls from her number. Is that what shows up on the bill? *(Pamela is starting to cry)*

**Richard:** *(looking at the bill)* Yeah, that's what I got here. Thanks. That helps clear up some confusion for me. See you tomorrow. *(Richard presses the button on his phone, reaches for Pamela and the two embrace.)*

**Richard:** I'm so sorry Pam, You did such a great job not reacting to this whole thing. You are the most amazing woman in the whole world. I'm so sorry my stupid behavior put us in this mess in the first place.

**Pamela:** *(still embracing Richard, through tears)* Thanks for being patient and understanding. You did good too. *(pause, she pulls back from Richard and with humor)* For a minute there I wasn't sure though. *(Both laugh, each wiping tears, and hug again)*



Isn't this what we all hope for? In a moment of dangerous vulnerability we discover we can safely process an issue and come through on the other side, closer and more confident about ourselves, our mate and the relationship. Safety -- my own as well as that of my partner -- makes all the difference. It isn't a contest about whose heart is more important and therefore requires all the attention. No, it's about both hearts being regarded and attended to at the same time. That's part of why God gave us two hands: we have one to always have a hold on our own heart, while we reach our other hand to contact our spouse's heart. When both hearts are extended, like two teddy bears held out between us, each being supported on its own and each being stroked by the other spouse, we have a "Love Fest." Yahoo! That feels like victory. It is especially triumphant when it can occur in the context of a potentially vulnerable and dangerous moment, like the one portrayed by Pamela and Richard.

Consider the directions and questions below to get more of a handle on how you are establishing and maintaining safety in your marriage.



### Editing Your Love Story

What have you been prone to do with your heart in the relationship? How well have you attended to your own heart? Have you let it go in some important way through handing it over, neglecting it, or hiding it away?

Is there a critical step you can take to maintain contact with your heart?

Use the space provided below to write a note to your heart about your intent to be a good steward of your heart.

*Dear Heart,*

How would you like to appear to your partner's heart? What do you need to bear in mind to help you be aware and attentive, even caring, toward your spouse's value and vulnerability?

The header for Episode 2 features a grey film strip graphic with sprocket holes. The text "Episode 2" is centered within the film strip in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

## Episode 2

Use the space provided below to write a note to your self about being caring toward your partner's heart.

*Dear Heart,*

*(About (spouse's name) heart)*

Having taken the above steps to examine the manner in which you care for you own heart and you spouse's heart. Ask your spouse if they would be willing to discuss together some of the insights you each gained from this study. Record any important discoveries you encounter from the discussion with your spouse.





## Letting Go of Trying to Manage What Isn't In My Yard



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**SCRIPT:** *"Bill and Jenifer Have a Talk"*

**SETUP:** *Bill and Jenifer are in the car on their way home from church. They are silent as they ride along. Jenifer begins to squirm and appears restless, emits lots of sighs and looks at Bill as if to try to read his thoughts. When it appears she is about to burst, Jenifer begins.*



**Jenifer:** *(emphatically)* Bill we need to talk.

**Bill:** *(Bill jumps and looks at Jenifer as though startled, then his shoulders sink)* Oh boy, I know what that means. What is it this time?

**Jenifer:** *(impatiently)* Have you signed up to go on that men's retreat at church? I thought we talked about that being a really good thing for you. You like the guys there and it's far enough out schedule wise you ought to be able to make time for it. Why aren't you going to go?

**Bill:** *(with irritation)* Who said I wasn't going to go? I just haven't got around to it yet.

**Jenifer:** *(with a pleading tone)* But there are only so many guys that can go. Once they have 20 signed up no one else can go. I'm afraid you're going to wait too long like *(with emphasis)* you always do.

**Bill:** *(exasperated)* Get off my back about it, will ya? It's not your retreat anyway. I'm still trying to decide if I can really go. There is so much to do. I don't know if I can afford to give up that weekend. Plus, I might enjoy going fishing instead.

**Jenifer:** *(more pleading)* But Bill you promised to work on our relationship and this retreat is supposed to help men be better husbands. You're making me feel like you don't care about me, or us. *(folding her arms, and face turns into a visible pout)*

**Bill:** *(whining)* I want to go, I just haven't completely decided yet. The more you harp on it the less I want to go.

**Jenifer:** *(whining)* Oh Bill! Now you're just being difficult for no reason. *(With a change in tone, as if rolling her sleeves up to finish a job)* How about if I call the church for you and get you registered? That way you won't have to think any more about it?

**Bill:** *(whining)* Jenifer, please don't do that. I'll get signed up when I'm ready.

**Jenifer:** *(with some mild excitement)* No, it's ok. I can do it. It will take a load off your shoulders. I can help this way. Let me do it for you.

**Bill:** *(with resignation in his voice)* Oh, alright. If you insist *(with some energy and straightening of his posture)*, but I still haven't completely made up my mind yet.



## **SCRIPT 2:** "Saturday Morning Breakfast"

**SETUP:** *It's Saturday morning at the Smith's. In the kitchen there are cereal boxes all over the counter; with bowls, spoons, milk jug, bread bag and crumbs in disarray. Susan is busy going back and forth between the sink and the dishwasher. She looks harried and slightly out of breath. Two children sit at the counter. A girl, age 8 in a soccer uniform and a younger boy, age 3-4 in pajamas and big cartoon character slippers. Tim is at the counter also in pajamas and a bathrobe.*



**Tim:** *(With a whining tone to no one in particular)* Why don't we ever have something good for breakfast? Saturday morning should be a time when we all sit down together and enjoy a big breakfast.

**Susan:** *(quickly reacting)* You could have made breakfast as easily as me.

**Tim:** *(picking up a cereal box as if to study the ingredients.)* I would hardly call this breakfast. What's in this cereal anyway?

*(Susan stops her activity and sighs)*

**Tim:** *(continuing)* Look, all you have to do is get up a little earlier. Some of those crepes you make with the mushrooms and Swiss cheese inside would be great, or the fruit ones with strawberries and the whipped cream on top. *(Change of tone)* When you do that do you have to make the syrup the night before?

**Susan:** *(in frustration)* You're hopeless! Do you have any idea how much we have going on today? Between Tabitha's soccer games and Chad's friend's birthday party at noon how could I possibly prepare a breakfast like that?

**Tim:** *(with an air of superiority)* You probably could if you wanted to. It's all about priorities and I don't think your priorities are in the right place.

**Susan:** *(getting more angry)* Priorities! What about you? Who said you could sleep in on Saturday mornings, and that breakfast was my responsibility anyway? *(Starting to cry)* Can't you see everything that needs to get done?

**Chad:** *(sounding as though he might cry too)* Daddy, don't make mommy cry!

**Tim:** *(exasperated)* I'm not son, Mommy and Daddy are just trying to talk. *(To Susan)* I'm just trying to help. If you would just get a little more organized you could do this stuff. You know, set your alarm for two hours before you have to be somewhere. Maybe make some of the stuff the night before, so you won't have to make

it in the morning. It's not hard. You just have to get straight what's important and what isn't.

*(Susan walks out)*

**Tim:** *(continuing)* Honey, don't be that way. I'm on your side.



In our Marriage and Couples Intensive programs there is a lot of discussion about personal responsibility. It is so natural to fall into the patterns portrayed in the scenes above. It is just so clear to us how much better things would be if our spouse behaved differently. etc. And, like in the two short dramas above we often think we are being helpful when we try to help our spouse manage their life better. We want to leave our own "yard," climb the fence and get in our partner's yard to just "help them along." It takes a little more insight and reflection to realize what we are really trying to manage is probably our own comfort, safety, preferences, etc.

As we stand at the fence and gaze into our spouse's yard we see so clearly what needs fixing, not realizing the disarray behind us in our own yard. Before we know it, our reactive cycle is spinning at breakneck speed. Stopping this cycle takes some pulling back from the fence and looking around at what is going on in our own yard.

Let's review the principle of personal responsibility again. It can be summarized in three statements:

- I am responsible for my thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behavior.
- I am not responsible for your thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behavior.
- In relationship we influence each other; we don't determine each other's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behavior.

The first two statements help me get clear about where I end and my spouse begins. The third statement reminds me of the realities of an intimate relationship like marriage. Since we influence and impact one another, it is important to recognize our responsibility in what that impact may be. Sometimes a person gets clear about the first two statements and concludes it doesn't matter what the other person thinks, believes, feels or does. An attitude can develop of "I don't care what they are thinking, believing, feeling, or doing; this is what I'm going to do." While this kind of clarity is a step in the right direction, where is the interest and commitment to be caring if I don't consider how I may influence my partner? The third statement keeps me honest in the relationship. Jesus so clearly articulated the principle of personal responsibility when he said,

*"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

*Luke 6: 41&42*

It seems a logical and appropriate, if not necessary, application of this passage to consider the category of "brother" to include our spouse. We could substitute the word "spouse" for the word "brother" and get an idea of how this might apply in our marriage:

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your spouse's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your spouse, 'Sweetheart, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your spouse's eye."

The principle of personal responsibility inevitably drives us to the issue of our own integrity. Few insights have as much power to transform not only our relationship but who we are and how we are known. We lose sight of personal responsibility because we are looking for something that will "work." And, "work" often means something that will produce change in our spouse. By substituting a new question in place of "What will work?" we can get focused on our own "yard," so to speak. The alternative questions sound something like; "Who do I want to be? What kind of person do I want to be in these circumstances? What kind of person did God create me to be? Who does He want me to be?" These questions direct my attention to my own "yard" and out of my spouse's "yard." More importantly they lead me to places where my efforts can actually yield results vs. the sadly familiar feelings of helplessness and powerlessness that come when I am trying to get my spouse to change.



### Editing Your Love Story

Use the following questions to take another step in strengthening your insight about what is going on in your own "yard." What is an area of your spouse's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or behavior you have wanted to manage? Think of something you have found yourself monitoring and reminding them of so that they can "stay on track."

What would it be like to never say a word about that "issue" again unless invited by your mate? We don't necessarily want to suggest you not address concerns when they arise, but for the purpose of this exercise, what would be the risk? What is the worst thing that could happen?

Assume for a moment that your spouse never changes in that area. What kind of person would you want to be under those circumstances? What sort of person would God want you to be?

Consider for a moment if you were to be more like that person you desire to be, that person God created you to be. What sort of impact or influence might that have on your spouse?

List three concrete changes in your life that could lead you to becoming that person. What are some changes in your own thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behavior you would like to make?

Consider following through on the changes you listed without saying anything to your spouse at first. Make a note if they somehow recognize your efforts on their own without any prompting from you. Use the space below to record your observations and feelings about pursuing your changes.

After some time has passed consider initiating a conversation with your spouse in which you affirm some way in which they refrain from trying to control or manage you in the relationship. Can you identify areas of the relationship in which you recognize your spouse respects your freedom, judgment, and perspective? Can you let them know how much you appreciate their willingness not to try and control or manage you in some important way? Make some notes on how the conversation went.



## Communicating Matters of the Heart



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**SCRIPT:** *"A Grunt Is Not a Compliment"*

**SETUP:** *We join Joe and Sarah in the middle of a common disagreement. Joe and Sarah are seated at the dining room table with the remains of an evening supper and some sort of cake not yet finished on the plates in front of them.*



**Joe:** *(earnestly, as he cuts another bite of cake)* Come on Sarah, you know I didn't say that.

**Sarah:** You did too!! You sat right there and said your mother is a better cook than I am.

**Joe:** *(Trying to stay calm)* No, I said that she makes great carrot cake and that I think she makes it from scratch.

**Sarah:** *(quickly, before Joe finishes)* No, you said carrot cakessss, *(emphasizing the s)* plural, which means she never makes a mistake when cooking.

**Joe:** *(matching Sarah's quickness)* What difference does it make? And that still isn't saying she's a better cook than you.

**Sarah:** Yes it is. Why would you say that if you liked my cooking? That was your way of criticizing my cooking with out saying it to my face.

**Joe:** Why do you insist that I don't like your cooking? When have I ever said you were a bad cook?

**Sarah:** You don't have to. You don't ever say you like my cooking. You just sit in silence and chew *(mocking Joe's chewing motions)*

**Joe:** Last night I complimented you on the pizza.

**Sarah:** *(nearly shouting)* You grunted!!! A grunt is not a compliment. Pigs grunt. Grunting is not complimenting my cooking.

**Joe:** I wouldn't have grunted if I didn't like it. I grunt at my mother's cooking all the time.

**Sarah:** *(pulling her hair with both hands)* Exactly my point. Last night was the first time you grunted in a week!!! *(pause, Sarah looks confused)* What am I saying? This is ridiculous. I can't even talk to you. *(Sarah storms out)* *(Joe drops his head in his hands in defeat)*





How does communication become so complicated? Part of the problem is that we don't say clearly what our heart wants understood, and we don't listen for the message of the heart in what the other person is saying. What do you suppose Sarah was really trying to say? Could it be that behind her complaints about Joe's lack of compliments was a fear that she might not measure up or be good enough for Joe? Was she afraid of failing? And, how about Joe, what was he really trying to say?

Could it be he felt judged for not giving more compliments? Could he have felt there was something unfair in how Sarah was interpreting his behavior? Further, who was listening in the above conversation? Both were talking, but it was pretty clear not much real communication was happening.

One of the ways to recognize communication drifting toward the reactive cycle is to recognize conversation spinning in a useless direction. At Focus on the Family we sometimes discuss "The Four Useless Questions in Matters of the Heart." When it comes to matters of the heart, we have come to see these questions as a waste of time. Invariably, these questions have a way of pulling us into our reactive cycle and leaving us feeling frustrated if not hurt and injured emotionally. Here they are:

1. Who is right and who is wrong?
2. Who is to blame?
3. What really happened?
4. What are we going to do?

**Who is right and who is wrong?** These questions are useless because they lead to competition between spouses. In matters of the heart, the last thing you want is competition over who is the most intelligent, informed, or reasonable. Even if you win the argument, what do you really gain? While you may win the upper hand and dominate the moment, will this result in greater feelings of closeness and unity? Hardly.

**Who is to blame?** This is a variation of the Who is right? question. The difference is that the question of blame also assigns responsibility. If I can determine that you are somehow responsible then I am absolved of responsibility, and you must do the changing. There is also the status of moral superiority at stake. Many spouses compete over who is the more virtuous of the two. We mistakenly believe if we establish the virtue of our perspective over our spouse's that they will somehow gracefully bow to our virtue and cooperate with our preferences. We further reassure ourselves that our preferences are superior because we are the more righteous of the two. So, blame and attributing blame becomes all important. However, our heart and our spouse's heart are left unattended to, if not outright wounded in the process.

**What really happened?** This question too quickly leads to competition between spouses. In the debate over whose version of the details is the right one, any concern for each other's heart is left in the dust. In some couples these debates can go on literally for years. Each time the dispute comes up over some detail, hearts are wounded and the fight is on. Spouses debate over whose version of the story will define the story and the parts each character played. Because our perspectives can vary so dramatically about details of events, this debate can often lead to feelings of betrayal. Our spouse appears to be lying and unfair, so any motivation to be open and vulnerable quickly evaporates.

**What are we going to do?** This is a tricky one, because all relationships must make decisions and set strategies for addressing numerous issues in the relationship. It is a useless question in “matters of the heart,” although not useless in an absolute sense. Recall the difference between communication aimed at completing a task or solving a problem (In the Intensive we referred to this kind of communication as “Work Talk”) vs. communication aimed at building understanding and cohesion in the relationship (“Heart Talk”). By focusing on what action to take, couples prematurely try to make decisions without establishing a solid foundation of emotional understanding surrounding the issue. When the issue is a matter of the heart, trying to problem solve first before making a heart connection quickly deflates the opportunity for loving partners to connect and encourage each other. The relationship sadly becomes a business transaction without the life and vitality of an intimate loving union.

Which of these questions was the focus in Joe and Sarah’s argument? Can you see how they quibbled about what was really said and how this took them away from hearing each other’s heart? By debating what was actually said, neither of them is understood at a heart level, and neither feels cared for.

Each of the “Four Useless Questions...” steers a conversation away from the longings, hopes, hurts, and fears of the heart. When addressing a concern of the heart, it needs all of our attention and care, for ourselves and for the other person. This may be the dilemma we feel. A big part of us is not really sure we want to be open and vulnerable. While we want to be understood at a deep level, we fear judgment and rejection. So we employ the strategy of being indirect and disguise our feelings. We are looking for signs of whether it is really safe to be open and honest about how we feel. The side tracks of the “Four Useless Questions...” allow us to hint at our feelings without really being disclosing and vulnerable. And, if we can win the upper hand in the conversation, we mistakenly believe we will be safer. Sadly, our avoidant and defensive interactions can lead to fulfilling the very fears we were trying to avoid.

Is there a way to circumvent this detour into our reactive cycle? Wouldn’t it be great if there were a simple strategy for avoiding the “Four Useless Questions in Matters of the Heart?” Fortunately there is. We encourage spouses to use a simple yet powerful discipline for steering clear of these detours away from each other’s heartfelt emotions, hopes, and anxieties.

## Curiosity

There is no substitute for genuine innocent curiosity. It is sometimes maligned and resented, as in the old adage, “Curiosity killed the cat,” or, the impatient teacher who ridicules a student for asking “stupid” questions. The best teachers, however, understand that a student motivated to discover and learn will ask questions and those questions will lead to discovery. In relationships, genuine curiosity can result in discovery, and discovery can lead to fascination, and fascination can lead to romance. This is a powerful strategy when feelings of love, affection, and attachment have seemed to wane or gone away altogether. A spouse who is experiencing a loss of love feelings has often stopped asking questions to try to understand themselves or their mate.

Pursuing curiosity gives a spouse the chance to discover something that may prove fascinating which then may lead to romance. Think about how a desire to know and be known drives two people during courtship. Feelings of love and valuing grow with each new discovery about the other person.

A great place to begin to apply curiosity is with our own heart. What are my secrets? How closely do I guard them? What is it that pulls me to such destructive thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors? Those are just some beginning questions. The list is never ending if I am generally curious about the person God has created that bears my name and walks in my shoes. Once curious about my own heart, I can be curious about my spouse's heart. What do I need to understand about their emotions to appreciate why they do what they do? Consider how Joe might have participated in the drama at the beginning of this study if he were genuinely curious about his own heart.

## Alternative Dialog



**Joe:** *(earnestly, as he cuts another bite of cake)* Come on Sarah, you know I didn't say that.

**Sarah:** You did too!! You sat right there and said your mother is a better cook than I am.

*(The stage darkens, Sarah freezes and the spotlight falls on Joe. This creates the effect of listening in on Joe's private conversation with himself.)*

**Joe:** *(frustration)* Oh man, here we go again. Why is she always arguing with me? It seems like she just looks for opportunities to harass me. *(pause)* Wait a minute. What is going on with me? Why am I so touchy about this in the first place? What button is getting pushed in me? What I'm really afraid of here is that I'm going to fail again. It seems I so often disappoint Sarah without really intending to. I clearly do not do a good job of letting her know how much I appreciate all her efforts to please me. It feels like if I miss any little thing she takes offense at it. I know I don't want to go around this bush again. Maybe if she knew how badly I feel about not being more open with her about my appreciation it would make a difference. At least, I think I would feel better. Maybe I can give this a try by asking her to hear me out. I'll apologize and tell her I know I'm lousy at recognizing her efforts and then I'll let her talk and try to listen without being defensive.

