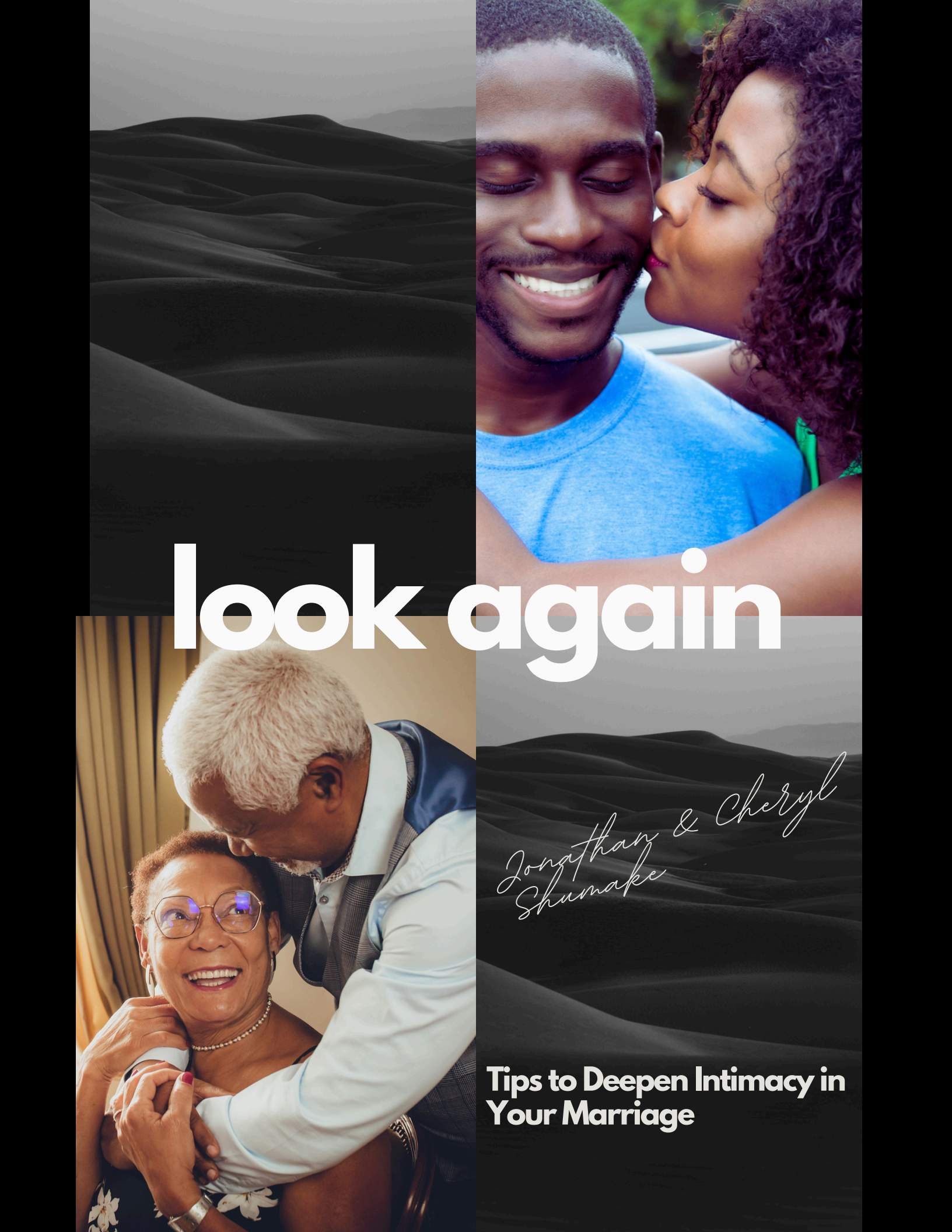




look again

*Jonathan & Cheryl
Shumake*

**Tips to Deepen Intimacy in
Your Marriage**

LOOK AGAIN

Look Again – Tips to Deepen Intimacy in Your Marriage
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From the Shumakes

Pronounced: “Shoe-mayk”

Sawubona Fam! Thank you for downloading Look Again. We are excited for you to dig in. The success of your marriage matters to us. With a connected, intimate, thriving marriage, your blended family is more likely to come together in the bonds of unity and acceptance. Your marriage supports a family culture which invites your family members to come close, even while navigating blended family dynamics.

But, if you're anything like us, a whole lot gets in the way of having a consistently connected, intimate, thriving marriage. For instance, those same blended family dynamics have just as much potential to pull us apart as they do to drive us together. Not to mention our own ego, pride, health challenges, concerns... LIFE!

Connection doesn't just happen. To become part of the fabric of our relationships intimacy must struggle against both internal hesitation and external pressure. Not to mention the complacency that creeps in when we confuse being in the same space with being PRESENT with one another.

So we work. We ponder. We pray. And we intentionally MAKE opportunities to develop connection, build intimacy, and fertilize our marriage so it can thrive. This guide is all about helping you do the same. Because, we're in this - and we're in this *with* you!

Jonathan & Cheryl



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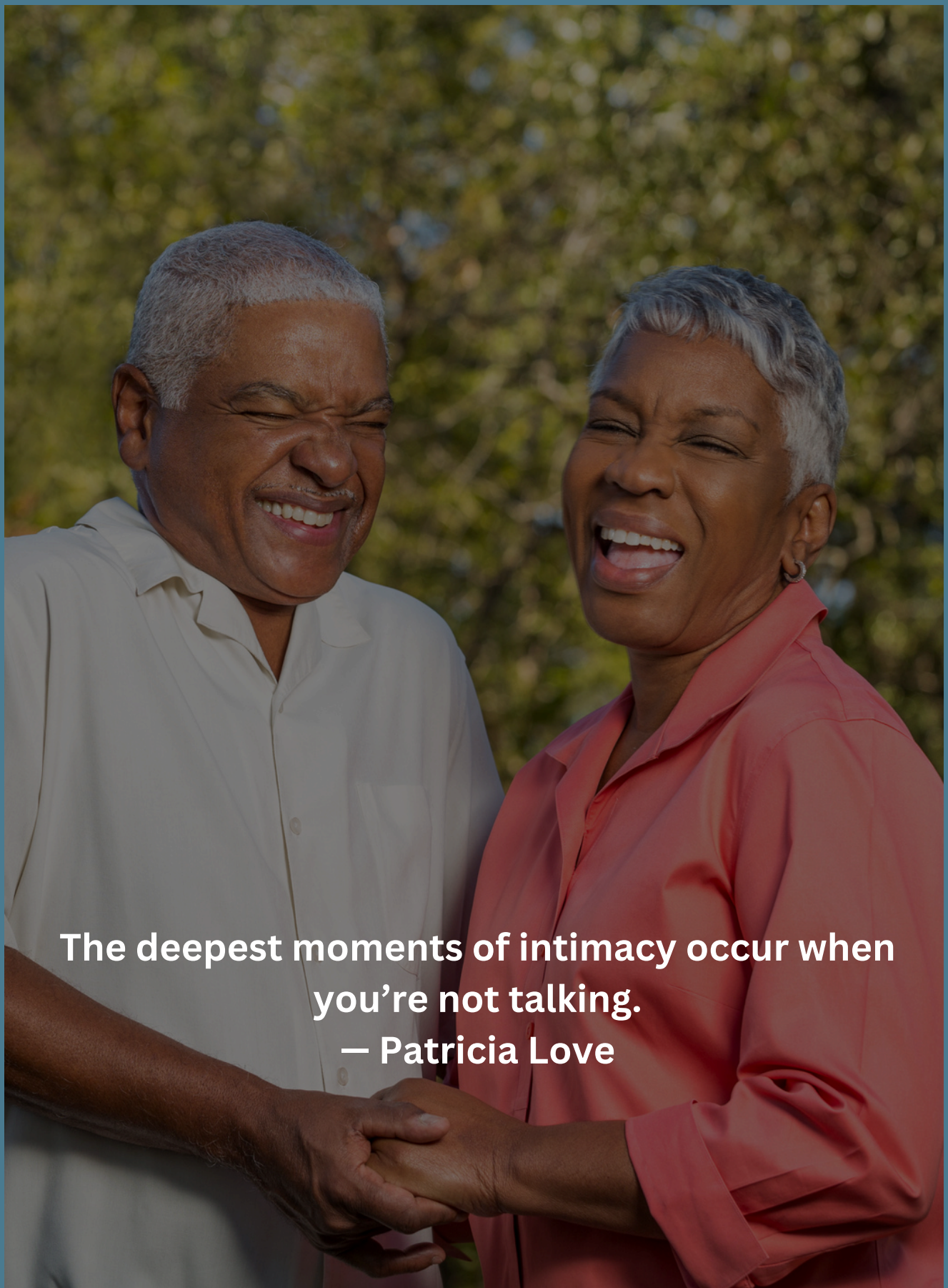


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**The deepest moments of intimacy occur when
you're not talking.
— Patricia Love**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Look Again: Tips to Deepen Intimacy in Your Marriage guide. Although, approximately 40% of marriages performed today create a blended family, (that number is actually higher for people in black and brown communities), we are still sorely lacking in Christ-centered, research-based resources to support this growing demographic. And we need support!

