



ASSESS YOUR MARRIAGE INTIMACY

In our Preface we invited you to think of your marriage as a videotape and "rewind" through the magic of memory to the decade in which you were married. Now we urge you to zero in on that once-in-a-lifetime event - your wedding day.

It may have been the most hectic day of your life. Or the most romantic. Or the most terrifying. Or all of these. And more. Much, much more. Your emotions may have careened from panic to ecstasy to anxiety and back again. And the questions no doubt pummeled your brain like swarming bees. *Will the ceremony go off without a hitch? Have I forgotten anything crucial? Am I really ready to spend a lifetime with this person?*

This last question may have come to mind as you said your vows. The minister or official who performed your ceremony no doubt reminded you of the significance of this moment and of the permanence of your commitment. He probably included in his remarks a reference to the three areas of intimacy we will be discussing in this workbook. You and your spouse may have pledged to "love, honor, and cherish" each other. That's the dimension of emotional intimacy (the soul, or your "self-consciousness"). You promised to "forsake all others." This refers to physical intimacy (the body, or your "world-consciousness"). And you made a commitment to "what God has joined together." That's *spiritual* intimacy (the spirit, or your "God-consciousness"). There you have it.

Your marriage vows suggest "oneness" in three parts - body, soul, and spirit.

Think about these areas for a moment. In which area(s) in intimacy do you think God would want us to become intimate first? What would the world's perspective be on this order? (Actually, our society often focuses on *one* dimension to the complete exclusion of the other two!)

The essential truth is that God intended for us to develop intimacy with our mate in *each* of these three areas. It is the only way we can establish a balanced, fulfilled marriage.

Are you open to nurturing an emotional intimacy with your spouse? A spiritual intimacy? A physical intimacy?

For the relationships in your marriage or family to be knit closely together, you must share yourselves with one another. "Closeness" doesn't just happen because we have the same last name or live under the same roof. Becoming one in marriage involves the freedom to share all of yourself with your spouse - spirit, soul, and body.

To survive the flourish, your marriage needs nourishment and attention in each of these dimensions. Just as you need air, food, and water to live, so your marriage has essential nourishment needs. A growing, healthy, and balanced marital relationship is one where each partner is enjoying and abundance of intimacy in all three realms - body, soul, and spirit. This means that as the two of you "become one flesh" (Gen 2:24), you become "best friends" growing together in spiritual fellowship and sexual closeness.

You may know many couples who excel in one of these areas but lag behind in the other two. Rudy and Marisa are newlywed lovebirds who can't keep their hands off each other. They bill and coo and whisper sweet nothings, but one wonders if they'll have anything to say to each other once they novelty of sex wears off.

Glen and Shawna seem like they've been best friend forever, but they act more like brother and sister than husband and wife. Have they forgotten the passions of their youth or did they never give their passions a chance to heat up in the first place?

Cliff and Phyllis are so involved in their church work they have no time for fun and recreation. They teach Sunday School, sing in the choir, and hold positions on every committee. No one has ever seen them together without a Bible or hymnbook between them; all their conversation revolves around the Lord's work. Surely God is pleased. Or is He? Wasn't it

His idea to have *three* dimensions in a relationship? Somehow, in spite of their "spirituality," Cliff and Phyllis have forgotten two of those three vital dimensions of marriage God has ordained.

How about you and your partner? Is your marriage lopsided because you're expending all of your energies in only one or, at most, two dimensions of your relationship?

During the next few minutes we encourage you and your partner to give responses that will help you assess your level of intimacy in each of these three areas - body, soul, and spirit.

Start by silently asking yourselves these questions:

- What does it mean to be physically intimate with my partner?
- What does it mean to be a friend to my spouse?
- What would a spiritual dimension to our relationship involve?

WHERE ARE WE?

After you've taken a few minutes to reflect on your relationship with your spouse, indicate your perception of your degree of intimacy in the three areas of spirit, soul, and body. Place an X on the scale below to signify your view of the relationship

1. The spiritual dimension of our relationship is

| | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Lacking in Intimacy | Very Intimate |
|---------------------|---------------|

What aspects of your spiritual relationship would you most like to see changed or improved in your marriage? _____

2. The emotional or friendship dimension of our relationship is

| | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Lacking in Intimacy | Very Intimate |
|---------------------|---------------|

What aspects of being a friend to your spouse would you most like to see changed or improved in your marriage? _____

3. The physical dimension of our relationship is

Lacking in
Intimacy

Very
Intimate

What aspects of your physical closeness would you most like
to see changed or improved in your marriage? _____

*What aspects of being a friend to your
spouse would you most like to see changed
or improved in your marriage?*

As part of your relationship assessment, complete the following Marital Intimacy Inventory. Carefully read each of the fifteen (15) questions below and circle the number from 1 to 5 that is most representative of your response.