*(Joe turns to Sarah who has been frozen in time. The lights come up and Joe speaks.)*

**Joe:** I know, I know. Look, can we just slow down for a minute? I need to tell you something. *(Joe pauses, and Sarah relaxes in her chair)* It is true I am lousy at recognizing when you have tried to do something nice for me. I'm really sorry for that. I hope you can forgive me. I want to do better at that. I guess I need to work on being more direct about how I feel all the way around. I'm asking you to be patient with me, 'cause I really do think you are an awesome woman and I hate it that you don't feel that from me more.

**Sarah:** *(hesitation as if she doesn't know what to say)* Oh, I'm sorry... we are starting one of our fights again. Let's start over. It's so easy to talk to you when we talk this way.

**Joe:** Obviously, you have some feelings around this cooking issue. Let me try and listen to what this is really about for you.



Now where is the conversation likely to go? You don't need to be a marriage expert with advanced degrees to recognize how Joe being curious about his own heart and what was happening with Sarah's heart could make a completely different conversation possible.

And, when Joe offers to take the role of listener, he is taking the other step of being curious about Sarah's heart. After all, both hearts are important. It isn't a contest of whose heart is more important and should take prominence. Joe can choose to be as curious about Sarah's heart as he is about his own. In many ways it may not even be important where Joe begins with curiosity as long as he is curious about both his own and Sarah's heart. In this example we started with Joe being curious about his own heart first. The example could have started with Joe being curious about Sarah's heart first. As long as he gets around to being curious about his own heart, the chances for discovery and connection between Joe and Sarah are greatly enhanced. Notice how curiosity steers Joe away from judgment -- judgment about himself and Sarah. Judgment is such a killer of intimacy. Essentially, when we make a judgment about ourselves or our partner, we close the door on the discovery process. This is what differentiates judgment from curiosity. Curiosity is gathering information with an open mind. Judgment simply looks for evidence to support a conclusion already drawn. Stated in this way, curiosity and judgment are clearly different. Inside our heads and hearts in the heat of the moment, it can be difficult to know when judgment is starting to interfere with communication. The best clue may be that sense of finality and absolute conclusion that characterizes judgment. If I hear myself saying things like: "Aha! I knew that was what she was thinking... There it is again, that tone that says he believes I'm inadequate... This will never change... He is impossible. He always reacts this way..." Words like always and never are good clues that I am probably off the path of curiosity and well down the road of judgment.



## Editing Your Love Story

**Consider the following questions and exercises as a way to enhance your capacity for curiosity.**

Which of the "Four Useless Questions..." is an easy pitfall for you? Why do you suppose that is? How did you come to be so easily distracted by that sort of question?

Think of something you are really frustrated about in yourself, a thought pattern, belief, feeling, or behavior that seems to recur and trip you up. Make a note of the "something."

What do you conclude about yourself when you think of this personal frustration? What is your judgment of yourself in reference to the frustration?

Now apply some curiosity to that frustration. Suspend judgment for a moment and give yourself permission to be genuinely curious about that thought pattern, belief, feeling or behavior. Does this thing you are frustrated with in yourself serve some purpose for you? Is it learned or more a matter of temperament? How did it begin? When did you become frustrated with it and why? Use these questions to form some reflections about yourself and record them below.

What is a repetitive frustration you have with your spouse?

What kind of conclusions and judgments do you make about them as a result of that frustration?

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 4" is centered in the middle frame.

## Episode 4

Now what if you were to be curious about your mate around this frustration? Can you challenge some of your conclusions and judgments and ask questions that could lead to new information? Can you separate curiosity leading to discovery from searching for evidence to support your judgments? Try listing 5-6 questions you could ask your spouse about the "frustration."

Review the questions. Are they questions free of value judgment and accusation? Do they seem like genuinely curious questions that if you had answers to them, you might learn something new about your spouse? If so, carefully and sensitively look for an opportunity to have a "Heart Talk" with your spouse and see what happens. Record your experience, observations, and feelings about what takes place below.



## Music and Marriage: Playing the Same Notes or Playing the Same Tune



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Text for Short Film:** *duet*

**Setup:** No dialog. Screen fades open from black to a concert hall filled to capacity. There is the buzz of hushed voices and the movement of people finding their seats. The hall darkens and the curtain rises. A female violinist and male cellist are at center stage. As the camera zooms in on the pair the voice over narration begins.



**Narrator:** The violinist paused and looked at her partner, the cellist. Their eyes met, he nodded, she took a deep breath and they began the piece. A hush fell over the audience as the violin and cello began to fill the auditorium with their music. The violinist had performed many times solo and was very capable as a soloist, as was her partner the cellist, who was renowned for his abilities and talent. Together, as a duet, they became something entirely different. It was a familiar melody that either of them could have played solo but it became something wondrously magnificent as they played it together. The music flowed from them dynamically, each moving to the forefront at times while the other supported in the background. Harmony, melody, sometimes counter melodies, sometimes in unison they played the piece with passion and commitment. Both musicians were deeply invested in the performance bringing to it their individual talents and style. The result was breathtaking to the audience who erupted in applause at the conclusion; clearly inspired by having witnessed two artists create something together as a duet, so much more than the simple addition of their individual talents.

**Closing:** Close ups of each musician show them smiling at each other. The picture fades as they leave the stage, the cellist holding out his hand to the violinist as they exit the back of the stage, hand in hand, their instruments carried at their sides. Picture fades to black.



How great would it be if marriage was like the duet described above? Is it really possible for a man and a woman to have that kind of relationship? We at the Focus on the Family certainly believe that this quality of unity is what God always had in mind for marriage. A scene like the one above resonates with most of us. At a deep heart level most of us want our marriage to look something like that. Consider the following short story as another example of what marital unity can look like.

It would not be fair or accurate to say that tutoring saved Jim and Julie's marriage. However, to say their relationship has improved in the last two years since they began volunteering at an after-school program in their neighborhood would be a gross understatement. Something amazing took place as a consequence of their pursuing a common purpose in the after-school program. Jim and Julie were one of those couples who had poured their lives into their children. Their three children left the nest relatively smoothly and were prepared to meet life on their own. After nearly 23 years of defining their life by their children's triumphs and struggles, Jim and Julie felt lost when the youngest of their children married and moved to another state.

In the year following the last child's departure from the nest the relationship floundered. Jim seemed to hover around Julie when at home and he had trouble completing any of the household projects he now had time for but had put off for years. Julie became more and more irritable. Her days became increasingly filled with reading romance novels and watching television. When they would sit down in the evening for a meal the conversation seemed to be stuck on reviewing the latest news about their children. On one particular Sunday at church, a friend of theirs mentioned to them that a volunteer after-school program was being coordinated between the church and a neighborhood school. Jim and Julie lived in the same neighborhood and their children had gone to that same school. Over the years they had become acquainted with some of the teachers and school personnel. The friend suggested that Jim and Julie might enjoy being involved with the program.

Jim was excited almost immediately. He had always enjoyed being involved in their children's school activities and had earlier in his life considered becoming a teacher. Life circumstances had interfered with him pursuing that dream as a young man but the idea of volunteering with school children really appealed to him. Julie was a bit more skeptical at first, and worried that volunteering in the program would be too stressful for them.

What actually occurred was something like a miracle. Jim was put to work with a small group of sixth graders who were struggling with math. He met with a group of four boys twice a week and helped them with their homework for about an hour. Julie thought she might enjoy helping in the administrative office at the school. So, while Jim was tutoring, she would help with filing, answering phones, and occasional craft and decoration projects at the school. Within a very short time they increased their time from two days a week to every day of the week. Jim found he could manage and enjoy working with a larger group of students. His tutoring sessions became popular with students. Within just a few months there was a waiting list of students wanting to join Mr. Jim's math group of ten students. Julie had so much fun getting to know the other administrative staff at the school, and decorating the school common areas, that she wound up being the leader for several decorating projects connected to calendar holidays. In addition, she formed some relationships with some of the girl students who stayed after school to work with her.

One of the earliest triumphs was the interest the children showed in coming to Jim's and Julie's church. Before long Jim and Julie had a car load of kids they brought to the mid-week evening activities at church. Several kids made decisions to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Jim and Julie would light up when telling others about their experiences with the school kids. Even their children commented to them about how lively and energetic they seemed to be since starting to volunteer in the school program. As encouraging and admirable as all these results were, perhaps the most valued result of what took place after getting involved in the school program was what was happening between Jim and Julie. The irritable mood and lack of direction in the relationship seemed to fade as their conversations each day turned to their anticipation of that afternoon's adventures at the school. Not only did they have lots to talk about, they also found new reasons to affirm and support each other. Jim remarked to a friend, "I never knew Julie had such a flair for design and organization. I guess I have benefited from it all along. Seeing what she does at that school has given me a whole new appreciation for her talents and gifts."



There seemed to be a wonderful synergy of inspiration flowing between them as they gave themselves personally and as a couple to encouraging students and making the school a more attractive environment.

While this brief story may be fictitious, the dynamics displayed within it are very true indeed. A fundamental characteristic of a vibrant inspiring marriage is unity. Consider Jim's and Julie's story. Like many couples hitting the empty nest stage of their lives they were struggling to find a sense of united purpose. The children had made a relatively straightforward cause they could apply themselves to. When the last child left home, their sense of purpose and common vision seemed to fade. What happened as they started the volunteer program at the school was a new sense of vision and purpose.

Notice they weren't necessarily doing the same things. They were unified in purpose not in activity or even motivation, at least in the beginning. And, the sense of purpose and reward grew over time. Like the violinist and cellist, their relationship became more and more like a duet of beautiful music instead of instruments lying in a corner of the house gathering dust.

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24*

Sadly, many of us have interpreted the above passage to mean that husbands and wives lose their individual identities and become absorbed into some amorphous blob of sameness. If we look at other passages describing a Biblical definition of unity we certainly do not see a description of sameness. Consider Paul's description of the church:

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body... The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 1 Corinthians 12: 12 & 21.*

Can this not be applied to the union of a man and wife in marriage? Husband and wife would be part of the church Paul describes. It seems not just logical but even essential to our understanding of the marital union to emphasize harmony in marriage. Even in the passage in Ephesians 5, which so often has been used to justify a male domination model of marriage, the emphasis is on a collaborative harmony between husband and wife, similar to Christ and the Church, not simple dominance.

*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- Ephesians 5: 28 & 29.*

It can be argued the roles described in Ephesians and other similar passages are for the purpose of clarifying functions of husbands and wives, not for the purpose of dominance. Submission and authority may be useful concepts but they are sensitive concepts to apply when there has been so much abuse of authority in trying to define what marriage should look like. Unfortunately, these passages have been misconstrued to imply a model of marriage in which husband and wife are to be the same. Further, the definition of that sameness is male dominated.

It is a model that would look like two people sitting at identical pianos and the male player strikes the middle C key and the female player follows by striking middle C with him. Even if they were to play an entire tune in unison, what would be the point? If both are playing the same notes, one of them is non-essential. Indeed, spouses who feel dominated and controlled in their relationship often describe feelings of being “invisible,” “ignored,” or “unnecessary.”

It is not our purpose here to provide a theological treatise for “THE” Biblical model of marriage. We do however, want to affirm and draw attention to the element of harmony contained in the Biblical value of unity in marriage. While some in the church have promoted a male dominant definition of marital unity, it is not the definition we aspire to at Focus on the Family. We much prefer the analogy offered in the short stories at the beginning of this study: two whole, talented, and gifted people who are complete within themselves before God, investing in a grand duet. It is the unity of purpose contained in this picture which allows a man and a woman to each contribute their unique selves totally to the relationship. In this model, marriage becomes a wondrous opportunity to be united with another for the grand purpose of glorifying God the Creator. The relationship is a “duet” which affords both husband and wife the blessing of enjoying something larger and more inspiring because of the mystery of intimacy experienced in the journey of “play-ing” together.



### Editing Your Love Story

In the space below describe an experience you have had with your spouse in which you felt the two of you were united in purpose. Think of an activity or cause you pursued in harmony together in which you each contributed in uniquely personal ways.

If the above direction was difficult, describe what it would mean to you to be involved with your mate in such a way as to be a team or duet pursuing some common purpose or cause. If you feel you and your spouse have had moments of unity, describe how those experiences are valuable to you.

Now consider a time or an example of not functioning in harmony with your spouse. Jot down the instance or conflict.

What thought pattern, belief, feeling or behavior pattern in yourself contributed to you and your spouse not being on the same page, functioning in harmony?

As you reflect on the above situation, can you identify how some movement or change in your self could give you and your spouse an opportunity to become more "One"? What would be involved for you to take steps of change for the purpose of being more in harmony with your mate?

If you feel it would be safe to discuss the above reflections with your husband or wife, give it a try and note your observations and feelings about the discussion in the space below. Remember to make listening and validation of their feelings and perspective a priority during the discussion.



## Part Two

The next section contains episodes devoted to sharpening skills that were introduced to you in the resource or at the service you received from Focus on the Family. These studies are meant to assist you in not only becoming more aware of how you participate in your marriage relationship but help you also identify important habits that can result in lasting change.

You may recall a reference to the “Good News” and “Bad News” regarding relationship skills like communication, working to win/win outcomes, etc. The “Good News” is, “It’s a skill!” Practically anyone can learn a skill. A skill is not a function of genetic endowment. Certainly, inborn talent can greatly enhance how adept someone becomes with a skill but the skill itself is not dependent on some inborn capability. In addition relationship skills don’t require us to be stellar in our performance of the skill in order for the skill to have a positive impact on our relationship.

The “Bad News” is, “It’s a skill!” And, skills must be learned. That means practice, trial and error, patience and yes, more practice is needed. Fortunately, husbands and wives can grow together in these skills. You have to determine on your own to acquire and learn the skills, but you just might discover a “work out” partner in your spouse as they also seek to grow and become proficient in these relationship skills.



## Care of Self

*...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10*



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<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** *"The Ride Home"*

**Setup:** Josh and Lindsay are traveling in a car. They appear to be on an Interstate. It looks as though they have been driving for several hours.



**Lindsay:** *(turning from the window and looking at Josh, with confusion in her voice)* I still don't get that caring for yourself stuff. What did they mean by that anyway? I don't have a clue what that is supposed to look like. Between you and the kids and my job, when am I supposed to take care of myself?

**Josh:** *(shifting his position behind the wheel)* I'm not sure I completely understand it either. It sure was nice this week being able to just have some time for us. I think part of it is making sure we look at our priorities. When you think about it, it's like they said, we spend so much of our time giving out, when it comes time to give to each other, there's like nothing left.

**Lindsay:** *(moaning)* I know. I just don't know what to do about it. I never realized how much my being tired all the time had to do with not taking care of myself. I was just mad at you for not taking better care of me. I still want you to care for me, but now, I get it. I can't rely on you to take care of me. I just don't know how to do it for myself. *(moaning again)* What's going to keep us from just falling into our old patterns of running frazzled all the time?

**Josh:** *(concerned)* So you're worried about nothing changing. You feel at a loss as to how to start taking better care of yourself, even though you get it that you need to do that.

**Lindsay:** *(smiling, and pushing Josh's arm playfully)* Wow, that sounded good. Yes, you heard me. That's what I mean.

**Josh:** *(smiles at Lindsay, and looks back to the road)* Well that certainly makes sense, I'm not sure how to do it completely, either. I do know things sure seemed different between us, when we started to understand how depleted we both have been. I feel so bad about neglecting you and our marriage for so long. *(laughing under his breath)* And, to think all this time I thought pushing myself at work like I did, was what I was supposed to do. How could I have been so blind?

**Lindsay:** *(straightening in her seat)* So, you're not sure how to take care of yourself either. And, you feel bad about neglecting me and our relationship all this time.

**Josh:** *(turns and smiles at her)* Yeah, that's what I mean. Hey maybe we really can do this Heart Talk stuff.

**Lindsay:** *(folding her hands in her lap, with a tone of humor)* Well, I guess we're just going to have to pray about this and do some brainstorming to come up with some win-wins, right?

**Josh:** *(laughing)* Yeah, I guess so. Let's try this out. We might as well. We got four more hours to go before we get home. Surely, we can come up with something.

**Lindsay:** *(smiling)* You can keep your eyes open while we pray. I think God understands you're driving.

**Josh:** Sounds good. Should I start or do you want to start?

**Lindsay:** *(closing her eyes and bowing her head)* I'll start. *(pause)* Father, we are so thankful for all the insight we received from you at the Intensive. Thanks for Focus on the Family, our therapists, and everybody in our group. It was such a special time. *(pause)* Lord, we now understand that you expect us to be good stewards of the hearts you placed in us. We confess we have not done the best job in that department. We are asking you to help us. Help us see what you see. Help us to understand how to really do a good job of caring for our hearts so we might be a blessing to each other, the kids and others you have placed around us. We want to honor you with everything we do. *(pause)* *(The view changes to seeing the top of the car as it travels down the Interstate. As the car begins to drift into the distance, we hear Josh's voice)*

**Josh:** *(with humility)* And Lord, forgive me for being so blind to how I have not only neglected Lindsay and the kids but how I've neglected you, and my relationship with you. Like Lindsay, I too want to honor you in all areas of our lives, help me, help us... *(Josh's voice fades away as the car drifts into the setting sun on the Interstate)*



It sure looks like Josh and Lindsay are trying to take another step in their recovery as they head home from their Intensive. And, they have chosen a very important place to begin, caring for oneself. It is staggering how many people report in Intensives that they neither feel permitted, nor know how, to really genuinely care for themselves. Many confess feeling confused about how to place a priority on their own wellbeing. They have become accustomed to assuming that thinking of themselves would be selfish and displease the Lord. An easy confusion to occur when trying to begin healthy care of self is to assume it is only about taking in, or receiving. We recognize, "I need more rest," or "I don't take enough breaks for fun." These may indeed be important to good personal care, but more important than simply receiving more is the notion of balance. People who take great care of themselves on close examination have a dynamic balance of receiving and giving. Often the assumption is made that one must stop giving and start receiving in order to take better care of themselves. This is an oversimplification of the problem of self neglect. Neglecting the heart God has placed in us is as much about how we are giving as it is about how we are receiving. Great self care entails a dynamic flow of receiving and giving. It is this balance that we need to be more intentional about and conscious of.

## Domains of Care of Self

Armed with the principle of balance in giving and receiving, we can then begin the task of monitoring how well we are balanced in four critical domains of caring for ourselves.

**Physical** – The receiving part of taking care of myself physically may be found in looking at my patterns of diet and rest. If these are unhealthy then my physical well-being, the “temple” (I Cor. 6:19&20) God has given me will not be healthy. The giving part of my physical well being would be how my body is exercised. Do I get adequate healthy exercise to strengthen and tone my muscles and keep my heart in good working order? If either of the giving or receiving is out of balance my physical well-being will suffer.

**Mental** – This part of my well-being has to do with my mind. The receiving side would be what I feed my mind. What do I allow my mind to focus on, where do I allow my mind to be entertained, where do I find stimulation and learning? The giving side would be how do I let what I learn, observe, and discover bless others? ? Do I seek stimulating discussion in which I test my knowledge and insight with others important to me? Do I challenge myself by teaching someone else what I know or do I simply hold it in for my own private entertainment? Again, balance is the key to a stimulating, vibrant mind.