The statistics bear witness; couples leading a blended family (a family structure where one partner entered the marriage with a child from a previous relationship) are more likely to divorce. According to Ron Deal of Smart Stepfamilies and Family Life Blended, the current divorce rate of stepfamily couples is roughly 45-50% with a projected divorce rate of roughly 50-60%.

The reasons for divorce are as varied as the people involved, but one thing is common; disconnection happens before anyone visits an attorney. We are committed to preventing re-divorce, and helping couples build a family legacy that honors God. That's our why for this guide.

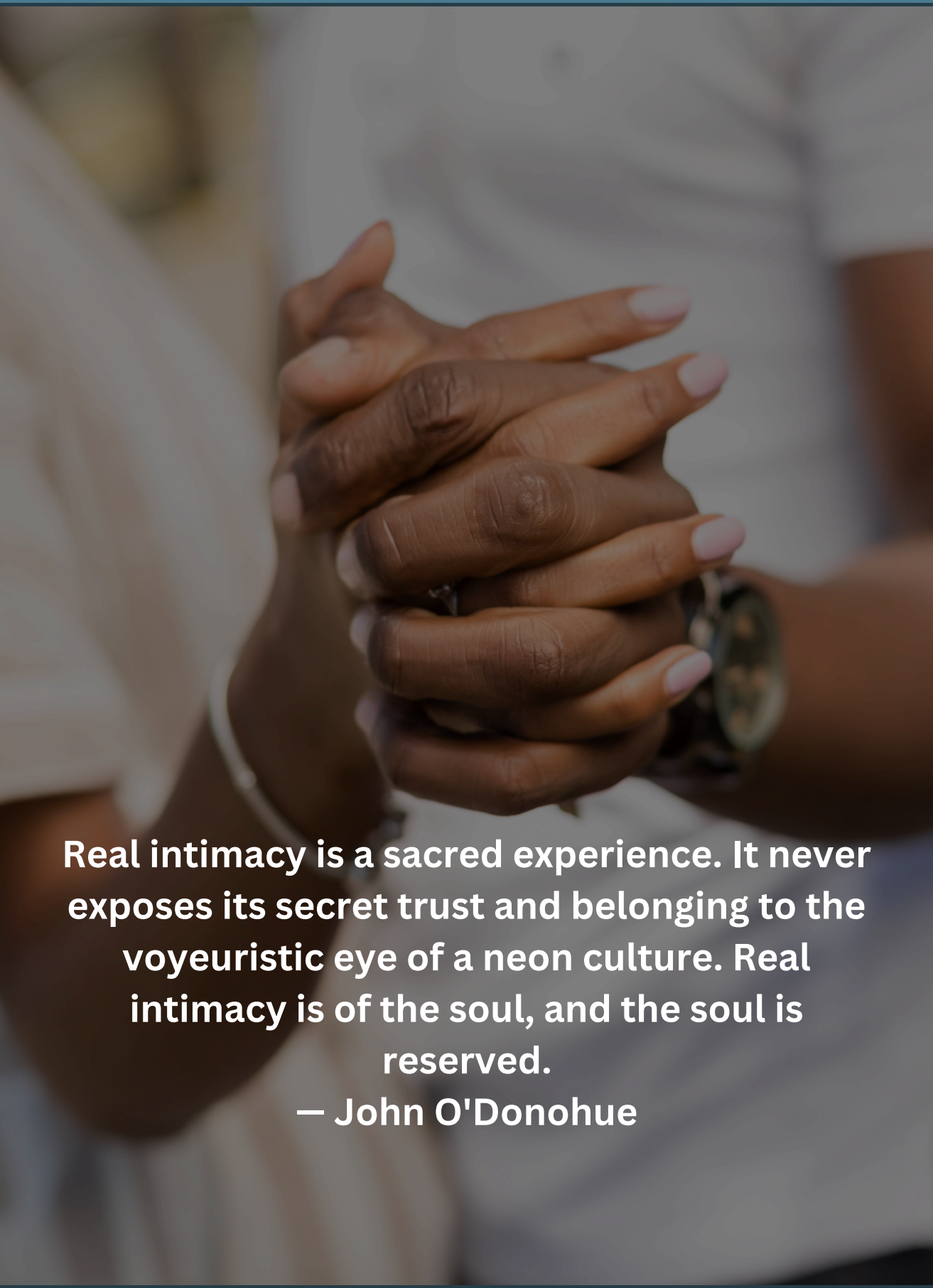
This guide is filled with information, **questions, tips, exercises, and scripture** to help you reacquaint yourself with the gift God gave you in your spouse.

The **Put a Pin In It** pages contain main points we don't want you to lose. Use the **Notes** pages to jot down your thoughts. We recommend downloading two copies; one for hubby and one for wifey.

This guide is comprehensive but it is not exhaustive. It's just an overview. So while you'll get something out of it, you won't get everything. Use it as a log to feed the fire.

Whether you are rocking hard, feel a little off, have settled for being roommates, or are out the door, it is our prayer you are inspired to look again, and experience the deep satisfaction that comes from deep connection with your spouse.





**Real intimacy is a sacred experience. It never
exposes its secret trust and belonging to the
voyeuristic eye of a neon culture. Real
intimacy is of the soul, and the soul is
reserved.**

— John O'Donohue

IN-TO-ME-SEE

As much as we talk about intimacy, no one seems to have an exact definition of it. Most people think about sex when they think of intimacy. Google, “what is intimacy” and a slew of definitions will pop up. Dictionary.com defines intimacy as “showing a close union or combination of particles or elements: an intimate mixture.” Collin’s dictionary defines it as “close or warm friendship or understanding; personal relationship.” Both of those definitions seem to be slightly off mark for our purposes.

A combination of particles or elements is a bland way to describe the joy and sense of completeness you feel when you see and are seen, welcome and are welcomed, listen and are heard, know and are known, show up, and are likewise attended to.

A close or warm friendship can enjoy intimacy, but that description too falls far short of the soul to soul connection intimacy promises. Intimacy just seems difficult to pin down.

Cheryl and I (Jonathan) have spent some time talking about this and trying to come up with a simple definition. And we’ve discovered a few things on our quest.

First, intimacy is God’s idea. We didn’t invent it; mankind is not that smart. Second, becoming one is about far more than the physical union of sexual intimacy. Sex is meant to be an outward expression of an inward reality.



IN-TO-ME-SEE

Third, intimacy is a need. The word, “Ezer” appears in the Old Testament 21 times. Twice it refers to Eve, 3 times it refers to powerful ally nations of Israel, all other times it refers to God Himself. In every instance it means to come alongside one who is helpless. God made us to need each other. The need is significant and is answered in our drive for connection. Like all things of God, intimacy is sacred. We can live without intimacy but we cannot thrive.

We also discovered intimacy is not a specific destination. We don’t arrive at “intimacy” never again to wrestle with it, pursue it, or fight for it. Instead, intimacy is a state of being. It is a present participle verb. Like all other states of being, it fluctuates. It can be impacted and influenced. It is active, and functional. Intimacy engages physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental senses on multiple levels.