MARITAL INTIMACY INVENTORY

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. My spouse is supportive and encouraging of my personal spiritual growth. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. We seem to be good at giving one another undivided attention when listening or talking. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. When I'm sharing my feelings, my spouse values them and is sensitive to provide understanding reassurance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. We seem to prioritize frequent times of quality talking and having dates together. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4 Intimate Encounters _____

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 5. My spouse is attentive and sensitive to my needs in the area of sexual foreplay. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. We seem to practice honest confession followed by genuine forgiveness when one of us has hurt the other. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My spouse is good at sharing appreciation and verbalizing love. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Verbalizing my needs and desires concerning our relationship to my spouse would be normal for me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I'm comfortable communicating my sexual desires and preferences to my spouse. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. We seem to frequently recount the good times and blessings we have enjoyed as a couple. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. My spouse and I often tend to agree in many of the important issues concerning values and beliefs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I remember special times when my spouse and I shared strong emotions, life grief, sadness, joy, or brokenness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I'm very satisfied with my spouse's sensitivity in meeting my sexual needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. As a couple, our spiritual closeness through prayer or sharing Scripture insights is quite good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I am satisfied with my spouse's frequency of initiating sexual times together. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Interpreting Your Score

Add your responses for Questions #1, #6, #10, #11, and #14, and chart your score here:

Spiritual Scale _____
0 25

Add your responses for Questions #2, #3, #7, #8, and #12, and chart your score here:

Emotional Scale _____
0 25

Add your responses for Questions #4, #5, #9, #13, and #15, and chart your score here:

Physical Scale _____
0 25

Did any new insights or questions come to mind as you completed this inventory? _____

Summarize your impressions or feelings about the inventory results here: _____

Scripture Journaling - Isaiah 58:11

The LORD will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring when waters never fail. (NIV)

Isaiah 58:11 promises the Lord will continually guide you. Reflect on God's promise of provision and strength. Spend some time telling God

your desires for your marriage. Ask for His guidance and strength. Write your thoughts and prayers to God here.

MARRIAGE STAFF MEETING

Set aside half an hour of quiet time together with your spouse. Spend this time discussing only the issues related to this workbook; save discussions about the children, finances, or household concerns for a later time.

We suggest the husband take the initiative and begin sharing his perceptions in each of the areas of intimacy. He shares the questions, insights, or summary statements about the inventory exercise, and his final scores for the inventory questions. The wife then shares the same information. Each partner also shares the specific area in each dimension they would like to see improved. Be sure to let each partner share his or her responses without interruption or comments.

Make this first session an information gathering session. Gather information by listening attentively to your spouse. Make eye contact and be sure your mind is free from distractions as he or she is talking. End your time together by holding hands, thanking each other for having the courage to vulnerably share responses, and, if you feel comfortable, say a silent prayer, thanking God for your partner and asking for His guidance in your marriage.

Here are some examples of what you might communicate to your spouse:

"Honey, when I was doing these exercises, I kept seeing the word *verbalize*. I think I've started to realize how important it is to communicate what I'm thinking to you. Maybe that's a good place for me to start."

"Sweetheart, for the emotional part of your marriage, here's the area I'd like to work on. I know it would mean a lot to you if I supported your decisions when you're disciplining the kids. I'm going to make a real effort to do that."

For Group Discussion

Encourage all couples who have completed Chapter One to answer the following:

After completing the inventory, the thing I realized about myself was

After the first Marriage Staff Meeting, one positive impression I had was

Make a mental note of the couples who did not complete Chapter One and visit with them privately after the meeting. Bring them into the discussion at appropriate times.

Have each group member turn to the results of their inventory questions. Explain that God intended for the marriage relationship to contain oneness in three areas. God wants our marriage to look like an equilateral triangle - with a spiritual base and the emotional and physical intimacy forming the other two sides.

Give each person a rubber band and ask them to manipulate it in such a way that it represents how their relationship started. Ask them: Which dimension formed the base of the relationship when you were first married? How did the other two sides look?

Ask participants to also show their current perception of their marriage. How do they see the relationship now?

Give each person a chance to explain his/her rubber band "creations." Participants may want to actually refer to their scores on page 6. These scores do give some indication as to their perception of strength or weakness in their marriage. Ask for group feedback and discussion.

Lifestyle Disciplines

Marriage Staff Meetings are included so that you and your partner will begin to prioritize your time together. Just as any successful business cannot be run without scheduled times for feedback and organization, a successful marriage requires the same commitment to communication. Begin the habit now of scheduling times to be with your partner. Agree on specific dates and put them on the family calendar or in your daily planner. Make these times a priority. Start incorporating this discipline into your lifestyle today!