**Emotional** – The emotional domain of course pertains to our feelings and emotional experiences. The receiving side would be how I go about receiving affirmation and compliments from others. Do I accept the affirmation with grace, appreciation, and humility or do I resist and deny others’ attempts to encourage me? Also, my self talk would be important here. The little voice in my head that carries on a running commentary during my waking hours -- what does it say about me? Do I speak truth to myself in love? Do I listen openly to my conscience?

The giving side of my emotional well-being would be expressed in how I open my feelings to others who are important to me. Do I let others know what I am feeling? Do I seek resolution of conflict in a way that honors my own feelings on the matter as well as theirs? I also give emotionally when I give affirmation and appreciation to others. I give emotionally when I offer support and understanding, when I work at being a good listener. The emotionally balanced person has a ready supply of attention, kindness and support to offer others when called upon. The emotionally unbalanced person will likely withdraw from emotion in others, give out of obligation and duty without vitality, or substitute gratification of some physical desire for genuine heart connection with others.

**Spiritually** – It may be apparent at this point that each domain of caring for self overlaps and impacts the other domains. This is especially true regarding our spiritual well-being. Our relationship with God undergirds every aspect of our well-being. Again the principle of a balance of giving and receiving applies.

We receive from God as we listen to His voice in prayer. As we study the Bible. As we listen to the preaching of His Word. As we contemplate His goodness and love for us. As we imagine His caring for us as a loving Father, intent on our being perfected into the awesome creation He designed us to be. We give when we worship and when we obediently follow the instruction we have received from His Word. We give spiritually when we give to the needs of others from our own resources. The balance provides us with a confidence in our faith that sustains us when giving is hard or when we are confused by adversity in our circumstances. The balance keeps us on track when life around us doesn’t seem to make sense.

## **The Role of Relationships**

By monitoring each domain and attending to each domain on a daily, even sometimes a moment-by-moment basis, we are being good stewards of the “life treasure” placed within us. Notice how each of the domains may be impacted by our relationships and will also influence those relationships. Relationships are a key component to each domain. Relationships provide a ready opportunity for both giving and receiving in each of the domains. Monitoring our relationships is critical to maintaining the balance of giving and receiving we desire in all the domains.

This is certainly true as applied to our marriage. The marriage relationship is designed by God to support each of the domains of caring for self. In this way our marriage is our most obvious and most readily available relationship for caring for ourselves. Sometimes conflict, hurt, fear, etc. interferes with the marriage being the safe environment it was meant to be. This reality does not change the design present in marriage. Interestingly, when spouses are doing a good job of balancing the dynamic of giving and receiving in their personal life, this pours into the relationship in very rewarding ways. A husband who has cared for himself through the day has energy to be a good listener when he comes home at the end of the day. A wife who has been discovering new things about her responsibilities and is stimulated mentally by what she has learned is eager to share her new insights with her husband. Husbands and wives pursuing personal relationships with God that prepare them to be sensitive to each other's needs are ready and willing prayer partners as the challenges of life unfold before them. There is no substitute for the health and wellbeing of the individual spouse. Bob Paul and Greg Smalley in their book *The DNA of Relationships for Couples* state, "Taking care of yourself is always in the best interest of all parties involved, because you can't give what you don't have. Receiving and giving are integral parts of good personal care. If you receive and don't give, what you are hoarding becomes stale and useless. If you give and don't receive, you eventually become empty. Excellent self-care, then, requires finding a healthy balance between giving and receiving." (Pg. 226)



## Editing Your Love Story

Take a few moments and consider the Caring for Self Assessment tool below to increase your awareness of how well you may be taking care of yourself. Make a mark on each line for Giving and Receiving, to rank how well you believe you are doing in each domain of caring for your self. A rank of 10 means you couldn't be better, a rank of 0 means you couldn't be worse.

### Caring for Self Assessment

#### Physical

*Receiving: Diet and rest*

*Giving: Exercise and physical activity*

#### Mental

*Receiving: Study, learning, activities of discovery and stimulation*

*Giving: Teaching, reporting, explaining a concept to others through writing or discourse.*

#### Emotional

*Receiving: Accepting attention, support, affirmation, and understanding from others*

*Giving: Expressing emotions, listening to others, expressing support, affirmation, and understanding to others*



## Spiritual

*Receiving: Bible study, prayerful meditation, listening to sound Biblical teaching*

*Giving: Praise, worship, fasting, giving resources of time, energy, talent skill and finances.*

Now look back over your rankings, what do you notice? Where are you doing a good job and where do you need to put some attention and effort?

Who are some of the people in your life with whom you experience a good balance of giving and receiving with? As you list the relationships, indicate which domains are impacted by each relationship.

Are there some people in your life where there is an imbalance of giving and receiving? As you list those relationships again indicate which domains are impacted by each relationship.

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 6" is centered in the middle frame.

## Episode 6

Now review the two lists. Do you see any relationships that need affirming or adjusting? Of those people with whom you experience a giving-receiving balance, consider how you might let them know of your appreciation for that balance in your relationship. Of those imbalanced relationships, how could you go about addressing the imbalance? Make some notes of your thoughts, insights, and plans.

Now discuss these plans in a "Heart Talk" with your spouse. Make note of any important insights or adjustments you want to make as a result of the "Heart Talk."



## The Blessings of Space

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**Script:** *"Waiting for the Bell to Ring"*

**Setup:** *The episode opens on a boxing ring in an empty arena. The edges of the picture are fuzzy, as if watching a dream. The arena is dark except for the light on the ring itself. A man and woman stand in the ring. They are barefoot and dressed in casual clothes with sweat soaking through their clothes. Their hair is in disarray and fatigue is showing on their faces. They are facing each other, with oversized boxing gloves poised to punch. The episode joins a struggle that has been going on for some time. Initially their voices are muffled and indistinct. As the camera moves in and the view is closer to the action, the sound comes up and their angry voices can be heard and understood.*



**Husband:** *(throws a jab and declares)* You don't care about me!

**Wife:** *(staggers back for a moment then steps forward throwing a left hook)* You only care about yourself!

**Husband:** *(his body twists and contorts, then he delivers an uppercut)* You think money grows on trees!

**Wife:** *(her head snaps back, then she counters with a body blow)* You never do anything nice for me!

**Husband:** *(he doubles over at the waist, then responds with a combination of punches)* You would rather spend time with your friends than with me and you never initiate sex!

**Wife:** *(falling to her knees, she slowly rears back and delivers a blow to the groin)* You never share your emotions with me or tell me you love me!

**Husband:** *(There is a sound of air leaving the husband's lungs as he falls to his knees.)*

The bell rings. Both slowly rise to their feet appearing exhausted and shuffle to their respective corners. Both appear winded as they plop down on a stool. Fade to black.



Does the reactive cycle ever feel like a boxing match to you? Do you ever wish you had a bell that could end the struggle and allow you the opportunity to go to your corner? How did you wind up in a boxing ring in the first place? It is laughable to think someone might walk away from the altar at their wedding anxious to begin sparring with their mate in a boxing ring. Yet sadly for many this is a comparison very close to home.

Indeed, for some the competition in the relationship has deteriorated to actual violence at times. For these couples the above imaginary boxing match might not be imaginary at all. For these spouses, having some skills to avoid escalation can mean the difference between a common marital squabble and an incident of actual physical violence. So how can we stop the reactive cycle from escalating to a situation where we feel like opponents in a boxing match? The next script offers some hint of how using space could serve a couple trying to avoid their reactive cycle.

**Script:** *"I Need Some Space"*

**Setup:** *The modest bedroom of Bill and Julie. There is a queen size bed with two night stands with lamps on either side. One stand has an alarm clock resting on it, the other holds a Bible. There is a chair in the corner with clothes stacked on it. A long dresser with an attached mirror is along one of the walls. Some loose change, nick-knacks and pictures are scattered on the dresser top.*



**Bill:** *(Bill is pacing in the bedroom, mumbles out loud.)* Aaagh! Come on, get over it! Why did she call that timeout? Doesn't she want to solve this? What's wrong with her? Can't she see how important this is to me? Does she have to be so mean about it all? She doesn't even care about me! *(Bill stops, leans on the dresser. Looks in the mirror and continues)* Why did I yell at her? She makes me so mad. If she would just listen.

*(sighing deeply he leans closer to the mirror)* Wow, I am really angry. Alright, what did they tell me in that Intensive--what button got pushed? *(Pause)* I feel pretty helpless right now. I guess I am afraid that I won't get what I really want. I sure hate the way I acted out there, but I am not sure I want to apologize. Why do I have to be the one to apologize all the time?

*(pacing again)* Okay, what else did they say I should do in a situation like this? Oh yeah, something about looking at how I may have contributed to this. *(sarcastically)* Oh that's fun at a time like this! *(tone becomes serious again)* Alright, well, maybe I am assuming the worst. I guess she does care about me. After all, she did put gas in the car for me —and I didn't even ask for it. What was it they said about her buttons getting pushed? Yeah, *(pause)* maybe she's scared about something. I hate it that she's scared. Am I really that scary? How can that be? I guess I need to let her explain that.

*(Another sigh looking in the mirror again)* I didn't want to be scary. I just wanted her to see it my way. Okay, okay, I really want to know that she thinks my opinion matters. Gosh, it's hard to admit that. Maybe there is a better way to talk about this and not be so scary. I suppose if I were more conscious of my tone of voice and letting her speak too, she might be more willing to listen to what I have to say. I'm not typically very good at letting her speak when I feel really strong about something. I guess that's what I'm supposed to be working on. If I can just remember that listening gives me a better chance of being heard when it's my turn to speak.

*(Deep breath, closing his eyes and raising his face toward the ceiling)* Lord, help me to do this. I know I can't do this without your help. Thank you, Jesus. *(Bill's head lowers as he whispers to himself)* I can do this. I can do this. God help me.

*(a knock sounds at the bedroom door)*

**Julie:** *(tentatively and softly)* Honey, I think I'm ready now to try and talk. Are you ready?

**Bill:** *(opening the door with a sigh and a calm voice)* Yeah, I'm ready. Let's try again.



The skill of creating and managing space is essential for maintaining safety in a marriage relationship. Healthy relationships are characterized by flexing space and closeness. Rigid inflexible closeness can feel like a trap or prison where we are being suffocated. Rigid inflexible distance can feel like trying to live in a desert, alone and abandoned without the comfort of love and nurturance. Spouses who learn to use space effectively give themselves the opportunity to participate at their best in the relationship. Spouses without this skill can find themselves spinning in their reactive cycle, exhausted and depleted of the precious emotional energy needed to meet the challenges in the relationship.

In the scene above we see Bill and Julie trying to use space to break their reactive cycle. By asking for the "Time Out," Julie is creating space so she can attend to her own heart and protect the relationship from some reflex reaction common to her reactive cycle. By honoring the Time Out, Bill is honoring his wife's heart and finds an opportunity to attend to his own heart. Even though he doesn't want the space at the moment, by honoring her request he finds space for himself before they try to approach the issue again.

It is helpful to remember that our fears drive our reactions. Those reactions are like reflexes. They don't require much, if any, brain power. Yet, those reactions take us away from what we really want. Thus, if we want a better chance to get what we truly want, it helps to alter our reflex reactions. Creating space is what Bill and Julie are doing in the above script to slow down the reactive cycle and try to come together in a safer way. Creating space is a skill to help a person step back for a moment and reflect on what is going on in their heart and to reflect on what may be going on in their partner's heart. In the end, space is created so that you can care about what is going on for you and respond out of integrity.

A valuable tool for creating space that we at Focus on the Family sometimes recommend to spouses is the use of "Time-Out." A time-out is used in a sports context when one team is losing control of a situation or at least wants time to think through what they will do next. Generally, the team tries to re-group and set a plan for when the game resumes. They are trying to do something that will help them win the game. In a relationship context we can use Time-Out to create space when we recognize our emotional intensity is accelerating our reactive cycle reactions.

The aim of Time-Out is to manage one's emotional intensity. We sometimes make the mistake of believing it is the emotional buttons that are the source of the problem in our reactive cycle. We want to challenge you not to strive to eliminate your buttons. Remember that feelings need not be good or bad. They are an extremely valuable source of information to us. Our feelings are our best clue about what is going on in us at a heart level. So the goal is not to eliminate our buttons. Rather we want to understand our buttons, or fears, and become more skilled in managing them. Indeed as long as emotional intensity is not threatening our self control, then finding ways to express our feelings is what creates the opportunity for a heart connection with our spouse. It is emotional intensity we want to watch out for, the kind of intensity that leads us to escalate or withdraw impulsively during conflict. Time-Out is a method for managing this type of emotional intensity. It is important to understand how emotional intensity is a threat to our integrity and safety in our marriage. Reflect for a moment on what happens to a person who has had too much to drink. Alcohol has very definitive effects upon the brain. The person loses awareness of how loud they are talking or how they may appear to others, they become more impulsive, and their judgment starts to suffer dramatically.

In essence they lose their capacity to regulate their behavior and wind up at the mercy of their impulses.

Think about the last time you were really angry or really frightened. Was it not difficult to think clearly? For most of us emotional intensity leads us to be reactive as opposed to being thoughtful and measured with our actions. This is part of how God wired us to meet crises and threats to our safety. The problem is our emotions sometimes don't differentiate well between imagined and real threats. So, emotionally we may find our intensity growing as rapidly at the hint of sarcasm in our spouse's voice as it would if an intruder had burst into our home and threatened our children. The more intensely we feel the harder it is to use our brain to help us tell the difference. Space and time let the intensity subside and thus help us regain some brain power to choose how we want to respond.

Here is a simple Time-Out procedure that can be used to create some space and manage emotional intensity. There are three basic guidelines:

### **1. Monitor my emotional intensity**

Since it is my emotional intensity I am responsible for then part of exercising that responsibility is learning to be more self aware about the intensity of my feelings. I can do this by tuning in to the sound of my voice and any physical sensations associated with emotional intensity. Over time I can learn important signs that my emotional intensity is approaching a problematic level. It may be a particular tone of voice, a nervous twitch, or something like pressure in the chest that tells me my emotional intensity is starting to climb in a dangerous direction. Fortunately, emotional intensity builds gradually for most of us. The problem is that we may dismiss or not attend to the building intensity until we have already reacted reflexively to something. As I get better at recognizing signs of climbing emotional intensity, I can avoid some of the habitual behaviors that have caused injury to me, my spouse, and our relationship. When I become aware that my intensity is climbing, then I move to step two.

### **2. Seek space, ask for a "Time-Out"**

In this step I want to let my partner know I need some space. It is vitally important I let my partner know what is going on to help guard against confusion about my intent to withdraw at the moment. I might simply state that a button has been pushed and I am trying to process through it but still want to try and listen. Or, I may need to ask to stop the conversation and withdraw somewhere to regroup and do the work of attending to the emotions that are threatening to lead me to speak or act impulsively.

If my partner cooperates, the space I am asking for need not be terribly disruptive. If however, for whatever reason my partner doesn't want to cooperate with my request I still need to take responsibility to create the space I need. It may help to reassure my spouse that I intend to come back to the issues once I have calmed down. But regardless, creating the space is my best bet for protecting me, my spouse, and the relationship from some reflex reaction I am prone to do when my buttons are being pushed.

### **3. Return to discussion of the issue.**

Once my emotional intensity has subsided and my heart is more open, it is a good idea to reengage in the conversation. The guidelines for Heart Talk are great to apply at this point. The person requesting space or "Time-out" is probably in the best place to judge whether their emotional intensity has subsided sufficiently to try some Heart Talk. Be aware, if I ask for space and don't return to my spouse to re-engage the discussion, I am injuring the relationship by practicing withdrawal. The importance of returning to dialog cannot be emphasized strongly enough. Some couples even establish an agreement on how much time can be taken before returning to dialog. This is a way of reassuring each other that the space called for in Time-Out won't

result in destructive withdrawal. The bottom line is to return somehow to my partner so we have another chance to better understand each other and perhaps reach a resolution to whatever issue or challenge resulted in our buttons being pushed.

If we consider the drama earlier involving Bill and Julie we can see how they used Time-Out effectively to avoid something destructive taking place in their relationship. By using Time-Out they are giving themselves an opportunity not to be controlled by their reactive cycle but rather genuinely engage each other's heart in a connection which results in greater understanding and emotional intimacy.

### ***One more thought...***

Now that we have established the importance of using space to manage our fear buttons and the emotional intensity attached to them. Consider the opportunity created when asking for space or a Time-Out. This is an opportunity to attend to your heart at a time when you may be able to see most clearly what is going on because of how accessible the emotions are. We want to encourage you to use the space well.

One of the best things to help you during this time is to be curious about what is happening in your heart and your spouse's heart. Asking the Lord to help you see things from His perspective can be powerful as well. Remember, we are looking for ways to return to the relationship more safely, as a person of integrity, which gives us the best opportunity to get the heart connection we truly want.

Jesus gives us many examples of using space well. We especially see this displayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

*"He withdrew a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down, and prayed...  
and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops  
of blood falling to the ground." Luke 22:41 and 44*

Talk about emotional intensity! You know the story, Jesus is about to be arrested. He has taken his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane for his last night as a free man. He then moves a little further from them to create space for himself in the midst of the horrible circumstance he faces—his own death. He spends his time in prayer and is ministered to by an angel. It is the final bit of space he gets to privately speak with the Father and struggle with the task at hand. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, we are told Jesus went back and forth from his disciples to private prayer two more times. Once he has spent this time apart from them, it appears that Jesus' heart is prepared to do what he has been called to do which leads to salvation for all of us. Thank you Lord Jesus for taking the time to prepare your heart for the sacrifice you made. This is space well utilized.



### **Editing Your Love Story**

Take a minute and reflect on some ways you could recognize when your emotional intensity is climbing at a dangerous rate. What could be a signal to you that Time-Out is needed? Are there physical sensations or habitual thoughts or phrases you either hear in your head or say out loud that could be a signal?

In the drama with Bill and Julie, Bill asked himself some critical questions to help him attend to his heart and manage his emotional intensity. This was his way of using the space well. What sort of questions would be helpful to ask yourself during your Time-Out? Are there other ways you want to use the space well when you take a Time-Out?

A great time to make plans about using Time-Out is when there is not some immediate conflict at hand. Consider initiating a Heart Talk with your spouse about using Time-Out. What difference would using Time-Out make to your relationship? Would you want to follow the Steps to Win/Win to arrive at some basic expectations and mutual understandings about using Time-Out? Record some observations below about how the discussion went.

If you have an opportunity to use Time-Out, record below your observations of how it worked. What seemed to be most helpful about using the Time-Out? Were there any challenges to using Time-Out? What would you want to change about how you use Time-Out next time?





## Nurturing Myself



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**SCRIPT:** “Déjà vu”

**SETUP:** It’s 10:00 pm. Armed with a pair of yellow kitchen gloves, Nancy picks up a kitchen sponge and begins washing the dishes left over from dinner. She is obviously tired from a full day of work and a full night of meal preparation, laundry, running kids to activities, and getting ready for the next day. The garage door opens and she can hear Jerry pull in.



**Jerry:** (walks through the door stops briefly as Nancy looks up at him, speaks flatly and without emotion) Hey. (Jerry then continues out of the kitchen without any chance for Nancy to reply)

**Nancy:** (still standing at the sink Nancy’s voice is heard creating the impression of listening to her thoughts) Not even a smile.... “Déjà vu”. It’s happening all over again. He’s spending all day and all night at work. I’m here alone with the kids and all the work. (stopping her work with the sponge and staring at her reflection in the dark window above the sink) I knew it...he doesn’t care. He really never did. He says he does but he’s never around. All he wants is for everything to look good. He doesn’t want to know anything about me.