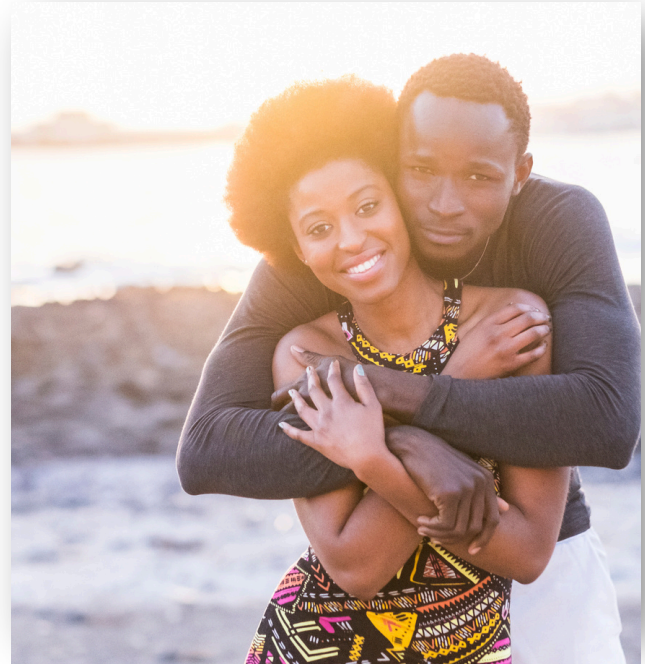
Last discovery we stumbled upon was intimacy is a mirror. It’s reflective. Real intimacy serves as a barometer for our own soul. That’s why it’s so scary. It is a place of such raw vulnerability, little,

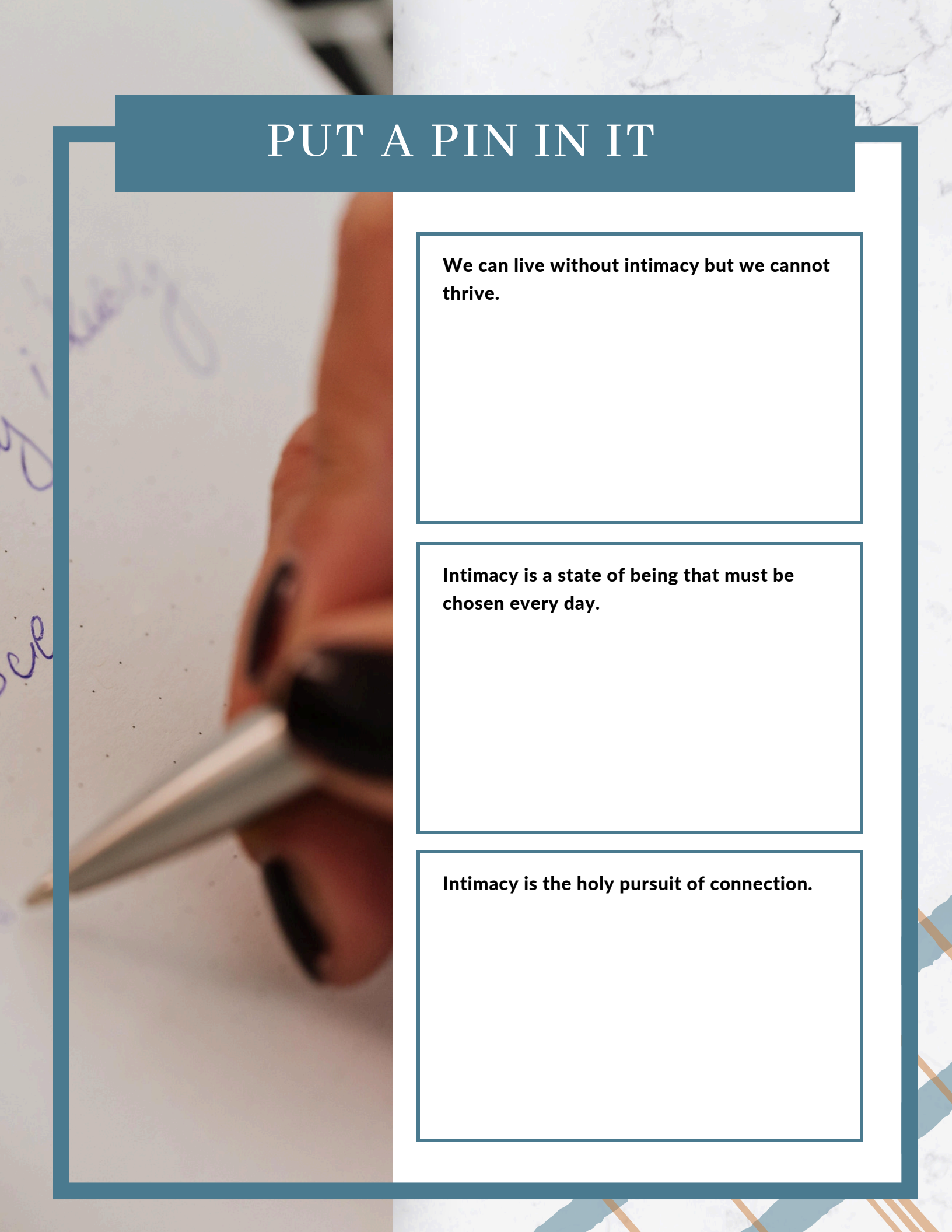
if anything, is hidden. Truth is known in intimacy. However, truth comes to set us free.

We clarified our definition. We took the components we discovered (God’s idea, active, indicative, etc.) and boiled it down to one concise sentence:

Intimacy is the holy pursuit of deep connection.

That’s it... simple, clear, and true. Yet complex, because intimacy is not monolithic... it is manifold; there are different types of intimacy, which we’ll discuss next.





PUT A PIN IN IT

We can live without intimacy but we cannot thrive.

Intimacy is a state of being that must be chosen every day.

Intimacy is the holy pursuit of connection.



Ask the right questions!

How have you begun to see intimacy in its fuller context?

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How has your view of intimacy hindered or helped your relationships?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for a user to write their response to the question above.

When is the closest you've ever felt to your spouse? Why?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for a user to write their response to the question above.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

The Revealing Game

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit facing each other. Make eye contact and take a few deep breaths together. Feel the space between you, and notice what it feels like to be sitting together in this way.

Pick one of these prompts as a way to open up and share your inner world with each other:

“Something on my heart and mind right now is...”

“Something I’m looking forward to is...”

“Something that’s been bringing me a lot of joy recently is...”

“Something I’ve been struggling with lately is...”

Decide who will go first, and let that person speak for at least 5-10 minutes without interruption.

After the first person has finished, switch roles. The second person can then pick the same prompt and speak for 5-10 minutes.

After you’ve both had a chance to share, reflect on what you’ve learned about each other. You can also share any feelings that came up during the exercise.

To help you go deeper, try asking some of these questions (not all will be relevant, depending on what topic you’re exploring) :

“Why is this important to you?”

“How does it reflect your dreams and desires?”

“How does this reflect who you are?”

“How would you like things to be?”



INTIMACY EXERCISE

Why it works:

Research shows that without personal disclosure, even people with a huge tribe still feel lonely.

