

30-DAY
MARRIAGE
MAKEOVER

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Introduction

GENUINE INTIMACY

GENUINE INTIMACY IS the cry of our nation. Many individuals search through multiple marriages trying to find the vital connection their souls long for. Still louder shouts the silence of the man or woman who has been married for decades and feels alone in that partnership. Many feel they have done everything right at home and with their spouses, yet there is little or no intimacy.

Far too many partners feel like roommates—as if they are just getting by emotionally. If fulfillment is promised, then why is it that few couples enjoy that impassioned connection? I don't think this is God's plan for your marriage. He wants you to live the abundant life and to have a marriage full of joy and love—and this is what we're going to accomplish these next thirty days. We are going to make your marriage over into what God has designed for you and your spouse.

I have lived in the laboratory of other people's marriages for many years. In addition, I myself have journeyed from the inability to be intimate to a place of deep intimacy and great fulfillment with my wife, Lisa.

Early in my married life I had the feeling that I was surrounded by walls. I desperately wanted to step out from behind those walls but could not find a way to connect to my wife. God in His graciousness drew me into the field of marriage and family counseling, where I gained much understanding. Still, no one explained, "These are the steps to intimacy:

1, 2, 3.” The mystery of intimacy and the skills required to build and maintain it continued to elude me—as it does for so many others in my field.

It is in the laboratory of real marriage, real crisis, real love, and genuine desire for intimacy that we will solve the mystery. Part of the solution can be discovered in a series of principles that can be applied daily. I’ve counseled couples whose relationships were so distant that they had not enjoyed sex for more than a decade. When these same couples applied the principles in this book, within six weeks not only had they rekindled their sexual relationship, but also they actually started to like one other again for the first time in years.

Intimacy is really not a mystery at all—it is a process. Intimacy is the fruit of being in this process. Allow me to explain it another way: Wealth is a process. You work. You save. Maybe you invest. But to those who follow the basic principles of wealth and apply them, regardless of how they feel about them, wealth happens to them. The same applies to your health. Under normal circumstances, the process of eating right and exercising keeps you healthy. Those who do what they want, eat what they want, or spend what they want often do not achieve optimal health or wealth.

The same is true with intimacy. Those who do what they want emotionally with their spouse do not achieve optimal intimacy. The following pages will guide you into the process and the practical application of intimacy. Since intimacy is a process, I strongly believe that after thirty days of applying these skills, your marriage will be made over into a dynamic and satisfying relationship with so many benefits that you will never want to abandon these principles of living and the deeply satisfying intimacy with your spouse that they can bring—ever!

I have practiced these exercises in my relationship with my wife. Lisa and I have been married for many years, and as we have applied these principles to our marriage, we have continued to grow closer and stronger together. I believe the greatest gift to our children is a strong, vibrant, and lovingly intimate marriage. I wouldn’t ask you to do something that I don’t practice myself. Throughout the years, these principles have given

life to my wife, to many of my clients, and to me. As you practice the power of intimacy, I pray that you and your partner will experience the abundant life that Jesus has promised each of you in your most intimate relationship—your marriage.

BEGINNING YOUR THIRTY DAYS

The next thirty days can breathe life back into your marriage, but you must work at it. Determine to spend this time mastering the basic skills necessary to enjoy satisfying and enduring intimacy with your spouse.

With Christian growth, those who pray, soak themselves in Scripture, have regular fellowship, and obey the Holy Spirit of God will enjoy intimacy with the Father. Disciplines are the structures of life breathed into us. This truth applies to intimacy in marriage too.

As you and your spouse take the next thirty days to commit to behaviors that support intimacy, your marriage can be completely transformed and made new—no matter what state it is in right now.

These thirty days are designed for the long haul. Remember, you are developing a marathon runner's mentality, not a sprinter's. So please take this next month seriously and discipline yourselves for the long haul. Happy training as you begin the happiest journey of your life—intimacy with your spouse.

During these thirty days you will begin to make over four key parts of a healthy marriage—spiritual, emotional, sexual, and making it all last for a lifetime. At the end of each day a place is provided for you to record your daily progress and make notes along the way. At the end of each week there will be a place to assess your progress for the week.

In the weekly section, space is provided for notes on three evaluation areas. You may write about your progress, such as whose date it was and the progress you are making on your financial structure. As you keep track of your progress, change will take place.

When your thirty days are completed, this book will be an enduring tool for developing and maintaining intimacy for a lifetime.

Day 1

THE THREE DAILIES— PART 1: PRAYER

I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

—MATTHEW 18:19–20

THROUGHOUT MY YEARS of counseling, I have discovered that many marriages lack structures to encourage intimacy. We grow up believing that one day we will get married and live happily ever after. We enter marriage ill equipped for intimacy and are disappointed when our husband or wife doesn't possess the secret code to intimacy either.