(head hanging down) Even if he did, why should he? I messed everything up the day I emailed Darrin. No matter what I do, I will never be able to take that back and Jerry will never forget it.

(taking a deep breath, sounding as though she is trying to gather herself and avoid crying) I can’t complain...I can’t complain.

Jerry says that he’s forgiven me (sarcastically) Yeah right, walking in with just a “hey” says I forgive you for sure! No wonder I went to Darrin. Jerry never gives me anything but a “hey”. (pause, and then with some emotion in her tone) I miss Darrin. Maybe I’m not over him.

(Nancy starts scrubbing the pan vigorously, with a judgmental scolding tone) I’m pathetic. I’m thinking about “him” again. If Jerry knew...it really would be over. (Tears begin to flow, as she begins to sob) I can’t stand this shame, I can’t seem to get away from it. I hate this feeling; I hate me. What’s wrong with me?

(pulling off her gloves, she runs out to the garage, gets in the car and sits sobbing at the wheel)



Nancy is clearly struggling with guilt and shame over mistakes she has made that have had hurtful consequences for her, for Jerry and their marriage. In addition to those guilt and shame feelings are feelings of hurt and neglect because her husband Jerry appears unavailable to her. She feels alone and uncared for. It is safe to say Nancy's buttons are being smashed intensely. She is in the vortex of her own whirling reactive cycle and hurting deeply as a result. Having this intimate window on her thoughts helps us appreciate how much she is hurting and how the feelings and internal reactions were set in motion. One might say Nancy is in need of some caring right now. Let's pause the action in this episode to explore some ways in which Nancy might be able to care effectively for herself. Don't worry, we won't leave Nancy sobbing in the car in the ga-rage; we will rejoin the action soon.

### **Where Does Nurturing Come From?**

When we were children many of us had parents who were nurturing to us. Not only did they provide for our physical needs, but our parents took steps to soothe and comfort us when we were hurting in some way. As children, God set parents as the primary source for nurture. Nurture is the process of nourishment, protection, support and encouragement. It creates the environment where a child's potential is most likely to be identified and realized. Nurturing allows a child to feel loved and to thrive. Even though a child eventually grows into an adult, the need and importance for nurture is still present.

In adulthood, we still need to be nurtured at times. Maybe not in exactly the same way as when we were children, but there is always a part of us that remains vulnerable and needs to be attended to. During times of discouragement, hurt, or life transition, knowing how to nurture ourselves can be critical to maintaining a healthy sense of wellbeing. Our parents no longer have the responsibility for nurturing us as adults, even though they can certainly be comforting and encouraging to us. Children are not a resource for nurturing us either because they need our nurturing. Granted, a child's attention, affection and understanding can be powerful in feeling cared for, but we are careful not to place the burden of nurturing ourselves on our children. There are at least two resources for nurturing when we need it that do not require caring from another person such as our spouse. There is the nurturing we can give ourselves and the nurturing we receive from God the Father.

### **Nurturing From God the Father**

The first and most important resource of nurturing can be found in our relationship with God. It is no accident that God is referred to over and over in Scripture as Father, a father eager to attend to our every need and who has sent his Spirit to be our Comforter. Referring to God as Father seems to be Jesus' favorite way to address God. Indeed, in teaching the disciples to pray, he begins, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." (Luke 11:2)

Using my imagination I can picture God as a Father who welcomes me and pulls me into his lap as Jesus did. In His embrace I can experience a deep soothing and reassurance much as I did as a child when one of my parents picked me up and held me to reassure me that everything would be okay, in spite of my fears and my felt pain. For some this picture of God may be hard to imagine due to hurts, disappointment, even neglect and abuse suffered at the hands of earthly parents. As hard as this may be, the picture and the image of God as a caring father is worth pursuing and developing for the purpose of being nurtured in the privacy of our own heart. When we allow God to nurture us it can bring peace, faith, and hope in ways that defy description, making a world of difference to us. The difference can be dramatic in the context of marriage.

When I let God nurture me as the loving gracious parent He is, my perspective on the hurt I've experienced with my spouse can be dramatically different. As painful as the relationship may be, experiencing God's care and nurturing may be the nourishment I need to weather the relationship storm I find myself in. His care sustains me in ways I couldn't possibly sustain myself. Being nurtured by God the Father directly addresses my fears of security when my marriage feels shaky and uncertain. It is so easy to panic during marital distress. We believe we will be left abandoned in some absolute way by our spouse because of the relationship problems. The presence of God as Father reassures me I am loved, valued and supported as I grieve the hurt and disappointment of my marital struggles.

This kind of experience simply can't be overemphasized and deserves all the attention we can give it. Ironically, this experience is received more than it is acquired. God's caring for me is not something I acquire through my own efforts but it is received as a gift from God. This experience of God as a caring, nurturing parent is most available to us in our surrender to God. It does not appear to be an experience we can create of our own design and effort. Even letting my mind imagine God as a caring father is simply a step toward experiencing God's actual care, His actual caring of me is so much more than my simple imagination of it. This caring and nurturing is a gift from God available as we let go and surrender to this relationship of caring. Many times our stubborn determination to somehow "make it" in spite of all that seems to be against us actually interferes with our receiving this nurturing from God. The discipline of surrendering to God seems to be central to experiencing His care, comfort, and nurturing. What is so amazing and so deeply fulfilling is that the experience of this nurturing from God grows over time as I grow to trust and surrender more and more of myself to Him. There is no end to His care and love for me.

### **Becoming My Own Best Friend**

Another powerful form of nurturing available to us without involvement from someone else is similar to the nurturing we might experience with a sensitive friend, mentor or even a spouse. There is something so powerful about being understood, validated and encouraged by a sensitive friend. What happens, however when such a friend is not available? What happens if the injury or hurt I am feeling is a consequence of the relationship with someone who I was hoping would be caring and nurturing? What if the relationship where the hurt happened is my marriage? Who will nurture you in these moments? We have already described how God as Father can be deeply comforting in such times. Knowing how to also nurture yourself as if you were your own best friend can be a tremendous compliment to the nurturing you receive from God. If you can only receive nurture when it is from another person, it leaves you dependent on others -- which will lead to greater feelings of helplessness, discouragement and disappointment. Indeed knowing how to nurture yourself may be a critical part of how you come to that place of surrender so you can experience God's nurturing. Much like how a trusted caring friend can support and encourage you to depend upon God, we can be that sort of friend to ourselves.

Many people are bewildered by the suggestion that they consider nurturing their own hearts. Most of the time, this is not a matter of being ill-equipped, nor unskilled. Rather it is a function of being unaware of the responsibility to do so. One of the best ways to begin to nurture yourself is to imagine stepping outside yourself and talking to yourself as your best friend might talk to you. A true friend is one who wants the best for you and is willing to extend empathy and compassion. She/he is also a person that will be honest even if the truth is uncomfortable. As strange as this suggestion may sound, most people recognize that there is an inner voice speaking in their thoughts on a regular basis. Sadly, this inner voice often for many people takes on an unfriendly form. For many their inner voice is one of judgment and ridicule. In effect, their inner voice sounds more like an accuser than a friend. In this way that inner voice may represent how we may be our own "worst enemy". The impact of harsh, negative, and condemning inner dialogue is just the opposite

of nurture. The net outcome is greater degrees of pain. Nurturing yourself can create an environment where you can feel safe with you. That's being safe with yourself. When our inner voice sounds more like an enemy we are unsafe to ourselves. Developing the inner voice of a friend to ourselves empowers us to be safe with our own heart. Consider this notion a step further. When a friend of yours is hurting what do you do? More than likely you try to show up in the presence of your friend's hurt similar to the steps listed below. Because you care about them, you will:

- 1. Listen to them.**
- 2. Be compassionate, value their pain and want something different for them.**
- 3. Affirm their value to you and to God.**
- 4. Confront the difficult issues (feedback) and point them to God.**
- 5. Affirm your belief in their ability to handle the struggle with honor and integrity.**
- 6. Help them come up with options for addressing the hurt.**

These six steps are core ingredients to the definitions of nurture and true friendship. When you provide these steps of nurturing to a struggling friend they experience your protection, support, and encouragement. Their value is affirmed. Nurture strengthens. Strength results in experiencing life at a deeper and more fulfilling level.

Imagine following these six steps with your own heart. Using these steps as a guideline, could you nurture yourself? Could you use your own inner voice in a "best friend" way? What would it mean to you if your own inner voice attended to your hurt in this way?

Let's return to Nancy's and Jerry's garage where we left Nancy sobbing in the car. There is an opportunity in this episode for Nancy to receive nurturing from God the Father and nurturing from herself like a best friend.



**Nancy:** *(Nancy's sobbing subsides for a moment. She appears to be trying to focus her thoughts. We hear Nancy's voice again narrating her thoughts.)* This feels familiar. I remember crying like this at the Intensive. That was such a cleansing feeling then; why does this feels so different? Why am I sobbing so hard? What's going on in my heart?

*(Nancy places her hands on the steering wheel, tilts her head back and closes her eyes)*

At the intensive, I was expressing my feelings of rejection, insignificance and *(pause)* feeling taken advantage of. I remember now -- I tend to react to those feelings by putting myself down, by trying to read Jerry's mind, and acting out my feelings. *(She sighs and her face clears as the tears stop)* Wow, just remembering that now somehow gives me some relief. Is it possible I'm doing those reactions again? Oh my, I think I am. *(picking up some momentum)* I felt rejected by Jerry's wimpy greeting which then led to feeling insignificant and taken advantage of. And, *(her hand slaps the steering wheel as she leans back in the seat).*

I started trying to guess his thoughts and feelings, putting myself down big time. I even acted out a bit by remembering some of the positive feelings I had with Darrin. *(shaking her head and wiping her eyes with her fingers)* This is amazing. I just went through a major internal reactive cycle, and I didn't even know it.

*(Looking out the driver's side window at the shelves stacked with cleaning supplies)* There's got to be a way to deal with this better than I was a few minutes ago. It's really sad that I feel ignored and insignificant to Jerry. I want to feel differently. His behavior isn't the last word on my real value. Whether Jerry sees it or not, my value is the same. *(her voice tone dropping)* I don't feel very valuable though.

*(Nancy bows her head as if to pray)* Lord what is the truth? What is the truth I need to see right now about me?

*(Her voice now sounding as though she is reading with great interest)*

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

*John 3:16*

*(With a deep sigh)* Thank you Lord, thank you for reminding me of your Word.

*(Nancy straightens in the drivers seat, raises her head, looks straight ahead, her voice sounds as though she were talking to someone in the car with her)* Nancy, you have a big heart. Loving another person and being loved is a God created desire. It is sad that Jerry misses out on you and you miss out on him. Thinking about Darrin is an attempt to get away from the pain of missing Jerry. No one likes pain so it makes sense why you would turn to thoughts of Darrin...but it really doesn't work. You end up feeling worse. The truth is that Darrin can never resolve the pain you feel about you and Jerry. So the people that really matter right now are you and Jerry, not Darrin. If you and Jerry didn't matter, you wouldn't be so sad. Is it possible that Jerry doesn't really know that you missed him today? Is it possible that all he saw was a blank tired face looking back at him too? Is it possible that he could be struggling too?

*(Nancy's reading voice is heard again)*

*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*

*1 John 3:18-22*

*(bowing her head in prayer again)* Father God, I recognize that there are times when I don't recognize my value. I look to others to determine my value and then I end up feeling cheated. I am so sorry God for looking towards others and not you. Thanks for reminding me of my value even when I don't see it. Thanks for not condemning my heart even though I do. Because you don't condemn me, I want to ask you for wisdom in approaching Jerry. I want to please you and not just mind read or turn to other things that will destroy me.

*(At this moment the sound of the garage door opening can be heard. Jerry, dressed in sweats, stops suddenly and sees Nancy in the car. A look of concern appears on his face. He approaches the driver's side window and knocks. Nancy opens the door as Jerry speaks)*

**Jerry:** *(with a tone of confusion)* What's going on? Is something wrong? I've been calling for you and looking all over. I was going to drive around the neighborhood to find you. Are you ok?

**Nancy:** *(Shaking her head side to side, softly she speaks)* Are you too tired to talk?

**Jerry:** *(with a tone of concern)* No, not at all, let's talk.

*(Nancy steps out of the car as Jerry offers her his hand and they walk into the house together)*



Is it possible Nancy is in a better place now to discuss her feelings with Jerry? Can you see how the nurturing from herself and from God made a difference in her mood and her motivation to address her hurt within herself and with Jerry? This is of course a fictitious scene but we believe it may be pretty close to the mark for how nurturing oneself can open doors for couples to address problems and conflict more sensitively and with more caring. Most of all this episode helps illustrate how one can take care of themselves in a nurturing way and not be trapped in the pain of helplessness and confusion.



## Editing Your Love Story

### Begin to nurture yourself!

To help you grow, take a few moments and make some notes in response to the following directions:

The next time you are with a friend, notice how you interact with them when they are struggling. How does it compare with the way you would like to be treated during a difficult time?

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 8" is centered in the middle frame.

## Episode 8

Think of a true friend that has been a tremendous support to you. How would you describe their friendship? Does your description fit what was outlined in this study? How is it different?

Notice how you speak to yourself. What are the prevailing themes of your internal conversation? If you said the same thing to your struggling friend, how would they receive it?

How have you allowed God to nurture you? Consider reading a chapter from Proverbs every day. Consider reading a proverb from different translations (King James, New International Version, The Message, etc). Record your thoughts and insights below.

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 8" is centered in the middle frame.

## Episode 8

What discoveries or insights would you now like to share with your mate about the practice of nurturing your self? Are there important ways in which your mate is able to nurture themselves that could be an example for you? What are they? Make some notes on what emerges in your conversation with your spouse about "Nurturing Self."





## Becoming a Gold Medal Heart Talker



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit  
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** *"I Know You Think You Know What You Thought I Meant..."*

**Setup:** *Amy and Scott, a couple in their late 20's are talking in the living room of their home. Amy is seated on a couch and Scott is standing behind a stuffed chair, looking as if he has been stopped on his way to another part of the house.*



**Scott:** *(turned sideways and with a tone of frustration)* So, you're saying now I can't go 4-wheeling with Jim and Bill this weekend?

**Amy:** *(defensively)* No, it's not that, I just think we have a lot to do around here for you to be going away for three days. That means the lawn goes another week not being mowed unless I do it while you're gone.

**Scott:** *(more frustration and a tone of confusion)* Is that a problem? 'Cause we can probably get that neighbor kid, what's-his-name, to do it if it's the lawn you're worried about.

**Amy:** *(more anger in her tone)* Why spend the money when we can do it ourselves?

**Scott:** *(more anger in his tone)* Because I want to go 4-wheeling! *(the tone becomes more pleading, almost childlike)* Bill says this place we're going to is awesome. It's 300 acres of pasture and woods and the guy who owns it lets his friends ride there all the time. We're going to camp out. There's even a park nearby with a river and a great swimming hole. It sounds really neat!

**Amy:** *(sounding hurt and as if trying not to cry)* And what am I supposed to do while you're off playing with your little boy buddies?

**Scott:** *(frustration)* Amy, come on, don't go getting all emotional, we talked about this. It's fine with me if you spend some time with your girl friends. Go to the mall, or a couple of movies or something. You always say you have a great time doing that stuff.

**Amy:** *(as if she is offended)* I like swimming at the river too. Did you ever think about that?

**Scott:** *(with confusion and frustration)* But you hate camping. Are you trying to tell me you want to go camping with us? Wouldn't you feel awkward being the only woman there? I know I would.

**Amy:** *(with a tone of dejection and disappointment, head down, as if she has given up)* I suppose you're right, I'll just find something else to do.

**Scott:** (*relieved, with excitement*) That's my girl. How about if we go see that new action movie Thursday night? That way you and I can get a little "us time" before I go on the trip.

**Amy:** (*without enthusiasm*) Yeah, I guess we can do that.

**Scott:** (*as he is leaving the room, with enthusiasm*) I better go finish packing, this trip is going to be great! (a tear can be seen flowing down Amy's cheek as she turns away from the camera and appears to begin quietly sobbing)



Does your heart ache for Amy? Do you think Scott is a complete idiot, clueless about his wife's feelings? Neither of them is doing a very good job of communicating, are they? Witnessing the action it is relatively easy to see how Scott is totally missing the disappointment and longing in Amy. How could he be such a knucklehead and miss the tone of longing and disappointment in his wife? Amy, however, is not being very direct about what she is feeling. She isn't clear about what her feelings are, other than she doesn't want Scott to go. And, what sort of emotions are going on at the end when she appears to give in? We can only speculate since she is not disclosing clearly what it is she is feeling. It is just these kinds of moments of disconnection between spouses which result in so many couples drifting apart and sometimes suffering intense feelings of hurt and anxiety. It really is quite sad when you think about how much we really want to be close, safe and intimate emotionally but some of us just can't seem to get there.

You may recall witnessing other couples, or experiencing what it can be like to really connect and communicate on an emotional level with one's spouse. You may have even been given some direction on how to become skilled as a "Heart Talker." If you have received some instruction in *Heart Talk* (if not see the appendix to get up to speed) you have probably experienced some challenges in making Heart Talk work for you and your spouse. Let's review some of the principles of communication from the "ICU Method" for having a heart connection with your spouse that we introduce to participants at Hope Restored Intensive Experience.

## I

**Identify:** This refers to the work of identifying your own feelings when you're the speaker or identifying what your spouse is feeling when you're the listener. The emphasis here is on getting clear about the feelings being expressed. "What is the emotional message I want to convey?" if I am the speaker. And, "What is the emotional message being sent to me?" if I am the listener.

## C

**Care:** Both Speaker and Listener have the opportunity to care about the feelings being expressed. The more both parties value the emotional message and care about it, the more likely a caring heart connection can be made. This is not caring in the sense of, "Let's do something about this." That would be more of a problem-solving approach (Work Talk). No, this is more the aspect of caring found in being present and empathic with someone. The quality of "being with" the person expressing the feeling and letting what is being shared matter to both of you.

## U

**Understand:** Whether seeking to understand one's own feelings more, seeking to be understood, or wanting to understand one's partner's feelings more, the emphasis here is on growing and expanding the depth of knowing oneself and one's mate. Speakers use feeling language to increase the likelihood that they will

be understood. Listeners summarize the emotional message they believe is being conveyed to them. Speakers give clear signals when the summary confirms they were heard or offer clarification or elaboration when the summary doesn't quite capture what their intended meaning was.

Finally, both spouses look for opportunities to express validation when understanding has been established. Validation can be so powerful in solidifying the heart connection made during Heart Talk. Recall that a validating message carries at least two elements:

- "You're not crazy..."
- "It matters to me..."

The person offering a validation includes these two messages in their attempt to validate the other person's feelings, perspective, wishes, etc. Agreement and apology will carry those two messages very efficiently but I can still validate even if I don't agree or feel an apology is necessary. Validation without agreement or apology might sound something like the following, "If I look at it from your point of view I can see how you might feel the way you do; it is not crazy to be feeling the way you do. And, it really helps me knowing you feel this way. It saddens me to know you have been feeling this way."

Heart Talk is of course a skill. To be proficient at any skill one must rehearse and practice the skill repeatedly. Often the learning curve on a skill can be shortened by emphasizing some particular element of the skill. When learning to swim, a student that gives a lot of attention to using their legs and kicking may hasten their capacity to be a more proficient swimmer. When learning to play a musical instrument, concentrating on proper finger placement can quickly transfer to faster learning of other aspects of playing the instrument.