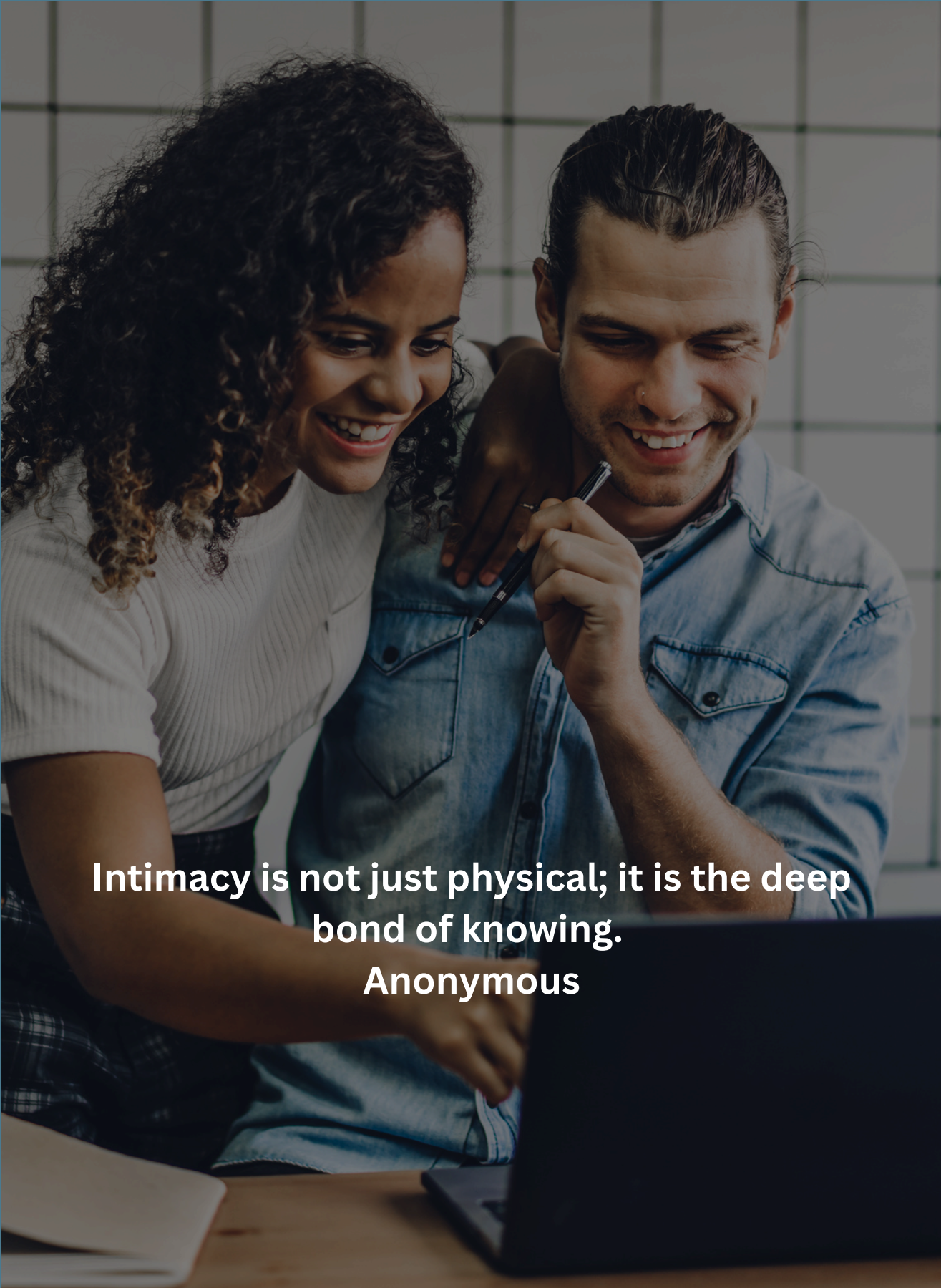
Being seen, heard, and understood means you have to open up and talk to each other about the things happening inside you.

So, unless you're talking about yourself in an honest and meaningful way, you just won't feel close.

Of course, 'talking openly' is only half the equation:

How well your partner listens, responds, and reflects an understanding is also crucial to intimacy (what's known as 'active listening').

NOTES

A young couple is shown from the chest up, sitting at a wooden desk. The woman, on the left, has dark curly hair and is wearing a white ribbed t-shirt. The man, on the right, has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a blue denim shirt. They are both smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The man is holding a pen in his right hand. The background is a light-colored wall with a grid pattern. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

**Intimacy is not just physical; it is the deep
bond of knowing.
Anonymous**

TYPES OF INTIMACY

Both Jonathan and I were married before. We both did what we thought was right and God-honoring in those marriages. We both fell short at times and we were both impacted by the short-comings of our former spouses. We still fall short in our current marriage from time to time, and are still impacted by each other's short-comings... we're human. But, one thing we work on, from a perspective of understanding and experience, is the cultivation of intimacy.

Jonathan and I are deliberate about pursuing connection - long before sex is on the table. I (Cheryl) have a saying that reflects this:

"If you want your lovin' at 11 you have to start at 7!"

And I meant AM!

We make deliberate efforts to pursue connection through friendship, prayer, recreation, support, and so much more. Since there are different types of intimacy, there are varied methods by which it develops and matures.

Deep connection is available to us in every area in life.

In a healthy marriage, the varied types of intimacy work together to create a deeply connected union. That's why emotional intimacy makes for deeper physical intimacy.

Let's take a little exploration into the different types of intimacy. We're sure we have missed a few, so please do some research to expand on what's in this guide.



SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Spiritual intimacy is the pursuit of connection with God together.

There is an old adage, we can't remember who said it, but it goes like this, "The family that prays together stays together."

Now, we know families that pray together can separate, but they are *less likely* to. Something miraculous happens when we pursue God together. Deep calls to deep. (Psalm 42:7) As we draw closer to God individually, **His Holy Spirit connects us at a place deeper than our emotions.**

The Word of God nourishes our soul, the presence of God instills joy and resiliency, the worship of God knits our heart to the Lord and also to the ones with whom we are worshipping, the pursuit of God brings heaven's perspective on all other pursuits. **We are connected spirit-man to spirit-man.**

In this way, spiritual intimacy becomes foundational to all other types of intimacy.

At it's most basic, spiritual intimacy looks like praying together, worshipping God together, reading and discussing His word together. It also involves shared worldview and values, serving together, sharing what God is doing in your hearts, family, and lives, making each other a central part of your private prayers.

If you are experiencing a lack of spiritual connectedness, make this an area of priority in your prayers and attention.



EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy is the pursuit of connection through the sharing of one's own experiences and their impact on you.

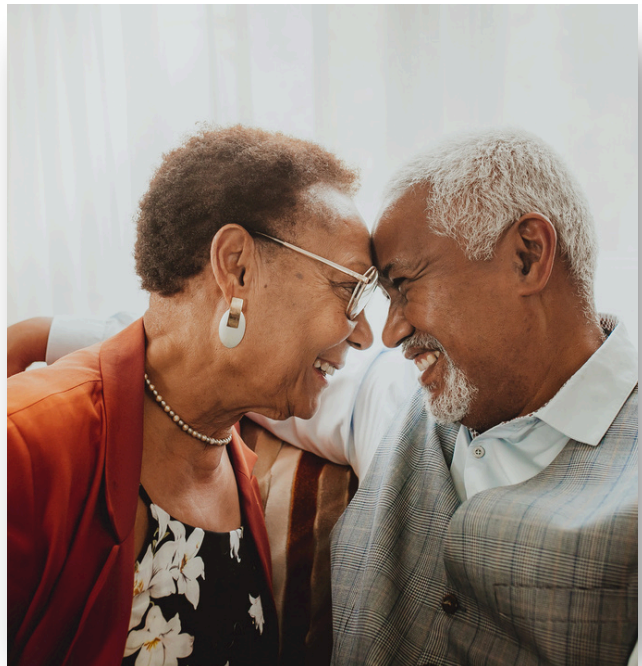
Other than spiritual intimacy, emotional intimacy is the one that is most likely to help us feel less alone. **Typically**, not always but usually, **emotional intimacy is ranked high on relational needs for women**. A woman needs her husband to make deliberate effort to understand her emotionally in order to feel marital satisfaction.

When emotional intimacy is highly developed in a relationship it can look like having long meaningful conversations about hopes, dreams, feelings, whatever. **We call it our "anything, everything, and nothing" talks.**

It will also involve curiosity about each other's thoughts, life, perspective and experiences. Emotional intimacy includes empathy, support, validation, vulnerability and safety. Emotional intimacy invokes a sense of belonging.

There are seasons when we are more emotionally connected than others, for a number of reasons. However, you will know that your relationship lacks emotional intimacy when you see a pattern of: lack of empathy, withholding of important information, loneliness, fear of rejection, emotional distancing, lack of support.

When you regularly experience this, it is time to seek help.



FINANCIAL INTIMACY

Financial intimacy is full financial disclosure and the pursuit of transparency and agreement in your finances.

There were two aspects of our pre-marital counseling we deeply appreciated. One was the willingness of the pastor who married us to include our children. The other was the fact that we had to bring our credit report and disclose our current financial standing to each other.

Financial intimacy allows you to feel heard, safe, and considered in all the factors of your financial picture.

Because of gifting and education (Jonathan has both an accounting degree and an IT degree), Jonathan handles our finances, investments, and is the final word on major financial decisions. However, we make those decisions together, and with full disclosure. We talk about our finances. We have periodic budget meetings (as of this writing, we're overdue), we alert each other of our individual credit scores and indebtedness, we talk about our individual financial needs, and we have a policy that when we're not in agreement, we don't move.