At first marriage is fun as you begin to learn about your spouse, go to work or school, get your first apartment, pick out furniture, go to church, and are physically intimate together without guilt. The sheer complexities of your new life together, along with the many new decisions you must make, can keep you talking and sharing regularly.

Slowly and subtly it happens. No one really knows when or where it happens, but something changes within the relationship. You don't seem to talk as much.

Decisions are not met with the same excitement as when you were

first married; instead, they are delegated, then discussed. Purchases become fewer, and sex and life take on a routine. You don't feel as close but seem just to be living together. What happened? Where did the passion for one another go?

Americans believe that people are either passionate or they are not. But this kind of thinking is incorrect. Passion is a dividend of consistent investments made into a relationship.

Let's reflect back a minute to when you were dating. You were selling your spouse on the idea that being married to you was a great idea. Remember the passion you had for your future spouse? Of course you remember the passion, but what you may have forgotten is the foundation of that passion, the priority of the relationship.

Do you remember how you "made" time to be together? You planned your days and weeks around each other's work schedule, including your days off. Those of you who were attending school in another city away from your future spouse, as I was, had the phone bills to prove your passion and priority. In my case, those phone bills took a giant bite out of the little income I made just so I could tell her about my day.

If you were a Christian at the time, do you remember how spiritual you were? You prayed together as often as you could and perhaps even read the Bible together. You desired to know God's will, and you wanted God to help you stay pure and still express your love to one another.

Do you remember the gratitude you had for the smallest things your spouse did for you? This was especially true for me when Lisa cooked for me. I was so grateful! I filled her life with a constant stream of praise. Do you remember when you thought she was so smart and attractive and had so much potential? You believed in her and regularly encouraged her.

Understand that passion is a result of setting priorities. Too many people attempt to get back the *passion* instead of getting back their *priorities*. Once you get the priorities back, the passion follows and grows naturally.

What priorities? I will discuss priorities shortly, but before I do, I want to share an analogy I often use in counseling sessions. Many

couples come in for help with sprains or fractures in their relationships. I liken the repair of a marital relationship to fixing a broken bone. When your bone is broken, you can continue to function in a limited way, but you look and act unusual. Then you go to the doctor or emergency room.

The first thing the doctor does is order an X-ray of the bone. Sure enough, he looks at the structure. Regardless of how it happened, the X-ray shows a damaged structure (your bone is broken). The doctor and nurse apply a structural treatment to your structural problem in the form of a cast.

The cast is a structural treatment that allows the bone to heal. The cast itself is just plastic or plaster, and it has no healing properties. But when it is applied to a broken bone to hold the bone in place, surprise! Healing can and does happen.

The same thing happens when you place the priorities back into your marriage. No matter how sprained or broken a marriage is, healing can and does take place. I have seen genuine miracles of restoration in marriages when priorities were put back into the relationship. One of the structures I apply is what I call “the three dailies.”

I want to add a personal note of testimony. As I have stated before, I would never ask you to do something that Lisa and I have not done or are not doing presently in our relationship. Lisa and I have done two of the three dailies every day for years, with only a few exceptions. When I developed the third exercise, we actively applied it to our marriage routine also.

These three exercises help Lisa and I maintain our relationship priorities. They are part of our bedtime routine. Neither of us expects to go to sleep without our relational ritual of the three dailies.

They are a major highlight of my day. I get to hear about my wife’s day, hear her heart, and she gets to hear about my day and heart as well. This relational structure has richly developed our skill for intimacy to such a level that it can weather the day-to-day challenges of children, writing, and media demands, together with all of our other commitments.

When your marriage priorities are restored, your passion will be restored. Everyone who knows me is well aware of my passion for Lisa.

I love her and really like her as well. This passion is the fruit of discipline that is born out of a heart of love.

THE THREE DAILIES

1. Prayer

Prayer is an absolute necessity in your marriage. I am constantly amazed when couples tell me that the last time they really prayed together, not including praying over food or a good night prayer with children, was years ago. Sometimes they say, “We both pray, just not together.”

Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” The Lord must be part of building your house. Prayer is an active way to include the Lord as part of the building plan of your marriage.

Matthew 18:19 says, “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” As we’ve previously noted, this verse discusses the importance of two or more agreeing in God’s name. It doesn’t say when *one* agrees—it says when *two* agree.

Since Christ’s resurrection, He intercedes with and for His bride, which is the church. The Lord sees prayer as being extremely important. God’s pleasure is for us to commune with Him not just as individuals, but as a couple as well.

Prayer is one of the priorities that must be set in place by a couple desiring more intimacy. Remember, intimacy is three dimensional, involving spirit, soul, and body. As we grow together spiritually, our intimacy in the other two areas will grow as well.

Prayer is just talking aloud to God with your spouse, similar to talking with a friend. Prayer doesn’t have to take long hours in any particular position. It is the principle of connecting with God that is essential.

As a couple, within your governing style in your marriage, process the decision of daily prayer. As a result of your decision as a couple, place a check by which of the following statements you agree with.