In order to be a "Gold Medal" Heart Talker there is no element more essential than being able to identify the emotional message the Speaker is sending. Reading the feelings expressed by someone's tone of voice, or the expression on their face, or hearing the message not put into words can take a conversation quickly from surface hints to deeper felt emotions. And, it is these deeper-felt emotions that often drive the action taking place in the relationship at that moment.

The priority of listening is referred to in the following Bible passage:

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, James 1:19*

James understands that listening first is essential to avoiding the destructive actions that ensue during escalation. Giving myself the opportunity to listen helps protect me from my impulses, those reflex reactions identified as part of my reactive cycle. Fortunately, there is a very simple principle for becoming a better listener - curiosity. As discussed earlier in previous "scenes" in this study, curiosity can help steer me away from judgment so I can discover new insights about my spouse. Interestingly I can become a better listener by applying curiosity to some of the more obvious elements of my partner's expressed message. This may sound ironic, in that it so often seems that listening is trying to identify deeply covered secrets in the other person. But, with a little attention one can become quickly astute at recognizing possible emotion in another by noticing obvious expressions of feeling. By "obvious" we mean aspects of someone's expression that are physical and can be readily seen and heard if we simply pay attention to them. Examples of these elements of expression would be posture, tone of voice, tearing in the other's eyes, etc. The problem is we spend a lot of energy ignoring obvious elements of someone's expression. And, if we do recognize them we tend to quickly dismiss, ignore, or even judge those elements.

**Let's look a little closer to how Scott ignores and dismisses Amy's obvious expressions of emotion. Note the following exchange:**



**Amy:** (*Sounding hurt and as if trying not to cry*) And what am I supposed to do while you're off playing with your little boy buddies?

**Scott:** (*frustration*) Amy, come on, don't go getting all emotional. We talked about this. It's fine with me if you spend some time with your girl friends. Go to the mall, or a couple of movies or something. You always say you have a great time doing that stuff.



If Scott would allow himself to pay attention to the obvious and be curious about it, the conversation might have gone in a completely different direction. He can hear a tone of hurt in Amy's voice and he can readily see she is about to cry. Instead of being curious about these expressions he judges them and dismisses them quickly. He repeats this avoidance of the obvious again just a few moments later.



**Amy:** (*with a tone of dejection and disappointment, head down, as if she has given up*) I suppose you're right, I'll just find something else to do.

**Scott:** (*relieved, with excitement*) That's my girl. How about if we go see that new action movie Thursday night? That way you and I can get a little "us time" before I go on the trip.



It doesn't take advanced psychological training to recognize Scott is totally disconnected from Amy emotionally at this point and potentially serious harm is being done to the quality of their emotional attachment to each other. We can almost hear Scott's thoughts, reassuring him that he has won the argument and that Amy now agrees with him and everything is fine.

To be fair Amy is doing her own share of avoiding the obvious. It is as if her hurt at being ignored and left out blinded her to Scott's obvious excitement and anticipation of doing something he greatly enjoys. This illustrates another block to curiosity, our own emotions. In order to effectively listen, I often must put my own emotions momentarily to the side so I can concentrate on the Speaker's emotional message. Once I set my emotions aside then I can be curious about the obvious elements of their message and what those may mean.

**So let's imagine how this conversation might have gone if Scott had used curiosity to help him be a better listener.**



**Amy:** (*sounding hurt and as if trying not to cry*) And what am I supposed to do while you're off playing with your little boy buddies?

**Scott:** (*moving closer to Amy and with a tone of concern*) Whoa, I think I might be missing something here. Are you trying to tell me you're somehow feeling hurt about my going away for the weekend?

**Amy:** (*tears start to form*) I guess I am feeling hurt. (*with some sarcasm*) You just seem so excited about your big 4-wheeling trip.

**Scott:** (*leaning forward*) Something about your tone of voice tells me maybe you feel like I would rather be with my friends than be with you. Is that close?

**Amy:** (*Amy looks at Scott with a searching look and stops crying for a moment*) Yeah, I do feel that way. Is that true? Would you rather be with them than with me?



Now Scott and Amy are squarely in Heart territory. At this juncture Amy is asking to now be the listener and Scott has the opportunity to disclose his heart to her. What is he really feeling? Does Amy have a priority over his friends? We can only hope they would be able to continue the conversation in a manner that leads to discovery and understanding. The key principle we are trying to illustrate here is how curiosity about obvious elements of the communication give them the chance to have a deeper heart connection. What starts as a tiff about a weekend trip becomes an opportunity to deepen their understanding of each other and affirm that love.



## Editing Your Love Story

**Here are a few steps to take this week to practice the art of curiosity in becoming a better listener.**

Recall a recent discussion with your spouse in which there were some feelings present in the conversation. Note what the issue was and most importantly what do you recall as obvious hints of emotion in your spouse. What was their tone of voice? What was their posture? What was the look in their face? Their eyes?, etc.

A decorative header graphic consisting of a horizontal film strip with sprocket holes. The text "Episode 9" is centered within the film strip.

## Episode 9

Regardless of how you responded originally, write out below some possible summaries of the emotional message hinted at by the obvious elements of your spouse's behavior. Remember you are trying to express curiosity about deeper emotions not necessarily stated overtly but reflected in obvious non-verbal aspects of their behavior.

Reflect on how the conversation might have gone differently had you used some of the above summaries.

Look for an opportunity to practice using curiosity as a listener with your spouse and record below your experience.



## Prayer and Win/Win Outcomes



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** *"Do We Take It or Not?"*

**Setup:** *Abby and Ben have been married for over 15 years and once again find themselves at their favorite restaurant, Salvator's. It is the same restaurant where Ben proposed some sixteen years earlier. Abby has already been informed of a promotion opportunity at Ben's work but the opportunity means they would be moving across the country.*



**Ben:** *(appearing rather nervous, finding it hard to look Abby in the face)* Abby, thanks for coming to dinner with me. I'm guessing you know what I want to talk about.

**Abby:** *(folding her arms on the table across from Ben, a look of mild irritation on her face)* You're quite welcome Ben, but you need to know before we get started I have my mind made up. Bringing me to Salvator's is not going to change that.

**Ben:** *(taking a deep breath)* Well, I just thought you'd be interested in knowing everything Mr. Jones said to me today. I really believe it's something that will make a difference in how you feel. Plus, I really do want to take your feelings into consideration. This could be *(with emphasis)* SO big for me and I need your support.

**Abby:** *(gesturing with her arm)* Go ahead. You are obviously very gung ho on this thing. But, I'm not sure I believe you want my input. It feels more like you want my permission. It already sounds like your mind is made up. I don't feel like you really want to know how I might feel about this.

**Ben:** *(enthusiasm starting to build)* You gotta trust me on this Abby. This offer he made to me today would make any wife happy! He has offered me a \$10,000 annual raise immediately and incremental raises every year provided I stay with the job. The only downside is that we would have to move to the Los Angeles area. He wants me there in three months, which I thought was pretty caring on his side. That gives us plenty of time to sell our house here and make the move. *(pause, tentative and questioning as though he knows the answer is no)* So, pretty exciting, huh?

**Abby:** *(leaning back on the bench in the booth where they are sitting, folding her arms, looking away, and trying not to cry)* I have to be honest Ben. Right now it is totally impossible to discuss this with you because I am so emotionally upset. You really don't want to know my opinion . . . as if it would really matter anyway.

*(Ben looks at the table cloth and traces a design with his fork. A waitress approaches and asks if they are ready to order)*

**Ben:** (softly, without looking up) Give us a few more minutes.

(Waitress shrugs and walks away, Ben and Abby sit in silence, Abby staring at the wall, Ben rubbing the tablecloth absently with his fingers)



Oh boy, Ben and Abby are not getting off to a very good start are they? Suppose they were alumni of Hope Restored Intensive Experience in the last several months. It might not occur to them immediately but during their silence, the memory of being coached through the “7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes” may come to mind. At this moment one or both of them may be thinking, “How do we get back on track this time? What do we need to do to get connected again?” It may also occur to them, “Does God have an opinion about what would be best for us?”

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:6&7*

In this passage Paul recognizes what is at the core of many of the decisions and desires we have in life. We are anxious. We fret, obsess, ruminate, strategize, and do all manner of mental torment trying to determine the best course of action. Notice in this passage the emphasis is on presenting our requests to God and in return we receive peace. Isn't that what most of us really want when trying to make a decision, peace? We pursue, sometimes frantically, finding the “right” decision because we believe the “right” decision will bring us peace. In this passage there is no mention of the “right” decision, only the promise of peace when we make our requests known to God.

The belief that God is interested and involved in our day to day lives resonates with many of the couples who come to Focus on the Family for help with their marriage. Many of us believe God can be part of our everyday life in an intimate way but we have trouble sometimes living the belief in practical situations. In recommending to couples they operate with a “No-Losers Policy” there is further encouragement to consider how reliance on God's guidance can be an asset to making decisions that will impact both spouses and their family. This reliance on God is the essence of the Philippians 4:6&7 passage.

Within the “7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes” often presented at an Intensive, is a critical step warranting some specific attention to letting God guide our lives. It is the step of prayer. Praying together about the conflicts, issues, and decisions they must make is critical for spouses to give God full opportunity to use circumstances to shape them into the people He desires them to be. Interestingly, prayer for many may be more vulnerable than even sexual activity. Couples may be very uninhibited when it comes to lovemaking but freeze and are stymied when it comes to praying together. We are passionate about empowering couples to release the full spiritual potential in their relationship. One way to do this is through prayer.

In this study, we want to examine how to strengthen the skill of prayer in the marriage relationship. We will do this by examining the step of prayer in working toward a Win/Win outcome. Possessing some skill at praying together could be life transforming for couples as they seek to give God greater and greater priority in all aspects of their lives, especially their marriage.

Let's begin by reviewing the “No-Losers Policy” and the “7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes.”



## No-Losers Policy

This principle essentially puts personal and relational wellbeing ahead of any conflict, issue, decision or strategy a couple may be facing. By operating with a No-Losers Policy, couples affirm a strategy for protecting the safety in their relationship. Simply stated the policy means, “I as a spouse am committed to finding outcomes in which both my mate and I feel good about the direction being taken.” This policy defines winning as both husband and wife endorse the path chosen. If either spouse feels compromised in some important way by a direction being taken, there is then work to be done before proceeding forward. What kind of work? It is relationship work, the work of connecting, understanding, and affirming the desires and longings in both spouses. To accept anything less than this undermines the wellbeing of both spouses and the relationship. It is an ideal, even an ethic, worth pursuing for a lifelong marriage.

### *7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes*

- 1. Commit To A No-Losers Policy:** Each spouse in the privacy of their own heart commits to approaching the issue from a No-Losers standpoint.
- 2. Heart Talk:** Couples begin the process by uncovering the Heart issues underlying the conflict or decision. By connecting at a heart level first they increase their understanding of the many different facets of the issue.
- 3. Pray:** Couples intentionally seek the guidance of God regarding the issue.
- 4. Brainstorm Options:** This is “green light thinking” time...begin listing every possible option you both can come up with. It is important to not evaluate or criticize any option mentioned in this step.
- 5. Evaluate The Options:** Narrow the options down to the top two or three you both feel the most comfortable with.
- 6. Pick One And Implement Or Wait:** Choose a strategy and act upon it or wait if none of the options result in a win/win. If stuck at this point it is a good indication that more Heart Talk is needed. There may be some important aspect of the issue not yet identified.
- 7. Revisit The Selected Option And Rework If Necessary:** This step is so critical to the overall effectiveness of the win-win. It allows both spouses the opportunity to reconsider a decision. If the plan is not contributing to results both partners feel good about, then it is important to begin the seven steps again to arrive at a different plan.

Putting the spotlight on step three, Prayer, requires a preliminary consideration. As mentioned earlier, praying with one’s spouse can be a very vulnerable thing to do. Keeping with our commitment to safety in the relationship it is very important to respect the vulnerability and sensitivity your spouse may have in agreeing to pray together. In the end it may not matter so much what your prayer together actually looks like as much as it matters that you are giving yourself a chance to experience the intimate connection praying together can be. Praying together can be a very intimate experience with your spouse as well as with God. If the importance of recognizing progress can be kept in focus, all the steps made toward giving prayer a greater priority in your marriage are valuable, no matter how small, and no matter how far away you may feel from the ideal. One spouse may not feel comfortable praying out loud. Another spouse may want only to pray in very private surroundings. Whatever the sensitivity may be, recognize that how you respond to that sensitivity is an opportunity to respect the vulnerability of your spouse and protect the safety in your relationship.

## Steps for Praying Together

- ➡ Thank God for past provision, ways He has “shown up” and been a help to you and your spouse.
- ➡ Thank God for your spouse and their giftings.
- ➡ Thank God for the promise of peace, security and guidance.

### *Personal Confession and Submission*

- ➡ Confess your dependence upon God for any good in your life.
- ➡ Confess your desire to be submitted to His leadership and direction.
- ➡ Ask God to use the situation at hand to shape and mold you into the person He desires you to be.

### *Inviting God's Direction*

- ➡ Ask for God's direction regarding the “Heart” issues you and your spouse have identified during Heart Talk.
- ➡ Ask God for direction about choices and options He might desire

### *Request for Vision*

- ➡ Ask God to help you see the bigger picture represented by the issues: “Lord, help me to see what you see, and help me to see what you want me to see.”

- ➡ Thanks for the answer already on its way
- ➡ Thanks for the opportunity to grow in Him and in unity with your mate.

Using the above steps spouses can experience a conversational style of prayer. Each spouse takes a turn at praying out loud consistent with each individual step. Allowing time for silence and listening to thoughts and impressions that may occur from God, the prayer becomes a three-way conversation with God, you, and your spouse. Following the prayer allow some time for additional Heart Talk to discuss thoughts, impressions, and feelings that may have emerged during the prayer. Remember again, this can be a very vulnerable experience for both spouses, so listening, acceptance, caring and validation are key to the intimate connection made in these moments.

Remember Ben and Abby at the beginning of this study? Maybe their getting back on track would look something like the following scene.

**Setup:** *We join Ben and Abby at the restaurant where the scene ended before. Abby is staring out the window, arms folded across her stomach, looking out the window, biting her lip, trying not to cry. Ben is tracing a pattern on the table cloth with his finger, head down and silent.*



**Ben:** (softly) Look Abby, I don't want this to go this way. Let's try this again. I may not have sounded like it, but I really do want to do this as a win/win for both of us. It is more important to me that we be together on this, one way or the other. Can we just try and talk this through -- maybe use some of the tools we got at the Intensive?

**Abby:** (looking at Ben as if to assess his sincerity) Do you really mean that?

**Ben:** (looking at Abby, with conviction) Yes, I do.

**Abby:** (shifting her posture, leaning forward) Ok, so who is going to be the speaker and who is the listener?

**Ben:** (with a smile, taking her hand) Why don't I start as the listener. (The scene changes to several minutes later, Ben and Abby are seen exiting the restaurant and Ben opens the passenger side car door for Abby to enter. The scene then shifts to Ben leaning back in the driver seat, car keys in hand, he places the keys on the console and sighs)

**Ben:** Wow! That felt like a really productive conversation. Do you think we might be ready to pray about this?

**Abby:** (her manner much softer and more open than earlier) Yes, I would like that. Do you want to start and I'll chime in as we go.

**Ben:** (sitting up straighter) Sure. (bowing his head and closing his eyes, and taking Abby's hand. Abby bows her head and closes her eyes) Lord Jesus I thank you for all the ways you have helped us in the past, even when we weren't aware of your presence and support. (pause)

**Abby:** Lord, you have always been so faithful to us.

**Ben:** God I thank you for Abby and the special person you have created her to be. She really is the greatest blessing to me I could have ever asked for.

**Abby:** Lord, I thank you for Ben and his ambition and desire to provide the best for me and the children.

**Ben:** Lord we are dependent on you for our very lives. We need your leadership and guidance toward what is ultimately your best for us.

**Abby:** God I want to ask that you use this situation to shape us and mold us so we might become the people you created us to be.

**Ben:** I need your help Lord to be more consistent in consulting Abby on decisions we make. Help me to behave in such a way that she can see how much I really do value her opinion and perspective. Help me to slow

down and not get so far down the road before I consider how my ideas of what we should do might impact her and the kids.

**Abby:** I want your help Lord in being open to Ben. Help me not to shut down so quickly when he presents something to me.

**Ben:** Father, if there is a direction or option here you want us to see that we don't, make that clear to us.  
(pause)

**Abby:** Help us to see what you see. Show us what we need to concentrate on to make a good decision.  
(pause)

**Ben:** Thanks Lord for the confidence you are already supplying that we can trust you.

**Abby:** Thank you for the blessing it is to come to you in this way.

**Ben:** Thank you Lord, Amen

**Abby:** Amen

*(The couple embrace)*

**Ben:** *(warm smile)* I'm thinking maybe we wait a few days and then revisit this before I give Mr. Jones any answer. That will give us time to reflect and listen more to how God may be speaking to us. What do you think?

**Abby:** *(smiling she hugs his arm)* Sounds good to me. *(sitting up straight, with enthusiasm)* Now how about some ice cream!

**Ben:** *(laughing)* You got it.



Is such a scene really possible? Why not? What if such a scene were normal in your marriage? What would that mean to you?



## Editing Your Love Story

**Take a few moments and respond to the following directions for reflection:**

What about the last conversation and prayer between Ben and Abby do you identify with? What would be needed for prayer with your spouse to look similar to that scene?

Can you think of some prayers God has answered during your marriage? How has God provided for you and your spouse in the past?

List a few issues or upcoming decisions that applying prayer, the No-Losers Policy, and 7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes would be appropriate.

Look for an opportunity to initiate 7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes and use the Steps for Praying Together outlined in this study, when you get to step 3. Record your observations and reflections about the experience below.

The background of the page features a light gray, stylized graphic of film strips. The strips are arranged in a circular, overlapping pattern, creating a sense of motion and continuity. The sprocket holes are clearly visible along the edges of the strips.

## Part Three

By now it is probably apparent that a healthy vital marriage is always growing and evolving. Indeed we as individuals need to always be growing and evolving. This requires couples to continually redefine and update what it means to be a husband, a wife, and to be married. Circumstances change, life happens, and new opportunities and challenges force us to adjust and accommodate all of these factors. Marriages that adapt and flex with these changes seem to show the greatest strength and depth. This next set of scenes are designed to help you identify the constants in you and your relationship and to identify the areas where it may be time to adjust and adapt. Recall that a big part of why you came to a Focus on the Family, Hope Restored Intensive Experience, one of our conferences, or read one of our resources in the first place was because you needed in some way for your marriage to go to a new place. These next five episodes are about continuing that journey.



## The Practice and Discipline of Forgiveness



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** *"The Mail Just Arrived"*

**Setup:** Joe is standing in the doorway of what appears to be the master bedroom. He has an envelope and letter in his hand and a look of stern anger on his face. Karen is folding clothes from a pile on the king size bed.



**Karen:** *(with concern and mild alarm)* What's wrong? What is it?

**Joe:** *(narrowing his eyes and his lips tight against his teeth)* Like you don't know. Were you ever going to tell me? Did you think I wouldn't notice? *(voice rising with emotion)* You promised Karen! *(Joe throws the envelope and paper at her and turns to walk away)* I don't know what to do with you. Do you ever think of anyone but yourself?