Our individual financial health has great consequence for the other. **Our financial goals should support the overall vision we have for our life together**, so it's important we maintain a connection in this area of our lives.

If you find yourselves avoiding or fighting over this area of your life together, we encourage you to speak with a financial advisor, coach, or attend a training (i.e. Financial Peace University).



RECREATIONAL INTIMACY

Recreational intimacy is the pursuit of connection by doing activities together.

Recreational intimacy is a fancy way of saying, “play together!”

Think of all the games you used to play as a kid, and the people you played those games with. If you're in our age range of 55+, those games might include Tag, Red Light - Green Light, Double-Dutch, Baseball or boardgames like Perfection and Life. We bet you just smiled.

A study appended to in 2006 by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott (originally conducted by Markman, Stanley, Blumberg, Jenkins, & Whiteley, 2004) suggests that while taking time to be playful in relationships can be enjoyable, playing as a couple is not only about having fun, but can serve many other functions.

Couples that make a habit of playing with each other experience **positive emotions**, have greater **marital satisfaction**, enjoy a deeper bond of **friendship**, and are more likely to **work together** to overcome challenges.

If you are struggling with how to play together, do one of the following: schedule fun, budget for fun, join a team together, get active (walk, run, bike), give yourself permission to be childlike (we spontaneously go kite flying or frisbee throwing), have friendly competitions - we have running Scrabble (Cheryl is the reigning champ) and Putt-putt (Jonathan has this one on lock) challenges.

Make the effort to have fun together. **We need the fun to look forward to, to make the make the hard worth enduring.**



INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY

Intellectual intimacy is the pursuit of connection through the exchange of ideas and/or engagement in learning opportunities together.

Intellectual intimacy may involve stimulating conversations about intriguing ideas, lighthearted conversations about the latest goings on in the family or respectful debates about a difference of opinion. **The important factor is the exchange.** The giving of yourself and the acceptance of your spouse through your thoughts about the world around you.

Intellectual intimacy not only gives you insight into how your spouse thinks, it gives you opportunity to be amazed at your spouse's intelligence, it supports intellectual development (fighting against diseases like Dementia and Alzheimer's), and it encourages critical thinking which is helpful when you need to work through a challenging situation.

You can deepen intellectual intimacy by reading a book together (as of this writing we are reading Caste: The Origins of Our

Discontent by Isabel Wilkerson.)

Regularly discussing world news, cultural issues, something you've read individually. Take a class together (we have taken Spanish Language classes together). Share your expertise with each other. Explore a new interest together. Dive into the details of each other's thinking. Complete a project together. Just explore and, **enjoy the exploration.**



NON-SEXUAL PHYSICAL INTIMACY

Sex is almost always where people go when they think of physical intimacy. But, physical intimacy extends way beyond the bedroom.

Non-sexual physical intimacy is the pursuit of connection through affectionate touch.

Men often think physical intimacy is an indicator that a woman wants sex, while sometimes she just wants a hug. And women often think a man touches to get sex when his cuddle is sometimes just an expression of his care, protection, and affection for you. Although, it should be noted that men typically feel closest to their wives when having sex. Women, on the other hand, typically feel closest to their husbands when he's tuned into her emotionally.

When physical touch is a means to an end, it objectifies our spouse and leads to disconnection.

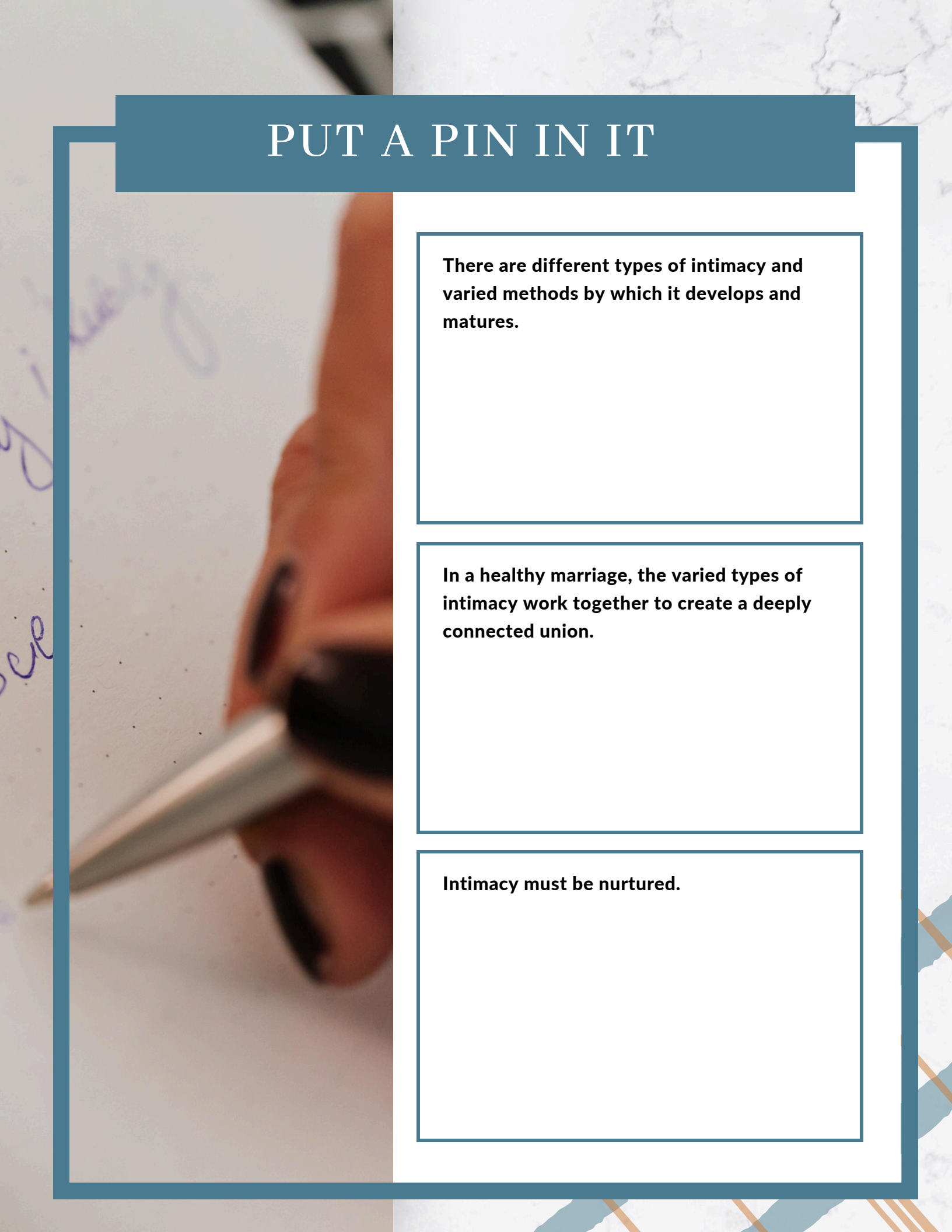
Non-sexual physical intimacy is meant to convey affection, concern, and love. It is non-verbal communication of connection.

We are an affectionate couple. Often our hands are laid on a shoulder or arm while speaking with each other. We both

work from home but never start our day without a kiss. Many times you will find us hugging, holding hands, or cuddling on the couch. We unapologetically gravitate towards each other because we enjoy physical connection. However, it's not unusual to be married to someone who avoids physical touch.

If you find yourself pulling back from non-sexual physical intimacy, try getting to the root cause. If forgiveness, therapy, or self-acceptance is warranted, seek help. Whatever you do, don't neglect meeting this God-given need for each other.





PUT A PIN IN IT

There are different types of intimacy and varied methods by which it develops and matures.

In a healthy marriage, the varied types of intimacy work together to create a deeply connected union.

Intimacy must be nurtured.



Ask the right questions!

Which type(s) of intimacy are you strong in?

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In which type(s) of intimacy do you feel you need improvement?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their answer to the question about areas for improvement in intimacy.