**Karen:** *(picking up the paper and envelope, her hand to her mouth she reads and leaves as if to follow Joe)* Joe, please can we talk about this?

*(scene shifts to the garage where Joe appears to be randomly fussing with items on a tool bench)*

**Karen:** *(at the garage doorway)* Joe, please let me talk to you. I know I promised to not use the credit card. I was going to tell you, I just forgot. *(tone is pleading and near tears)* Please don't be angry with me. I won't do it again, I promise. *(Karen pauses as if trying to think of something else to say)* It's not as bad as before, I didn't spend as much as I used to.

*(Joe has stopped moving, his back is to Karen, his hands in fists on the bench, his head down)*

**Karen:** *(softer and pleading)* Give me some credit for making some progress.

**Joe:** *(still with back to Karen)* Progress? *(slowly turning to face Karen)* You don't get it, do you? I trusted you. You promised to not use the credit card without talking to me first. "No exceptions," we said. We had an agreement. This isn't about the money, it's not even about using a credit card. I'm not just angry, I'm hurt. You betrayed me. How am I supposed to trust you about anything? *(He turns back to the bench)*

**Karen:** *(softly)* You're right. I am so sorry. I don't know if you can forgive me again but please can we just talk about it? Don't shut me out. I really am sorry.

**Joe:** *(looking up at the ceiling, with a huge sigh)* I need some space. Maybe we can talk about it later.



Have you ever been in Joe's shoes or felt betrayed in some way by your spouse? Marriages are unraveling all around us every day in situations just like Joe's and Karen's. It is in moments like these that understanding the practice and discipline of forgiveness is crucial.

First, let's try to be clear what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is like other aspects of the Christian walk. Just when we think we have it figured out, life comes along and God teaches us something new. The meaning of forgiveness and its power are constantly being renewed in us if we will listen and be open to its lessons. In the simplest of terms, forgiveness represents the cancelling of a debt created by some offense. A crime was committed and the penalty for the crime is lifted from the offender.

*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions  
from us. Psalm 103:12*

Forgiveness as we see in the above passage from Psalms is a matter of orientation. If I aspire to forgive others as God has forgiven me then I remove the offense from the landscape in front of me. I recognize the offense done to me and the justification for seeking retribution, but I turn away and forgive. I set aside my right to be vindicated and set my face in a different direction. The offense is no longer in my field of vision. In so doing forgiveness frees me from being defined by the offense that was done to me and makes it possible to move forward. Before we examine how this might apply to Joe and Karen, a couple of other points of clarification are warranted. Forgiveness seems to get confused often with other things that might be desirable in relationships but are probably different.

**Excusing.** It may be gracious to excuse someone's behavior which may have injured me in some way, but this is not the same thing as forgiveness. It is not the language of forgiveness to say, "Oh it's alright, no harm done." The language of forgiveness says, "I know I was injured and harmed but I choose not to hold this offense between us." In order to fully forgive I must fully acknowledge the offense along with the hurt and pain that came with it. Not to acknowledge the offense and the injury may limit the full reach of forgiveness.

**Forgetting.** God's forgiveness is described by some as if He has brain damage. Forgetting is a symptom of brain dysfunction. To say God forgets our sin is to compromise an important aspect of His character. He is omniscient, all knowing. If something is capable of being known, He knows it. Which is the greater miracle? That God develops Alzheimer's Disease in relation to my sin, or that God knows my offenses and intentionally cancels the penalties as an act of His will and an expression of His love for me? He now relates to me on the basis of our current relationship, not on the basis of my past offenses. Just like in my relationship with others, I don't forget the offense as if I had brain damage. Rather, in forgiving, the right to justified retribution is released and the relationship that would not have been possible otherwise, becomes possible.

In Jeremiah 31:34 God is describing his new covenant, a time in which he will "...remember their sin no more..." A closer study of this phrase indicates this is not a description of passive forgetting, as if God could not remember. Rather it is a phrase that indicates active commitment not to mention, be mindful of, or record the sin any more. This further amplifies the intentional element of forgiveness. Forgiveness entails a commitment not to keep a record of the offense. It is not remembered in the sense that it is no longer recorded.



**Reconciliation and Trust.** Forgiveness can get confused with reconciliation and trust. Forgiveness certainly makes it possible for relationship to be restored, but the actual restoration of relationship will take place over time as a consequence of trustworthy interactions between people. To equate forgiveness and trust would be similar to equating wedding vows on one's wedding day with years of faithfulness and fidelity; the vows in a wedding set in motion a relationship of faithfulness and fidelity, the vows alone do not accomplish this. Forgiveness may cancel the debt; trust and reconciliation influence what sort of business two people will do together going forward. To presume I should be trusted simply because I was forgiven can feel emotionally violent to the person who was injured by my offense. If I truly receive forgiveness in humility, I respect the process of building trust and reconciliation over time.

**Finally, forgiveness may ultimately be for the benefit of the one offended more than for the offender.**

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

*Matt. 18:22&23.*

We might ask what was Jesus getting at when he commanded "seventy-seven" forgivings? The King James version translates this phrase as "seventy times seven." Either way the message is clear -- a whole lot more forgiving than Peter's initial offer of seven times. Is it possible Jesus was addressing what happens to the human heart when we harbor unforgiveness? Most of us can identify or recall friends or family members who refuse to forgive offenses done to them. There is nothing quite so sad and pathetic as someone who turns their life into a monument memorializing the many offenses done to them by others in their past. These individuals become frozen in time, unable to move beyond the deeds done to them, spiritually withering into bitterness and cynicism. Jesus understood this and his intention with Peter was to define forgiveness as the antidote for the spiritual cancer represented in withholding forgiveness.

This instruction also firmly establishes forgiveness as a discipline to be practiced throughout the course of a relationship, not just an isolated event. It would be wonderful if forgiveness were a once-and-for-all experience. Maybe on some occasions in some individuals and in some relationships it can be at times. But in many instances the offenses done to us have a nagging way of re-presenting themselves and we are confronted with the dilemma of forgiveness all over again. This seems to be the case with Joe in the script at the beginning of this study. It sounds like he and Karen have had conflict over her use of a credit card before. What if Joe were to apply the principles of forgiveness we have just outlined? Let's return to the script and see what could happen.



*(Karen turns and leaves Joe alone in the garage. We see Joe's face as he is obviously in deep thought.)*

**Joe:** *(voice over of Joe's internal dialog as he moves about the garage absently moving things on the work bench, sighing, looking out the window, etc.)* Why is this happening again? Can I really trust Karen about anything she says? How can you have a marriage without trust? This is just so unfair. *(pause)* I suppose I ought to forgive her and start over again. I've done it before. Can I forgive again? I don't know if I can. I don't know if I want to. Suppose she breaks my trust again? How many times do I have to forgive her anyway?

*(pause)* Oh yeah, Jesus said something about that. Is that you Lord trying to speak to me?

Lord Jesus, you've got to help me here. I'm not sure I have it in me to forgive again. I know I certainly need your forgiveness often. Come to think of it, there are plenty of times I benefit from Karen's forgiveness. *(As if reconnecting with his anger)* But, I don't break promises like she does! *(voice dropping and softening)* But, I still want forgiveness, and her injuries are no less painful than mine now that I think about it. *(pause)* I need help trusting you with this fear of being let down and disappointed again.

*(taking a deep breath)* OK, Lord help me, here goes. I'm going to try and do this and stay focused on forgiving her and starting over.

*(Joe turns from the work bench and is seen leaving the garage, re-entering the house)*



Can you imagine the conversation that ensues as Joe finds Karen and softly, with tenderness and humility tells her he forgives her and is ready to talk? Maybe, they do some working toward a "win/win" aimed at Karen rebuilding trust with Joe in money matters. Maybe Joe confesses his held resentment and asks Karen to forgive him for being judgmental with her. It isn't hard to imagine the power of forgiveness when people really let go and give themselves to it.



## Editing Your Love Story

**Here are some ways you might apply the practice and discipline of forgiveness in your marriage:**

Is there some area of the relationship where you find yourself wishing you could teach your spouse a lesson? Some matter in which you feel offended and find yourself looking for a way to impress upon your spouse how inappropriate their behavior is or was? Take a minute and see if you can identify some way in which you secretly hope to shame your spouse into changing their behavior.

Your response above may be a clue to areas of unforgiveness. The desire to shame someone may be an indication you want to amplify the offense done to you in order to gain some advantage in the relationship. What would it mean to forgive them for how they have offended you? How could you express this to them? Write down anything that you recognize is blocking you from offering forgiveness. Now, jot down some ideas about how forgiveness would make a tangible difference in your behavior. What would be different about your thinking, your beliefs, and feelings and how you participated in the marriage if you forgave whatever offense was done to you?

When are you most vulnerable to revisit offenses that have occurred in your marriage? Can you see a pattern to when you feel most injured by some past offense? It may be something you determined to forgive at one time but find yourself feeling offended in some fresh way by the memory of it. Imagine the offense as a stone in your hand. Forgiving would be like taking the stone and throwing it over your shoulder as you step up the path before you. Maybe instead of a stone the offense looks more like a boulder blocking your path. Forgiving might mean turning to the right or left of the boulder, forging a new path, going around it and leaving it behind you.

One exercise to help visualize this spiritual discipline of forgiveness is to write a note to the "offense" announcing and describing your intention to leave it behind. The note might begin, "Dear betrayal of January 2015, You keep popping your ugly head up to remind me of what happened. I am officially informing you that you don't matter any more. I'm moving on..." This may sound a bit abstract but some may find it a useful exercise. Use the space below to write your note.

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 11" is centered in the middle frame.

## Episode 11

After writing the above note consider sharing it with your spouse. Be aware that these offenses often are sensitive for both spouses. Your husband or wife may need some significant Heart Talk with you when you share how you are seeking to forgive on an ongoing basis some offense from the past. Record below what happened when you discussed your efforts at forgiveness with your spouse.



## The Good News About Being Grown Up



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit  
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** “How Do I Look?”

**Setup:** Mike is a 40-year old distinguished looking man. He is sitting alone in the dining room, eating a bowl of Raisin Bran, reading the paper. Michelle walks in dressed in a snugly-fitted business suit.



**Michelle:** *(appearing a little insecure)* How do I look?

**Mike:** *(doesn't look up from the paper)* Good.

**Michelle:** *(appearing perturbed)* Mike, You didn't even look at me.

**Mike:** *(looks up, and sighs)* Honey, you always look good. It's not going to make a difference whether I look or not. *(with sarcasm)* There, I'm looking at you, and you look good. *(goes back to reading the paper)*

**Michelle:** Well, I've gained a few pounds recently, and I'm wondering if this suit is a little too tight on me.

**Mike:** *(looks up again)* Nope. I like it that way. *(Goes back to reading the paper)*

**Michelle:** *(clearly frustrated, grabbing her purse and opening the garage door)* I'll probably be home late to-night.

**Mike:** *(still not looking up from the paper)* All right. Have a good day... Hey, where's my kiss good-bye?

**Michelle:** *(tone becomes cold)* Why do I have to be the one to give you a kiss good-bye?

**Mike:** *(confused and frustrated)* What's your problem?

**Michelle:** *(angry)* I don't have a problem. It's just...Who made the rule that it's my job to initiate everything in this relationship?

**Mike:** *(confused and becoming defensive and sarcastic)* You initiate everything? *(louder)* Yeah right, I can't remember the last time you initiated anything.

**Michelle:** *(irritated)* I'm not talking about sex.

**Mike:** *(Stands up to walk into another room and mumbles sarcastically under his breath)* Of course you're not, that would be miraculous.

**Michelle:** What did you say?

*(Mike walks out of the room, saying nothing. Michelle waits for a moment, and then walks out, shutting the garage door behind her with force).*

**Michelle:** *(scene shifts to garage where Michelle is getting in her car, and driving away, her voice is heard as she drives, giving the effect of listening in on her thoughts)*



What just happened? I'm too stirred up to figure much out right now....I need to pray. Lord, please help me calm down and process what just happened in my heart so that I can take care of myself right now. *(takes a deep breath, and sighs)* O.K., I just know that I'm mad, and all I can think of right now is that it feels like he's just a big jerk...but I know he's not. At least, not usually. So, let me try to figure out what's happening.

## **The morning didn't have to go the way it did for Michelle.**

Someone identifying with Michelle might read the script and say, "Well, of course Michelle felt badly. Her husband was ignoring her and sarcastic in his tone. But, then again there may be more to it. Let's look at what was going on inside Michelle's heart and mind. When Michelle asked Mike how she looked, she was hoping that he would respond to her question with something along the lines of an enthusiastic "Wow, you look great!" His seemingly apathetic response disappointed her, and pushed her big button of "feeling insignificant." Upon stating that she'd be home late that night, he responded with no resistance, which confirmed again her feeling of insignificance. Subconsciously, she believed that if he appeared disappointed in hearing that she'd be working late, her fear would be alleviated, and she would feel like she mattered.

## **That morning didn't have to go the way it did for Mike, either.**

Someone identifying with Mike might say, "That wife of his just needs to lighten up and let him read the paper. He said she looked good and that she always looked good. She should have been appreciative that he complimented her. Instead, she got all wound up over something really petty, and then punished him unfairly." Sure, she could have responded kindly or playfully. If Mike had to suggest an ideal response from her, he might say that he wished she would have made a joke along the lines of asking if he'd look up from his paper if she took off her suit and then playfully bantered with him before leaving. Mike loves Michelle very much and is typically pretty attentive as a husband. But he knows that sometimes when he is engrossed for hours in a football game, work, hobby, or project, she can become hurt and react in anger. Mike's "failure" button can get pushed, and he reacts by reacting with sarcasm, shutting down emotionally, and withdrawing, which perpetuates the reactive cycle. It might be tempting to become judgmental about how Mike or Michelle reacted to one another, but let's give a little information as to how those fear buttons originated.

Michelle grew up in a home of eight children. Her dad was a hard working but emotionally distant farmer. Her mother was an equally hard working stay-at-home mom. Michelle was the second to youngest, and when she was two years old, her baby brother was diagnosed with a terminal disease. He required round-the-clock care, which the mother took on, and he ended up dying when he was only sixteen years old. Michelle always loved her brother, but oftentimes felt like she was invisible and insignificant to her parents. She tried hard to get good grades in an attempt to get some extra attention. She can remember with a little heartache running home from fourth grade with a report card in her hand, filled with straight A's, and when she proudly handed it over to her father, he glanced at it quickly, handed it back, and muttered, "That's nice, Michelle. Now go do your chores." As an adult, when Michelle's "insignificant" button gets pushed, like in the

above morning scene with Mike, some of those old feelings re-surface, and she finds herself overreacting.

Mike, on the other hand, grew up in a single-parent home. His father left the family when Mike was eight, to pursue a relationship with another woman. Mike's mother at that time informed him he had to be the man of the house and needed to help raise his younger sister. His mother worked two jobs and expected Mike to do the cleaning and cooking as well as help his younger sister with her homework every night. If he didn't do something quite right, he would get a lecture from her, and he would feel like a failure. As an adult, when Mike's failure button gets pushed, some of those old feelings re-surface, and Mike typically emotionally shuts down as a result.

Understanding our childhood, as well as our spouse's, is a wonderful way to help understand the intricacies of who we are and how we have been impacted by our past. But, even more important than that, is to understand that we are not children anymore. We are grown-ups now. It may sound funny to say it, but emotionally some of us may not fully realize we are not children anymore. And the good news about being grown up is that you don't have to let your past determine your present or your future. You get to decide who you want to be, how you want to live, and the direction your life takes.

Oftentimes, we carry messages that were seared onto our hearts in childhood. Those messages may have said something like, "You're stupid. You'll never amount to anything. You're worthless, and insignificant." We then can live our lives trying to prove to the world, and to ourselves, that those messages aren't true. But our greatest fear is that they are. And, when those fear buttons get pushed, we can find ourselves reacting strongly in an attempt to cope in such a way as to feel better. Sometimes those reactions have the aim of provoking someone else to make us feel better. Sadly, our reactions tend to often inspire others to behave in ways that wind up confirming our fears and we feel hurt, disappointed and worst of all, stuck.

This is when it is important to remember that regardless of whether you had a great childhood or a painful one; you do not have to be defined by what you were told as a child, what you did as a child, nor with whom you associated as a child. You were not given a choice in those things. The good news is that while there is some part of your childhood always with you, you are now an adult. And, the good news about being an adult is that you get to write your own script for the kind of person you are becoming.

So, what kind of person are you? What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of legacy do you want to leave? You get to answer those questions, and as you do, you will define who you are today.

Returning to Mike and Michelle, could they possibly figure some of this stuff out on their own?



**Michelle:** *(still driving, calmer, we hear Michelle's inner voice)* Well, I'm pretty sure I'm aware that when Mike didn't look up from reading the paper to acknowledge how I looked, it pushed that "insignificant/unimportant" button that used to get pushed all the time when I was little. When I think about my childhood, it's sad to me that a little girl would go unnoticed for so long by her parents. I'm glad I've learned that I get to treat myself now with the care and compassion I deserved as a child. OK, let's see, I know Mike is a very loving husband, and I probably just caught him reading an article he was interested in. I know that I'm more important than the article to him. I just caught him at a bad time. More importantly, I know that even if I didn't matter to Mike, I matter to God, and I matter to me. But, I do know Mike loves me. I probably need to call him and make things right, at least try, to the best of my ability.

*(Michelle picks up her cell phone and dials Mike's cell phone)*

**Mike:** *(seemingly emotionless)* Hello.

**Michelle:** *(soft tone)* Are you still mad at me?

**Mike:** *(softening slightly)* Well, kind of. What was that all about this morning?

**Michelle:** *(sighs)* I think I was trying to get you to notice me this morning, and I read into your lack of response that you were not interested in me. I'm very aware that it's my issue. I'm becoming more aware all the time just how big that "insignificant" button is in me.

**Mike:** *(with a more sympathetic tone)* Whoa, that's really something you figured all that out. I appreciate you saying that. The truth is I wish I would've paid better attention to you this morning, 'cause I want so much for you to feel valued by me. Man, you are so important to me and I hate it that you would doubt that at times -- especially when my non-attention has sort of made you feel that way.

**Michelle:** *(with tenderness)* Thank you. I really do know that. And I'm really working on allowing God to erase those messages on my heart that tell me I don't matter. I know in my head that I matter, it's just a matter of letting that get to my heart.

**Mike:** Yeah, didn't we hear somebody say recently that the longest 18 inches in the world is the distance between our head and our heart. I really need to work through my feelings of being a failure as well.

**Michelle:** *(her tone brightening with expectation)* Do you think that tonight after dinner we might be able to do that exercise from the Writing Our Love Story follow up study? I think it is Scene 12 where we write down who we feel called to be, and what our "Promised Land" marriage would look like.

**Mike:** *(with interest)* Yeah, actually believe it or not I'd like that. I've been thinking some about that the last few days. And, just so you know, I think my idea of a Promised Land marriage would probably feel something like this talk we're having right now.

*(Lights dim)*



## Editing Your Love Story

**Spend a few minutes reflecting on the questions below and jotting down your thoughts.**

What were the messages that were written on your heart as a child? Were there things said to you that have impacted the way you see yourself in the world? Where did those messages come from? How powerful have those messages been in effecting how you operate in life and especially your important relationships, like your marriage?



What are some new messages you want written on your heart? What would you like to believe about yourself and your place and role in the world?