What one thing can you do differently to bridge the gap between what you currently do and what you can do better?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their answer to the question about bridging the gap in intimacy.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

HUGGING 'TO EXHALE

Set a timer for 5 minutes. Hit start and begin hugging. You can do this standing, sitting, or laying down – whatever you like.

Take a few deep breaths to relax. Tune in – notice your body, notice your breathing, notice how you're feeling. Where are you at emotionally? Are you holding tension anywhere? Can you relax some more?

Once you feel more present and connected to the moment, begin tuning in to your partner. Notice their body and breathing. How do they feel to you? Can you feel them holding tension? What feels good about being held by them?

Then notice – how does tuning in to your partner make you feel? What comes up in response? Bring an awareness to the chatter in your mind. What thoughts do you notice coming up? Do you find it hard to just be with your partner without some kind of agenda or goal? Is it difficult for you to be still and quiet with each other? Does it feel comforting? Arousing? Is your mind racing? Are you worrying about your partner and what they're thinking or feeling? Keep hugging until the timer goes off, keeping an awareness on your own internal experience, while also letting yourself be impacted by the close physical contact.

Afterwards, share how the experience was for you. What did you notice? What was challenging? What did you enjoy?



INTIMACY EXERCISE

Why it works:

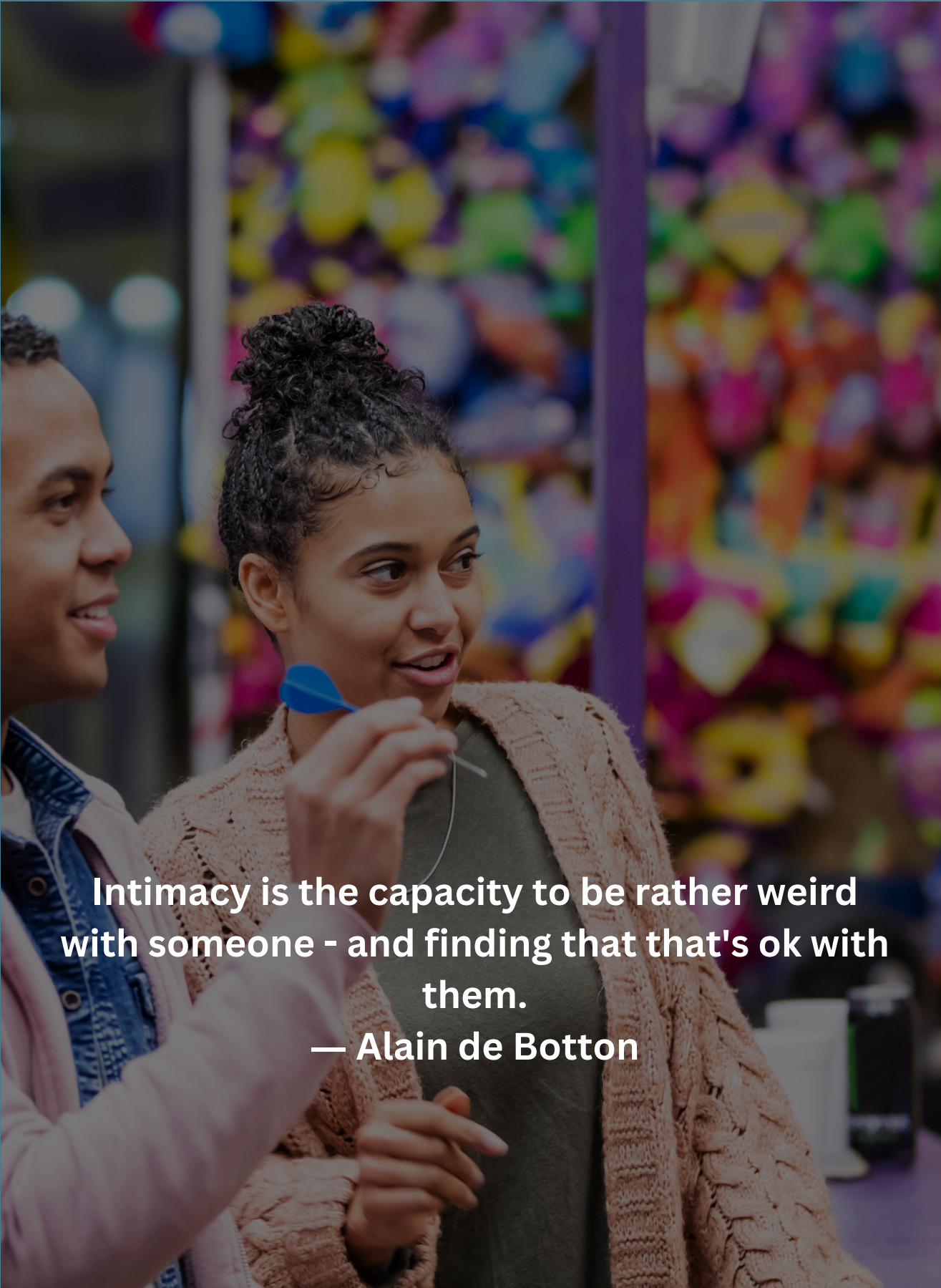
Research shows hugs reduce stress, increase serotonin (the happiness hormone) and release oxytocin (the bonding brain chemical).

Hugging is a great exercise to build health, happiness, and connection, all at the same time.

Although, challenging at first, with practice, this simple intimacy exercise can go to some incredibly deep places.

Hugging 'Til You Exhale is especially helpful if you've noticed a decrease in physical intimacy in your relationship, or you're facing challenges in your sex life.

NOTES

A young man and woman are shown in profile, smiling and looking at each other. The man is on the left, wearing a pink jacket over a blue denim shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a beige knitted cardigan over a dark green top. She is holding a blue dart. They are in a room with a large, colorful, and out-of-focus background of many small, bright objects, possibly a party or a game area. The overall mood is joyful and intimate.

**Intimacy is the capacity to be rather weird
with someone - and finding that that's ok with
them.**

— Alain de Botton

STUFF IT'S MADE OF

How couples express deep connection is as varied as pizza toppings. **What intimacy looks like for us is different than what it looks like for you.** The expression of intimacy is varied, however, the foundational components are the same.

Just like all pizza begins with baked dough, **intimacy is comprised of factors that remain true in every marriage.**

We've provided a list of factors which indicate intimacy is deepening in your relationship. **You will know true intimacy when the following factors are functional in your relationship.** That means these factors are integrated into the culture of your relationship. The integration process varies, depending on a number of external and internal factors.

What you're looking for are patterns of consistency, not one-offs. An off season does not mean you've stalled - it may mean someone is recovering from surgery, or you're experiencing an emotionally troubling time, or you're overworked. Give yourselves and your relationship grace.

Now, deeply connected relationships typically have the following:

Time: Intimacy happens in real-time interactions, so give your relationship the time needed to develop intimacy, and be fully engaged with the moment. Turn off the phones and TV!

Commitment: Intimacy flourishes when those in relationship are devoted to the success of the marriage. Commit yourself.



STUFF IT'S MADE OF

Integrity: Integrity is truthfulness and honesty regardless of the cost to oneself or the audience. Integrity says you're trustworthy.

Trust: Integrity will have little impact if you are not willing to place your confidence in your spouse. Reliance on the character of your spouse is imperative to intimacy. You will only open yourself to people you trust.

Acceptance: Intimacy needs a sense of belonging. Belonging happens only when one is fully accepted without pressure to change.

Protection: The protection we're speaking of here is protection of the heart, secrets, and vulnerabilities of your spouse. Do not weaponize your spouse's vulnerabilities. Protection makes you a safe person.

Communication: Communication has its own section in this guide so we'll just mention it here.

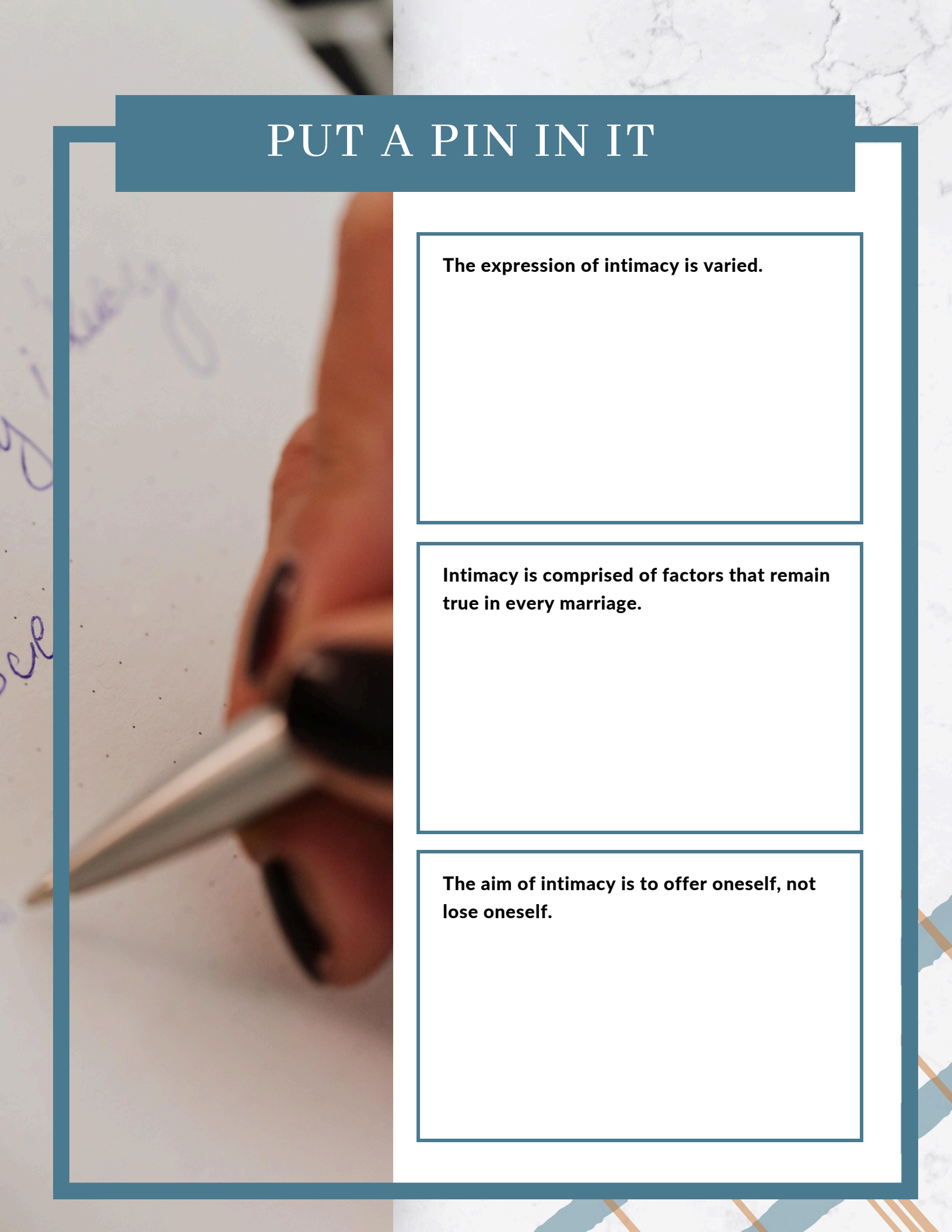
Intention: For intimacy to flourish we need to be clear on why we do what we do. Your why will fuel your motivation.

Prioritization: Intimacy often gives way to life. It's easy to take each other, and our connection, for granted when busyness or challenges press in. Keep connectedness as high on your list of priorities as possible.

Authenticity: Intimacy does not work from behind masks. Be you.

Balance: The aim of intimacy is to offer oneself, not lose oneself. Stay engaged with who you are, your own interests, development, goals, your own personal relationship with the Lord.





PUT A PIN IN IT

The expression of intimacy is varied.

Intimacy is comprised of factors that remain true in every marriage.

The aim of intimacy is to offer oneself, not lose oneself.



Ask the right questions!

What component of intimacy surprised you most? Why?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the first question.

What is something you might want to try but are afraid to?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the second question.

What in your relationship shows intimacy is deepening?

A large, solid blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the third question.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an intimacy exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

5-SECOND KISS

The simple pleasure of kissing can easily get lost in the busyness of life. (Not to mention the general trend of complacency in long-term relationships).

But kissing has a number of positive effects on your health, well-being, and relationship satisfaction:

It releases oxytocin and dopamine, and reduces stress. It reaffirms commitment, facilitates secure attachment, and communicates that you're wanted, loved, and desired.

One study in Germany in the 1980s showed some even more profound effects:

Men who kissed their wives before going to work in the morning lived an average of five years longer than husbands who didn't. And, they earned 20-35% more money.

Amazing, right?

So why 5 seconds?

It's long enough to feel meaningful but not too long that it feels forced.

But if you want to carry on for longer, go for it!



INTIMACY EXERCISE

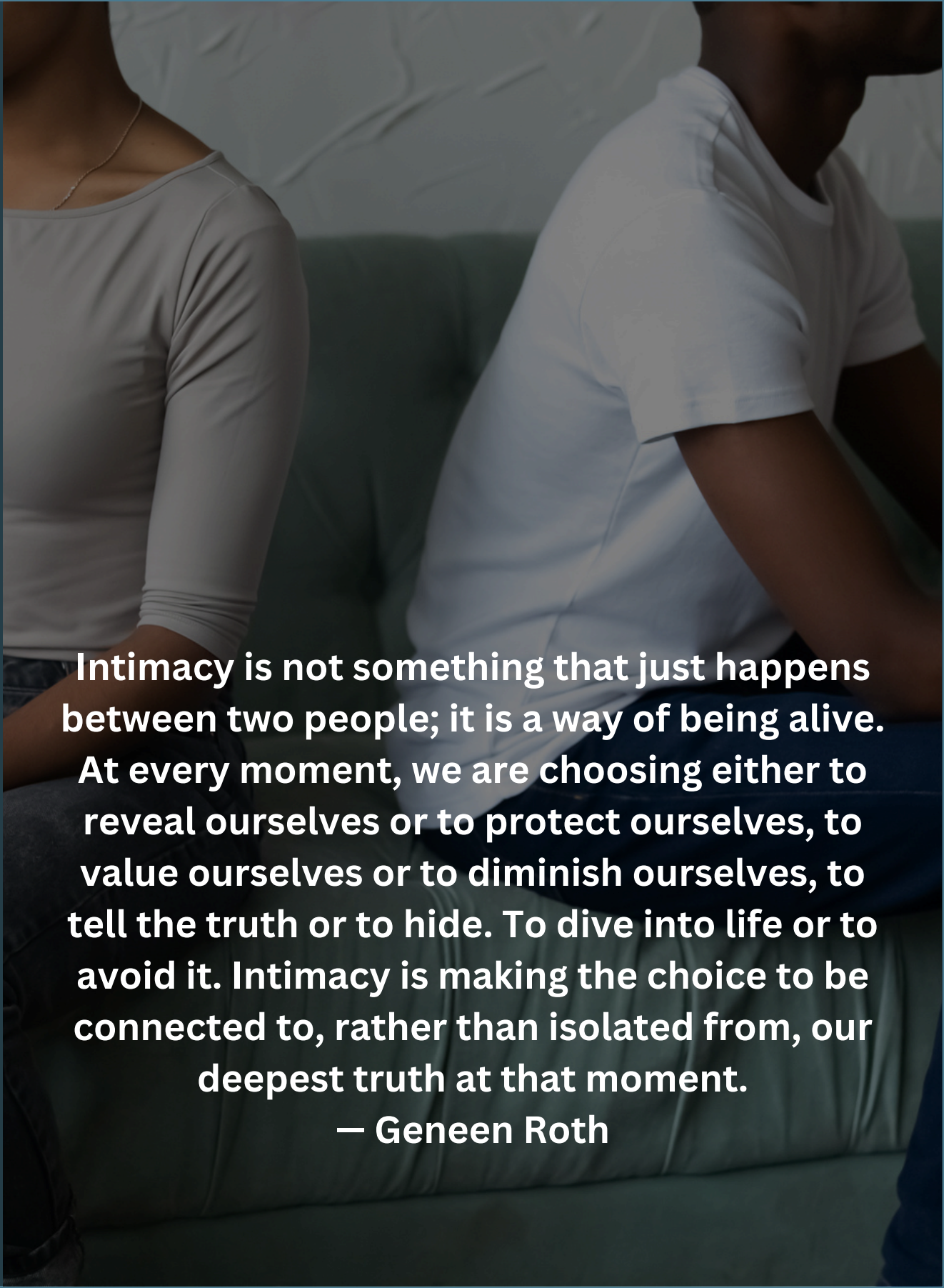
Why it works:

Kissing fosters intimacy, helping couples bond emotionally and physically, and strengthening the emotional connection between partners.