Who do you believe God wants you to be? Given some of the circumstances in your life, how would God want you to operate? Would that be different from what you have believed in the past?

If you and your spouse allowed God to continue working in your marriage, describe what your "Promised Land" (ideal) marriage would look like.

A horizontal film strip graphic with several frames. The text "Episode 12" is centered in one of the frames.

## Episode 12

Now take the step of sharing these thoughts and insights with your spouse. Be sure to give to give them ample opportunity to share their own thoughts and insights. This is a great opportunity for each of you to learn more about each other emotionally. Make some notes of what you learn below.



## Health and Vitality As a Shared Goal



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** “Competing Interests”

**Setup:** *In the kitchen we see George has just returned from work, changed into his workout clothes and come downstairs with his gym bag. Tina is cutting up an apple at the kitchen counter. A child is crying in a high chair. Another child is tugging at mom’s apron asking when they will eat.*



**George:** I’m off to the gym to work out.

**Tina** *(throws a knife down, exasperated):* Again? Can’t you see it’s kind of crazy here? Besides I was hoping to go for a walk so I could get **MY** exercise.

**George:** *(drops his gym bag and throws his hands in the air)* All right, I guess it’s not really important that I exercise regularly like the doctor said. What do you want from me?

**Tina:** *(hanging her head)* I never said... *(voice drops and pause)* I don’t need your help, just forget it.

**George:** I’m not going now. Just tell me what you want me to do. Give me their plates.

**Tina:** *(holds two plates out)* Fine. Here.



One of the questions sometimes asked after a couple has returned home from an Intensive is, “How do I take good care of me while also taking good care of the marriage?” As you saw in the scene above, the busyness of life, undisclosed expectations, and uncertainty about what to do can intrude on taking good care of the relationship and yourself, making it hard to do either, let alone both. It is easy to think that the two are exclusive of each other, yet, caring well for self and caring well for the relationship can be highly intertwined. Let’s do a brief review of the two concepts and how they might fit together.

As you might recall from the earlier scene “Caring For Self” in this Writing Our Love Story study, taking good care of self is one of the pathways to safety. It entails recognizing the truth about the value, worth and vulnerability of your heart. We are also called to be good stewards of our hearts.

*Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23*

We sometimes challenge couples in Intensives by stating, “Taking good care of yourself is always in the best interest of all parties involved.” While that might seem strange, notice what Jesus does in the following verses.

*When Jesus heard what had happened [the death of John the Baptist], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

*Matthew 14:13 & 14*

Jesus spends some time alone in reaction to the loss of his cousin. He is then able to have the compassion he needs for the work he is called to do. We often forget that in our busy lives and run on empty. It may seem easy sometimes to confuse good self-care with self-centeredness, but in reality the two are not the same. Self-centeredness leads to pleasure seeking alone and does not take into account that we exist in relationship with others. Good self-care moves us in the direction of finding a balance between giving and receiving. Take a minute to think about how well you have engaged in self-care.

Likewise, good care for your marriage is another pathway to safety in relationship. It involves recognition that there are two valuable hearts that have chosen to be in relationship with one another and that honoring both is best for everyone involved. Out of this then is a third heart that beats—the heart of your marriage. This heart needs to be nurtured and cared for in order for it continue to beat in a vital and healthy way. Notice that two healthy hearts (or at least hearts striving for health) coming together increases the health of the heart of the marriage that they form. Take a minute to reflect on how well you personally have engaged in caring for the marriage.

In order to make these work jointly, it is helpful to utilize good communication. Good communication starts with self-awareness. Are you aware of what you need for good self-care? Are you aware of what you hope for out of time in relationship together? It is helpful to share these with one another in a loving way. Heart talk is a useful tool in discussing how you want to care for you, how your spouse wants to care for him or herself, and what each of you is hoping for in the relationship together. Remember that what works today—perhaps five nights a week playing softball or dinner out with friends—may not work in the future. That is why ongoing dialogue is important. Also important is the use of teamwork and the “No-Losers Policy.” Remember that there are two valuable hearts coming together trying to navigate and understand what is healthy for the marriage.

**Let’s revisit Tina and George.**

**Setup:** *A couple hours later in the family living room. Kids are in bed. Tina is reading a book and George walks in.*



**George:** *(speaking softly)* Tina, Have you got a minute? *(Tina nods yes)* I’m sorry about earlier. It seems like we had competing interests there.

**Tina:** *(lowering her book)* I agree.

**George:** *(moving to sit next to Tina on the couch)* I was pretty focused on getting to the gym. It was stressful at work today.

**Tina:** *(now facing George, with sympathy)* I'm sorry to hear that.

**George:** Nothing major, just really hectic.

**Tina:** I see. It was pretty hectic here too. The kids had lots of activities today. I was really looking forward to a walk with you tonight.

**George:** *(surprised and hopeful)* You were?

**Tina:** Yes. I was wanting some exercise and also to spend some time with you.

**George:** Oh. I would have enjoyed that too. How about a walk tomorrow after dinner?

**Tina:** *(placing her hand on his)* I would love that.



As you might recall from the earlier scene “Caring For Self” in this Writing Our Love Story study, taking good care of self is one of the pathways to safety. It entails recognizing the truth about the value, worth and vulnerability of your heart. We are also called to be good stewards of our hearts. Taking it to another level. So, self-care is important. Caring for the marriage is important. It is good to do both. Why don’t we look for ways to combine them? George and Tina give an example of that, taking a walk together. You might view this as “killing two birds with one stone,” but it can actually be more than that. Imagine spending time engaged in something that charges your batteries while also charging the battery of your relationship. Sound energizing?

Okay, so you’re probably thinking, “My spouse and I don’t enjoy anything together.” That may be true, but it might be worth taking another look. Consider that this can involve more than just shared interests. It is about connecting around something that is vitalizing to each person.

At Focus on the Family we think of caring for self as occurring in four different domains: physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. These can be understood as follows:

**Physical Care**— involves activities that care for one’s body: typically involves exercise, rest and nutrition

**Mental Care**— involves activities which stimulate one’s mind

**Emotional Care**— involves activities that increase one’s awareness of and attending to emotion

**Spiritual Care**— involves activities which deepen one’s relationship with God

Remember, relationships are important sources of accomplishing a balance of receiving and giving in these four domains. Friendships with other couples are a great way to achieve healthy self care and care for the marriage. The flow of receiving and giving in these relationships strengthen not only the individuals but the marriage as well. A great strategy for caring for self and caring for the marriage is to identify areas of self-care you and your spouse can pursue together.

***Some possible examples:***

- Training together for a walk or run for charity (Physical Care)
- Learning a new hobby together (Mental Care)
- Discussing childhood experiences and how they have impacted you (Emotional Care)
- Doing a daily devotional together (Spiritual Care)

Consider having activities like these that you can do within the day-to-day routine of life (walk together, pray together, etc.) and those that would require more investment (new hobby, mission trip, etc.). Notice that these activities would require some time together in preparation as well as actually doing them. For example, if you are going to read a book and discuss it, some thought would go into what book you will use—one of you might choose the first one and the other the next and so on, or you might not choose until it was something you both were really interested in.

Consider the following application steps for identifying and pursuing some self-care with your spouse. Be reminded that if your spouse is not available to join you for some reason there is still value for you in growing your capacity to care for yourself appropriately.

**Editing Your Love Story**

**What are some things you have been considering to grow in the domains of self-care?**

***Physical***

***Mental***

***Emotional***

## ***Spiritual***

Of the activities and pursuits you identified, do you see any that might be something your spouse could enjoy with you? Is there something you could do together?

**Consider initiating a conversation with your spouse about beginning something together.**

Take a minute to ask your spouse for a good time to come together and talk about ways you might combine self-care with relational care. Once you get that time together, spend some time in heart talk sharing your list and listening to your spouse's list. What do you notice?

Are there some important friendships with other couples you can nurture together? What friendships do you have that might be a resource for some giving and receiving?

Now, consider a moment in prayer and then spend some time being creative about what you might do to combine these important aspects for a vitalized marriage. What are some ways that you can join together to do self care while also attending to your marriage?

Is there one that stands out for you to do together? Do you both feel great about it? If so, give it a try and have fun with it. Remember to keep your goals realistic. Record below your observations and feelings about doing a self-care activity together.





## Tuning in to the Harmonious Heart Channel



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** *"A Day in the Life of Carl and Janet"*

**Setup: Conversation #1:** *It is morning and Carl and Janet are getting ready for their day. The action zooms in on Carl rummaging through his closet as if looking for something. Janet is applying make-up at the master bath mirror.*



**Carl:** *(with irritation as if thinking out loud)* Why don't I have any clean shirts? *(shouting)* Janet!

**Janet:** *(with irritation)* Carl! I'm right here.

**Carl:** Oh...How come I can't find a shirt?

**Janet:** *(continuing to apply make up, with irritation)* It's probably because you didn't wash them. Go check the dryer maybe there is one in there.

**Carl:** *(with irritation)* I thought you said you would get some laundry done.

**Janet:** *(now sounding angry, as Carl leaves the room)* I do laundry all the time. Am I the only one in this house who knows how to run a washing machine and dryer?

*(Action moves to the kitchen, Carl and Janet appear somewhat rushed trying to get some breakfast. Two elementary age children, a girl and a younger boy, are sitting at the counter.)*

**Janet:** *(with a pleading tone)* Carl, when are you going to fix the door on the mailbox? Yesterday it rained and some of the mail got wet. You promised you would take care of that.

**Carl:** *(appearing flustered, gathering a sport coat, coffee mug, briefcase, and Poptart)* All right, all right... I'll have to look at it tonight. Bye. I have to run.

*(Carl quickly exits, Janet stares into empty space as if she is lost in thought)*

**Setup: Conversation #2:** *Split screen. It is now later in the day and Carl is at his desk at work. Janet is on the other half-screen, in her car.*

**Carl:** *(sitting at a desk Carl pushes a button on the phone)* Sharon, I'm going to make a few calls, would you see that I'm not interrupted for the next 20-30 minutes? Thanks.

*(picking up the receiver he dials a number, the phone rings in Janet's car and she pushes the button on the wireless receiver resting in her ear, Carl's tone is apologetic and soft)* Hey, how are you doing? I just realized I didn't give you a kiss and hug when I left this morning. I'm sorry.

**Janet:** *(coolly)* Yeah, I noticed that.

**Carl:** *(quickly, almost interrupting her)* Hey there's a new restaurant over on the north side. I heard it's really good, some sort of barbeque chicken place. We should go check it out.

**Janet:** *(with concern in her voice)* You'll never guess who I talked to this morning.

**Carl:** *(with interest)* Who?

**Janet:** *(still serious)* She and Jim apparently have been having problems. She said she is thinking about leaving him. Can you believe that?

**Carl:** *(awkward, and sounds hurried)* Wow, that's too bad. Hey, I've got to go. I'll see you tonight. Bye.

*(They both hang up. Carl blows a sign of relief, as if he just dodged a collision. And Janet appears as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.)*

**Setup: Conversation #3:** *Carl and Janet are clearing, what appears to be the dinner dishes from the table. Two children appear to be trying to tickle each other on the opposite side of the table.*

**Janet:** *(placing a hand on Carl's arm and looking at his face, a tone hinting of hope)* Brandon's teacher sent a note home with him today. *(the boy rushes out of the room, Carl does not seem to notice)*

**Carl:** *(sighs and slumps his shoulders)* What does she want this time? Why can't she stop picking on Brandon? How is he going to learn anything if she's constantly criticizing him?

**Janet:** *(still calm, the hint of positive expectation in her voice)* It wasn't that kind of note. You should read it.

**Carl:** *(with irritation, closing the refrigerator door)* Can't you just tell me?

**Janet:** *(with firmness)* No, I think you should read it yourself.

**Carl:** *(with a shrug)* Oh alright, I'll read it later. *(voice tone changes)* Bill said he wants to talk to me about a new project tomorrow.

**Janet:** *(firmly and assertively)* Did he say anything about a raise? When are you going to talk to him about a raise? You know it's long overdue.

**Carl:** *(slowing his pace)* I don't know. I kind of like what I'm doing now. I'm worried he's going to ask me to switch departments and he may make the raise tied to my moving to something else. Things are a mess in shipping. I sure hope that's not what he has in mind.

**Janet:** *(as if continuing her previous statements)* Aren't there company policies about how often someone is supposed to get a raise?

**Carl:** *(walking out, sighs)* I'm going to go see if I can fix that mailbox door.

*(Janet appears puzzled as she is loading the dish washer)*



**SETUP: Conversation #4:** Carl and Janet are in the master bathroom in pajamas preparing for bed. Carl is standing in front of the mirror brushing his teeth. **Janet:** (standing beside Carl Janet takes ahold of Carl's free arm, puts her head on Carl's shoulder, and sighs wistfully) Do you think I should change the color of my hair? Maybe some red highlights would be nice.

**Carl:** (bending over suddenly to spit in the sink Janet is nearly knocked off her feet, she loses her balance. Half spitting and half muffled shouting into the sink as water noisily pours out of the faucet) Looks fine to me. (Janet appears dejected and disappointed as Carl, bent over the sink, continues to aggressively brush his teeth, loudly spitting into the sink and coughing. Janet straightens and grabs a jar of face cream and begins applying it to her face)

**Carl:** (noisily finishing his teeth and rising up from the sink, he wipes his face with a towel and moves behind Janet, who is at the mirror applying face cream, he puts his arms around her waist giving her a hug and a kiss on the shoulder, in a playful tone) Any chance you might be feeling frisky? (He smiles at her in the mirror)

**Janet:** (now brushing her hair, as if she is trying not to be distracted) Oh, Carl. Not tonight, I think I feel a headache coming on.

(Carl withdraws, shoulders slump, and he walks out of the room. Janet continues to brush her hair, apparently unconcerned and unaware that Carl has left)



"A Day In The Life of Carl and Janet." Anything in those conversations sound familiar? What is really going on? Are Carl and Janet missing something? What is it? Have you ever had the experience of driving and scanning the radio channels looking for something to listen to? You're twisting the dial and all of a sudden the dial hits a channel that comes through clear as a bell with some song you recall from your youth. At that moment you utter an audible sigh and begin to sing along, your spirits immediately lifted. You sit back and hope you caught the song at the beginning and not the end. Relationships can often be a little like two people trying to figure out what frequency they should be tuning into. I am either trying to figure out what wavelength my spouse is on, or how to get them to pay attention to the tune I'm trying to play for them. Wouldn't it be great to be tuned into each other more often?

Tuning in to each other is what we want to focus on in this study. Life circumstances, age, and internal longings all impact how someone defines their role as a husband or wife. If spouses are not "tuned in" to these processes in each other it is easy for people to begin drifting apart. Spouses are changing but not connecting with each other as those changes take place. The changes ultimately redefine the relationship, but without connection the redefinition leaves spouses more and more disconnected.

A significant part of a couples' experience at a Hope Restored Intensive Experience is the opportunity to redefine their relationship and their roles as husband and wife. By "redefine" we mean getting focused on the roles, responsibilities, and aspirations each has personally at some given time. It seems that couples who have great marriages are capable of being flexible in how they function as husband or wife from one period of their lives to another. How one goes about being a husband or wife today may be very different than it was years ago, or even a month ago. The Intensive is designed to challenge people to move toward new attitudes and behaviors that ultimately change the way they operate as a husband or wife. One of the ways to continue the process of defining a relationship in new, ever more intimate ways, is to become more aware of the opportunities for connection that occur in everyday life. Most couples do a reasonable job of connecting

and feeling closer when they get away for a weekend or go on vacation together. But, those events happen only occasionally, which is not often enough to maintain and grow a vibrant, healthy, intimate relationship with one's spouse. If our marriage is going to be reborn and evolve into the dream we long for, it will happen on a day-in-day out basis. Many couples only look for a dramatic romantic event to change their relationship, failing to realize they have opportunity every day for living their dream relationship of deep connection and intimacy.

Let's take a closer look at Carl and Janet. This couple as described in the script at the beginning of this study appears to be missing each other. There are signals being sent "over the air waves," but they do not seem to be tuned into one another. The script describes several conversations during Carl and Janet's day. Each time they both fail to recognize some hint of an emotion or request for emotional connection. Is it any surprise that at the end of the day the opportunity for lovemaking and sexual intimacy is missed by both partners? What if Carl and Janet were more "tuned in" to each other's hearts? Is it possible something significant could have happened in the mundane routine of their everyday life? Consider many of the principles learned so far and how they could apply. Let's rewind one portion of Carl and Janet's day and imagine what difference could be made if Carl and Janet applied principles and skills of healthy intimate relationships.

**ALTERNATIVE SETUP: Conversation #2:** *Split screen. It is now later in the day and Carl is at his desk at work. Janet is on the other half-screen, in her car.*



**Carl:** *(sitting at a desk we can hear Carl thinking to himself)* That was really dumb. Why didn't I remember to kiss and hug her before I left this morning? What's going on with me? What am I feeling? Right now I just feel sad that I forgot something so small and yet so important. I really have been working hard to be more affectionate and aware of Janet. I need to do that in the little things, not just the big things. This is my job. This is in my yard. What can I do now? *(pause, then with enthusiasm)* I know, I'll call her now and apologize. I'll let her know I'm sorry and that I've been thinking about it all morning. I want her to know how much she means to me.

*(Carl pushes a button on the phone)* Sharon, I'm going to make a few calls. Would you see that I'm not interrupted for the next 20-30 minutes? Thanks.

*(picking up the receiver he dials a number, the phone rings in Janet's car and she pushes the button on the wireless receiver resting in her ear, Carl's tone is apologetic and soft)* Hey, how are you doing? I just realized I didn't give you a kiss and hug when I left this morning. I'm sorry.

**Janet:** *(the action freezes and we tune into Janet's thoughts)* This is weird . . . him calling me in the middle of the day. What was that? That sounds like an apology. That's right, he didn't give me kiss or hug this morning. *(coolly, she states)* Yeah, I noticed that.

*(there is a pause of silence, more of Janet's thoughts)* The apology is nice. Should I tell him I appreciate it? What will he think if I thank him? I better not make this too easy for him if he is going to learn a lesson. Wait a minute I'm not supposed to worry about managing what he thinks. If I like the apology and it means something to me, I'm the only one with that information. He has no way of knowing that unless I express it.

*(tone changes to one of warmth)* You know I really appreciate you calling me to apologize. It makes it sound like you were thinking about me.

**Carl:** (*hurriedly*) I was. I so much don't want to be like I used to be. I'm really sorry. I've been thinking about it all morning, kicking myself for messing up.

**Janet:** (*action freezes, and we hear her thoughts*) Wow, he's really being vulnerable here. Is this one of those moments to try that listening thing? Oh yeah, I could summarize what his emotional message is. Ooo...

what if I mess it up and it sounds goofy -- will he laugh at me? Oh alright, this is my chance to try whether he gets it or not.

(*calmly, Janet speaks*) Wow, sounds like you've been feeling guilty. It sounds like you want me to know how hard you're trying to make things better in our relationship. (*tentatively*) Are you saying you're trying, and you feel like you missed a chance to do the right thing?

**Carl:** (*action freezes, and we hear Carl's thoughts*) Man! is she good. I think she is really listening to me.

(*Carl speaks*) Yeah, that's right. It feels good to know you're getting it. Will you forgive me?

**Janet:** (*with tenderness*) You're forgiven. Thank You. (*pause*) You know this is a lot better than it used to be, this conversation I mean.

**Carl:** (*action freezes, and we hear Carl's thoughts*) Oh, now it's my turn to be a listener, I better not screw this up.

(*Carl speaks*) So you like this way of talking better than no talking at all.

**Janet:** (*smiling and with humor*) Hey--- who is this, and what have you done with my husband? (both laugh) Yes, I do like it. I feel cared for, especially now when I can tell you're really trying to listen to me.

**Carl:** (*without hesitation*) You feel cared for when I'm listening to you.

Janet: (*smiling again*) Yeah... I like this. Where are you at? I just may have to come and get that hug and kiss I missed this morning. (both laugh)

**Carl:** (*smiling*) You know, I could take a longer lunch today and meet you somewhere, just the two of us. I promise I'll not forget the hug and kiss.

**Janet:** (*smiling*) Yeah, I would like that.

**Carl:** (*with anticipation*) I'll even go to the Tea Room if you like. I can meet you there in 30 minutes.

**Janet:** (*firm and confident*) The Tea Room it is. I'll meet you there in a half hour. Oh Carl, (*pause*) thanks for thinking of me.

**Carl:** (*softly*) I love you.

**Janet:** I love you too. See you soon.

**Carl:** (*hangs up the phone, lifts the receiver and pushes a button*) Sharon, I need to head out. I'll be taking a little longer lunch today, hold my calls. (*pause*) No, nothing serious, everything's fine. I'm meeting Janet for lunch. (*smiling, he hangs up the phone, grabs a sport coat and starts to whistle as he leaves the office.*)



Maybe you're thinking that sounds like a fairy tale. Does it? Why couldn't something like that be real? Is it really that unbelievable, if two people give themselves half a chance to grab the opportunity found in life's everyday circumstances? Granted, Carl probably can't afford to leave work every time he and Janet have a heart connection on the phone. Forgive us if we get a little carried away for dramatic effect. The point is still made: you never know what a seemingly small demonstration of caring can lead to if you give yourself a chance. Further, a similar awesome scenario could be imagined with the other conversations described in Carl and Janet's day. Each one of those conversations is full of opportunities for Carl and Janet to tune in to each other's hearts and have a heart connection in a regular ordinary day. Isn't that what most of us are longing for? We want to feel intimately connected to our spouse, not just on special occasions but every day.



### Editing Your Love Story

Take a few minutes and see if you can imagine a different script for Carl and Janet using principles and skills you learned at the Intensive. Select one of the conversations described at the beginning of the study. Who do you identify with or feel similar to in that conversation? Perhaps the conversation about friends in marital distress, or the note sent home from one of the children's teachers. Any of the conversations would apply.

In the space below describe the changes you would make if you were Carl or Janet.

You might note at the side or in parentheses the principle or skill you would want to apply. Here is a short list of relationship principles and skills used at a Hope Restored Intensive Experience; Getting a hold of what is going on in my heart, Space, Heart Talk, Safety, Personal Care, Personal Responsibility, No-Losers Policy, Valuing my heart, Valuing my spouse's heart, 7 Steps to win/win outcomes, Forgiveness, Trust, etc. Are you starting to see some ways you could take advantage of everyday events and occurrences to make a "Heart Connection" with your spouse? In the space below, list two or more situations which occur or present themselves on a frequent basis that would be an opportunity to tune in to your partner's heart or have them tune in to your heart.

## Episode 14

In the next few days try some things to make more heart connections with your spouse in the “everyday.” Record in the space below some of your observations about what happened. What seemed to work and what didn’t?

Now take one additional step. Has this study presented you with some change in your behavior or attitude which could become a new habit of caring? Is there a practice or discipline you have been trying in an attempt to make heart connections daily? Describe below what that habit would be.



## Where Will Your Next Discovery Come From?



Videos have been created to partner with each episode of this resource, please visit <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hope-restored-videos/>

**Script:** “A Tale of Two Households”

**Setup:** Two women are seen sitting in a booth at a restaurant. There are dishes on the table with the remains of a lunch they have been sharing together. The scene shifts to closer focus on the two women and the action is joined with them in mid-conversation.



**Sharon:** (*fingers stroking a water glass, sadness on her face, looking down at the table*) I just don’t know what to do. Jim just seems so stuck. He helps around the house sometimes, and he seems to be trying, but when it comes to following through on job leads, he just seems paralyzed. He seems so different now. Sometimes I don’t even know if he is the same man I married. (*pause*) He probably needs encouragement. Ever since we sold the business, it’s as if he has lost confidence in himself. I try to tell him not to give up, but the truth is I’m probably more of a nag than anything. (*slight pause*) Sometimes he looks at me when I’m trying to be helpful with such anger -- even hatred -- in his eyes, it scares me. I just don’t know what to do anymore.

**Emily:** (*with concern, places a hand on Sharon’s arm, sighs*) Your situation sounds so familiar. That first year after John was laid off it seemed like we would never get past it. I’d try to talk to him and he would just stare at the carpet. It was such a role reversal for us. He had always been the strong one, in control, on top of everything. I was very content to follow his lead in almost everything. (*pause*) Losing that job turned our world upside down. (*pause*) I took on more responsibility at home -- got a job to keep us afloat. (*slight pause*) For awhile I didn’t know if he would ever pull out of it. Only recently has he started to explain some of what he was feeling during that year.

This past Valentine’s Day in the card he got me he wrote something about me being strong and thanking me for staying with him. At first I was a little offended, how could he possibly think I wouldn’t stay with him? I asked him about it, and he said that he felt like such a failure, that he was afraid if I knew how scared he was I would leave. He told me that seeing me stay strong and hopeful when he felt so lost made him admire me more. (*laughing*) I don’t mind telling you I shed a few tears on hearing that. I was just trying to survive during that time. (*serious again*) I wasn’t thinking about trying to be strong or anything. (*thoughtfully*) I didn’t realize at the time how much all of that was impacting John.

**Sharon:** (*wistfully*) I wish I could have that kind of impact on Jim.



**Emily:** Maybe you are and he just can't acknowledge it yet. You know what a difficult transition this is for him, having been the owner of a business and now having to look at possibly working for someone else.

**Sharon:** *(with concern and frustration)* Well, I'm trying to keep everything the same to lower his stress. I know we will get back to normal once he's working again. It's just so hard to pretend everything is like it always was.

**Emily:** *(tentatively)* Maybe that's part of the problem.

**Sharon:** *(confused)* What do you mean?

**Emily:** *(straightening and taking a deep breath)* Look, your situation is yours, and I wouldn't begin to know what is best for you and Jim. I just know that things shifted for us after John was laid off, when we faced the reality that life really was different. We realized the harder we tried to keep things the way they always were, the more frustrated and irritable we became. Once we faced the reality of our situation, it seemed like we were able to start working together more. John started doing things and taking on responsibilities he had not even been concerned about before. It was really neat to discover a whole new side to him in the process. I guess he saw new things in me too, like he put in the card. *(softer tone)* And, I saw new things in him. These things -- the new things we saw in each other -- were the discoveries that come out of our trouble. It's like we made lemonade from the lemons life was throwing us.

**Sharon:** *(questioning tone)* So, you didn't try to keep your lives the same? I thought that should be our goal: to limit the disruption as much as possible. And, what do you mean about finding new things in John?

**Emily:** *(leaning forward)* Well for one thing, John has never been much of a handyman. After the lay-off we certainly didn't have money to pay someone else to do stuff around the house. John eventually started doing some projects and actually seemed to enjoy himself. I think it helped him feel like he was accomplishing something. Anyway, I started helping on the projects, like painting the master bedroom. We had this paint given to us by his parents and we decided, "Why don't we paint the bedroom?" We worked for hours on end without breaks till it was done. We laughed and kidded through the whole thing, and when it was done he gave me a big hug and kiss. *(wistfully)* We hadn't worked together on something like that for years. I had forgotten how much we enjoyed working together.

We decided since we enjoyed it so much maybe we could work together in other ways. Just last week he brought up the possibility of starting a small business together. I don't know if we'll actually do it, but this is a whole new thing for us. *(thoughtfully)* I never would have predicted feeling this way about John or our marriage when he first came home with the bad news.

**Sharon:** *(thoughtfully)* Wow, that's really something. Maybe we are trying to hang on to the life we had before? I guess I never thought there could be opportunity in our crisis. *(long pause in silence, a waitress comes and clears the table, with a change in tone Sharon continues)*

You know there is one thing I have noticed that is different with Jim. He rarely misses going to church now. He even goes to a small group meeting regularly with some other men in the church. We would sometimes fight in the past about his skipping church or avoiding small group stuff.

**Emily:** *(with interest)* Maybe there is something going on with him spiritually through all this. Have you asked him about it?

**Sharon:** I'm afraid too. I'm afraid if I say anything I will spoil it. We haven't been very good in sharing our spiritual lives with each other.

**Emily:** *(with some enthusiasm)* Maybe that's it -- this crisis has created an opportunity for Jim to invest more in his spiritual life. Isn't that what you have been praying for, for years? Maybe he would be willing to share it with you. (pause) You could just try letting him know you like being with him at church. Let him know how it impacts you to see him investing in his spiritual life.

**Sharon:** *(hopefully)* I guess I could risk that. I would be just telling him how I feel, not trying to help him or anything, just letting him know I like that side of him.

*(the voices dim and the camera pulls away as the two women continue to visit together)*



Have you ever noticed how life changes can have a way of bringing out the worst or the best in some people? How is it that some people seem to get stronger when adversity or change occurs in their life, yet others seem to falter and drift toward despair? Notice in Emily's story how she and her husband John allowed themselves to be changed by their circumstances. Rather than pursue a futile aspiration of keeping life the same, they took stock of their situation and discovered new things about themselves and each other in the process. Ironically, these changes resulted in preserving what is most important, their love and fascination with each other and their marriage. Sharon may be on the threshold of this very discovery.

These kinds of transitions can be vital, even thrilling, for couples if they recognize the opportunity in changing life circumstances. Every couple will go through changes over the course of time. It is how we allow ourselves to be impacted by those changes that determines what sort of people we are becoming and the direction our marriages are taking. The conversation above illustrates how changing life circumstances can impact people and their marriages. Put another way, some people are defined by their circumstances, other people define their circumstances.

There are multiple variables influencing how someone is impacted by changing life circumstances. Two variables we want to shine a spotlight upon in this study are the variables of perspective and of openness to change. These two factors work together to either move us in the direction of growth and adaptation or the direction of withdrawal and despair. Let's look at a familiar passage in the book of James to set the stage for examining the factors of perspective and openness to change.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*  
James 1:2-4.

Notice the emphasis here is on the end result of trial. To be "...mature and complete, not lacking anything," is a reference to God's intention for us. He wants us to be whole, equipped and prepared to be a willing vessel for Him. He uses trial in our lives to accomplish this. This is His nature, to take what appears on the surface to be bad and transform it into something that is good. It is His dynamic nature to redeem. God is all about redemption. The Bible is filled with one redemptive story after another. To grow, adapt, and to be open to change is to be open to God's redemptive power in our lives. Finding the redemptive path through whatever trial comes my way ensures that I am always being refined and perfected for His purposes in my life.

### ***Perspective***

James writes, "Consider it pure joy...because you know..." These phrases are directives to us to intentionally shape our perspective on our circumstances in a direction consistent with God's redemptive intention. Because I know God desires good for me and He is intent on shaping, molding, and preparing me, then I can consider the trial before me a Joy.

The perspective with which one chooses to view changing life circumstances will have significant implications for a marriage. If one views circumstances as only representing loss and evidence of failure, despair is just around the corner. From this defeated perspective our spouse's behavior, even if intended to be helpful, will be distorted as more evidence of our loss and failure. This can be one of the saddest events in a marriage relationship, when one spouse's efforts to be supportive and caring are seen as indictments of failure or manipulation by the other spouse. A gesture meant to be a blessing becomes an occasion for injury in both spouses. The problem lies with the perspectives held and pursued by each spouse.

It can be exceedingly challenging when we recognize our own perspective is dramatically different from that of our spouse. When some people recognize that their spouse is viewing things through a negative lens, they take it upon themselves to change the other's point of view. This can be disastrous if the negative spouse is not open to our input. When a spouse is closed to a different perspective, the best course of action may be to look for ways to validate their perspective which may include emotions of loss and fear. Once validated, the negative spouse may be more open to other points of view. We seem wired to hang on to our pain until we feel somebody cares about how much we are hurting. Even then, it can be a struggle to consider other perspectives.

A turning point in a marriage facing changing life circumstances can be experienced when spouses resolve together to define their circumstances in new ways. This is often the consequence of repeated and thorough emotional communication, what we at Focus on the Family refer to as "Heart Talk." The exchange of emotional information about a change taking place in the life of a marriage can be significant in helping couples find new perspectives that can be shared. Often couples report this experience takes them by surprise. They seem to stumble upon the new perspective as if by accident. But closer examination will often reveal the new discovered perspective was born out of deep, thorough emotional connection experienced through something like "Heart Talk."

### ***Openness to Change***

The second factor helping someone to adapt and grow is to be open to change. It is interesting how many people seem to believe that who they are -- their personality -- is somehow static. Indeed some people seem intent on preserving aspects of themselves as if they can resist the impact of life's changing circumstances. These individuals seem to resist change even when it is detrimental not to change. For them change threatens some desperate security they have in preserving their picture of themselves. What is sadly overlooked by these individuals, is that change happens to us whether we want it to or not. One need not travel any

farther than the mirror to recognize this. Wrinkles, hair loss, graying hair, our waistline, etc. are all evidence that we are changing every day.

When one tries to resist change, one of the changes that can occur unwittingly is the growth of bitterness. If changing circumstances are seen as a threat to some deeply held definition of self, then the loss brought about by the changes become an occasion to feel cheated by life. For example, the husband who has seen his physical strength and vitality as core to his personality is stricken with an illness that leaves him weak and unable to perform physically. He drifts to despair because he does not value other elements of his personality which make him a unique and special individual, elements which could help him affirm his place in his world even though these sides of his personality do not involve physical strength and stamina. Or a wife who has defined her place in the world by being a mother discovers that she is lost and despondent when her children assert their independence in adolescence and appear not to need her anymore. The more she tries to nurture, the more estranged the relationships become and she can't understand, after she has given so much, why her children distance themselves from her. These are just two examples of ways resisting change can paralyze us and leave us feeling lost and confused about what the future may hold.

The alternative is to intentionally expect change, to recognize change as inevitable and commit oneself to seeing change as opportunity to be made, as James put it, "...mature and complete not lacking anything." Individuals with this outlook seem to accept changes in themselves and their relationships brought about by changing life circumstances with grace. They may indeed mourn losses when appropriate, but they do not become defined by those losses. These individuals embrace the next chapter of their lives as an opportunity to go to new places spiritually, emotionally and in their relationships. Interestingly, change with these people has a way of sharpening and bringing into greater focus the core elements of their personalities. Their secret, at least in part, is their openness to change.

The next discovery in your marriage will likely be dependent on these two factors of perspective and openness to change. Have you ever heard someone married for many years reflect upon some new appreciation they have of their wife or husband? Did you marvel at how, after many years of marriage, someone could still find something new and intriguing about their mate? Perspective and openness to change are surely part of that formula. There really can be new discovery and fascination in marriage throughout life if we have eyes to see it and hearts willing to receive it.



## Editing Your Love Story

What is the next discovery awaiting you in your marriage? Take a moment to reflect upon the following questions and directions to see if you might be able to identify something on the horizon of your life that may be headed your way. List five changes you are fairly certain will occur in your or your spouse's life in the next five years?

A graphic for "Episode 15" featuring the text "Episode 15" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered within a horizontal rectangular frame that resembles a film strip with sprocket holes along the top and bottom edges.

## Episode 15

Now make a note on each of those expected changes -- the ones you and your spouse have had a "Heart Talk" about. Which ones would you like to discuss from a heart standpoint? Why?

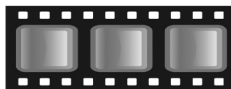
Choose one of the five anticipated changes you feel most threatened by. Are there alternative perspectives regarding the change? Is there a way to see opportunity in that change? Is there a redemptive opportunity in that change?

After reflecting and noting some thoughts above, initiate a Heart Talk with your spouse and record any new discoveries you hit upon.



*Though one may be overpowered, two  
can defend themselves. A cord of three  
strands is not quickly broken.*

*Ecclesiastes 4:12*



## Epilogue



## Steps for Heart Talk: ICU

1. Either spouse can initiate "Heart Talk" at any time that either is experiencing strong emotions (positive or negative). The initiating question could be as simple as, "would you be willing to do 'heart talk' on this topic".
2. Commit to creating a relational ICU (Intensive Care Unit).
3. Determine who will begin as the speaker (remember you will soon switch).
4. The communication continues until the speaker feels understood, not when the listener thinks s/he understands.
5. Switch roles once the initial speaker feels complete on that topic.

<b>Speaker</b>		<b>Listener</b>
<p>Get in touch with your emotion.</p> <p>Ask for time and give your heart a voice.</p> <p>Express your emotion directly; "When ____ happens, I feel ____".</p> <p><b>Tips:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stick to one topic</li> <li>• Share in bite-size chunks</li> <li>• Avoid "you" language</li> <li>• Goal is to be understood</li> </ul>	<p><b>Identify</b></p> <p><b>Care</b></p> <p><b>Understand</b></p>	<p>Focus on spouse's feelings.</p> <p>Allow your heart to be impacted by their emotion (empathy)</p> <p>Summarize heart message, then validate what they felt.</p> <p><b>Tips</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't react – just listen</li> <li>• Suspend judgment</li> <li>• Empathize with spouse's feelings</li> <li>• Be tentative in summary</li> </ul>

## Things to remember:

1. Remember emotional information is valuable, private and worthy of honor, respect and care.
2. Understand that caring for your feelings is not making your feelings more important than your spouse's, getting your spouse to change, or demanding that your spouse admit guilt or apologize.
3. Understand that caring for your spouse is not agreeing, being responsible for their feelings or trying to "fix it," making changes, admitting guilt or apologizing.
4. As a listener, you can make a validating and caring statement before switching roles (e.g. "thanks for sharing your feelings" or "that makes sense" or "you and your feelings really matter to me).

## ***7 Steps to Win/Win Outcomes***

- 1. Commit To A No-Losers Policy:** Each spouse in the privacy of their own heart commits to approaching the issue from a No-Losers stand point.
- 2. Heart Talk:** Couples begin the process by uncovering the Heart issues underlying the conflict or decision. By connecting at a heart level first, they increase their understanding of the many different facets of the issue.
- 3. Pray:** Couples intentionally seek the guidance of God regarding the issue.
- 4. Brainstorm Options:** This is “green light thinking” time...begin listing every possible option you both can come up with. It is important not to evaluate or criticize any option mentioned in this step.
- 5. Evaluate The Options:** Narrow the options down to the top two or three you both feel the most comfortable with.
- 6. Pick One And Implement Or Wait:** Choose a strategy and act upon it or wait if none of the options results in a win/win. If stuck at this point it is a good indication that more Heart Talk is needed. There may be some important aspect of the issue not yet identified.
- 7. Revisit The Selected Option And Rework If Necessary:** This step is so critical to the overall effectiveness of the win-win. It allows both spouses the opportunity to reconsider a decision. If the plan is not contributing to results both partners feel good about, then it is important to begin the seven steps again to arrive at a different plan.



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The Bible. New International Version.

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