Kissing plays a role in sexual arousal and foreplay.

Kissing increases trust. The International Journal of Science found that oxytocin boosts trust between humans. Not only does this make partners feel more trusting of each other, but it also increases their willingness to participate in emotionally risky behavior... like deepening intimacy.

NOTES

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a couch, their backs to each other. They are both wearing white t-shirts. The woman on the left is wearing a thin necklace. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall mood is intimate and contemplative.

Intimacy is not something that just happens between two people; it is a way of being alive. At every moment, we are choosing either to reveal ourselves or to protect ourselves, to value ourselves or to diminish ourselves, to tell the truth or to hide. To dive into life or to avoid it. Intimacy is making the choice to be connected to, rather than isolated from, our deepest truth at that moment.

— Geneen Roth

BARRIERS TO INTIMACY

None of us stand at the altar thinking, three years from now they're going to be a lonely husband or a lonely wife! We stand with hope and expectation for a life filled with joy, friendship - better than before. Unfortunately, there are barriers to the connectedness we hoped for when we stood at the altar, and they show up at the most inopportune times. On these next two pages you will find a non-exhaustive list of possible barriers to intimacy we may experience:

Fear: Fear is tormenting. It locks you down and keeps you from reaching for your loved one.

Offense: Offense is unreleased resentment about a perceived wrong and it is a relationship killer.

Limiting Beliefs: Any state of mind or belief about yourself or your spouse that is lie-based will restrict your ability to give to or receive from each other.

Busyness: Busyness crowds out your ability to make time for each other.

Carelessness: Carelessness is the opposite of protectiveness. It's treating your marriage and/or spouse with negligence and disregard.

Routine: If you find yourself having the same conversations, going to same restaurants, habitually doing the same things, you are trapped in a boredom inducing routine which may derail real intimacy.



BARRIERS TO INTIMACY

Exploitation: Exploitation is using your spouse to meet your needs (sexual, financial, etc.) without regard for them. Intimacy requires mutuality - there is no mutuality in exploitation.

Lack of Understanding: 1 Peter 3:7-9 encourages husbands to dwell with their wives with understanding. A lack of understanding will cause you to lose empathy.

Laziness: Laziness is an inability, by choice, to support your marriage. It can be due to a lack of knowledge, or carelessness, but if a spouse refuses to do the work, the desired connectedness is forfeited.

Deception: Deception is disrespectful and erodes trust, which is a pillar of intimacy.

Contempt: Contempt is one of the 4 Horsemen of the Marriage Apocalypse. Research indicates when contempt (a sense of superiority, disgust, etc.) is present in a marriage, that marriage is headed towards divorce without immediate intervention.

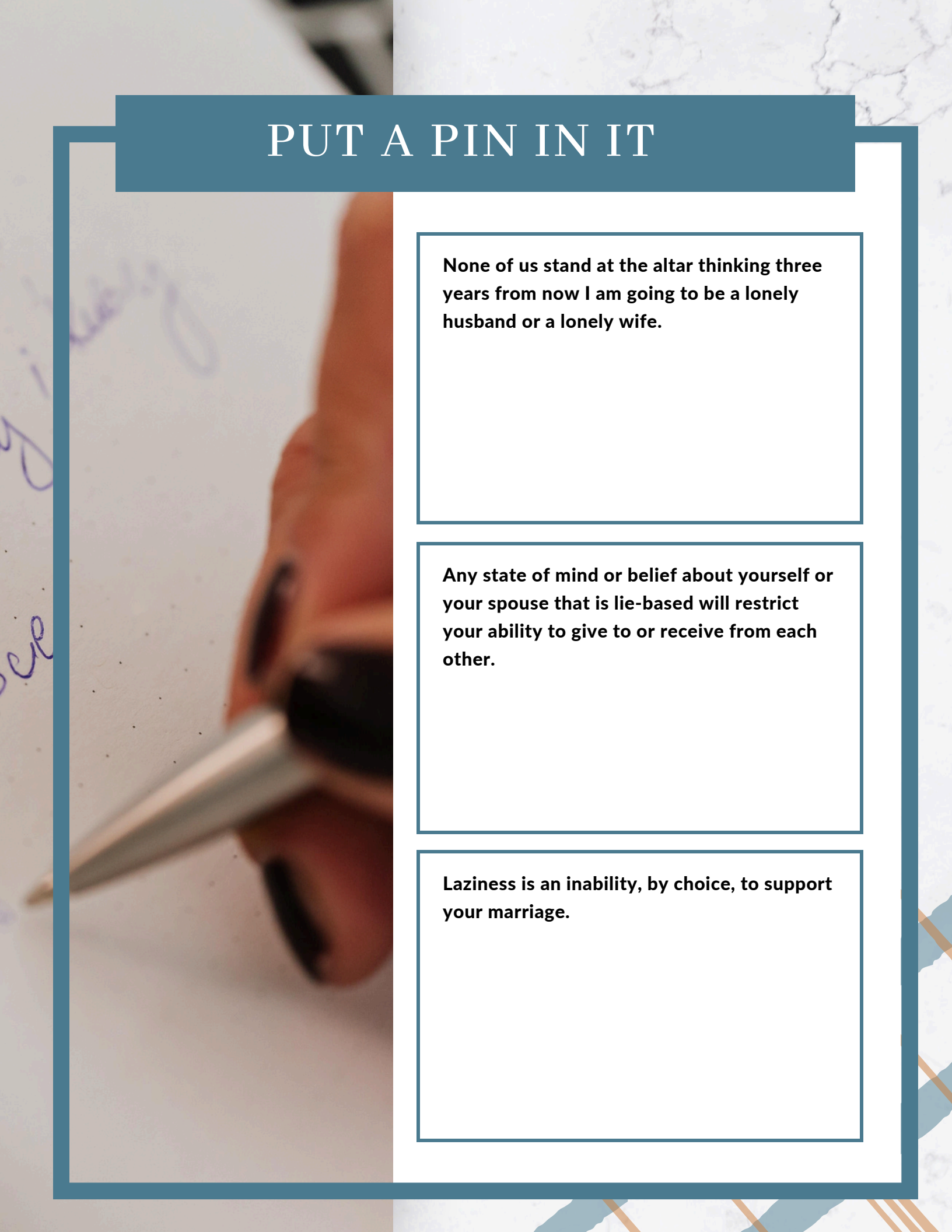
Disrespect: Disrespect is the display of rude and/or entitled behavior.

Communication Issues: Again, communication has its own section so we'll just mention it here.

External Validation: Reaching for anything other than the Lord to validate your identity creates an idol and erodes the opportunity for your spouse to meet your need in ways God ordained.

We'll explore how to generally overcome barriers in the next section.





PUT A PIN IN IT

None of us stand at the altar thinking three years from now I am going to be a lonely husband or a lonely wife.

Any state of mind or belief about yourself or your spouse that is lie-based will restrict your ability to give to or receive from each other.

Laziness is an inability, by choice, to support your marriage.



Ask the right questions!

What is preventing you from opening up to your spouse in deeper ways?

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In what ways might you be holding on to offense? Resentment? Disappointment?

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For what do you need to forgive yourself?

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INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

SHOW AND TELL

Grab your phones and switch them to Do Not Disturb mode.

Find a cozy spot where you can sit and relax together for 20 minutes or so.

Take a few minutes to go through your photos individually. Pick out 3 each that represent a cherished relationship memory. (You don't even have to be in the photo – just pick photos that bring up relationship memories).

Next, take turns sharing a photo and talk about what it means to you. Recount the memory, how you felt, and why it's a treasured or important moment for you.

Discuss any themes or patterns that emerge as you look at your pictures together. Are there certain activities or places that you both enjoy? Are there particular emotions or experiences that are common across your photos?

Once you're finished, take a moment to give each other some love and appreciate the awesome relationship and life story you're writing together.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

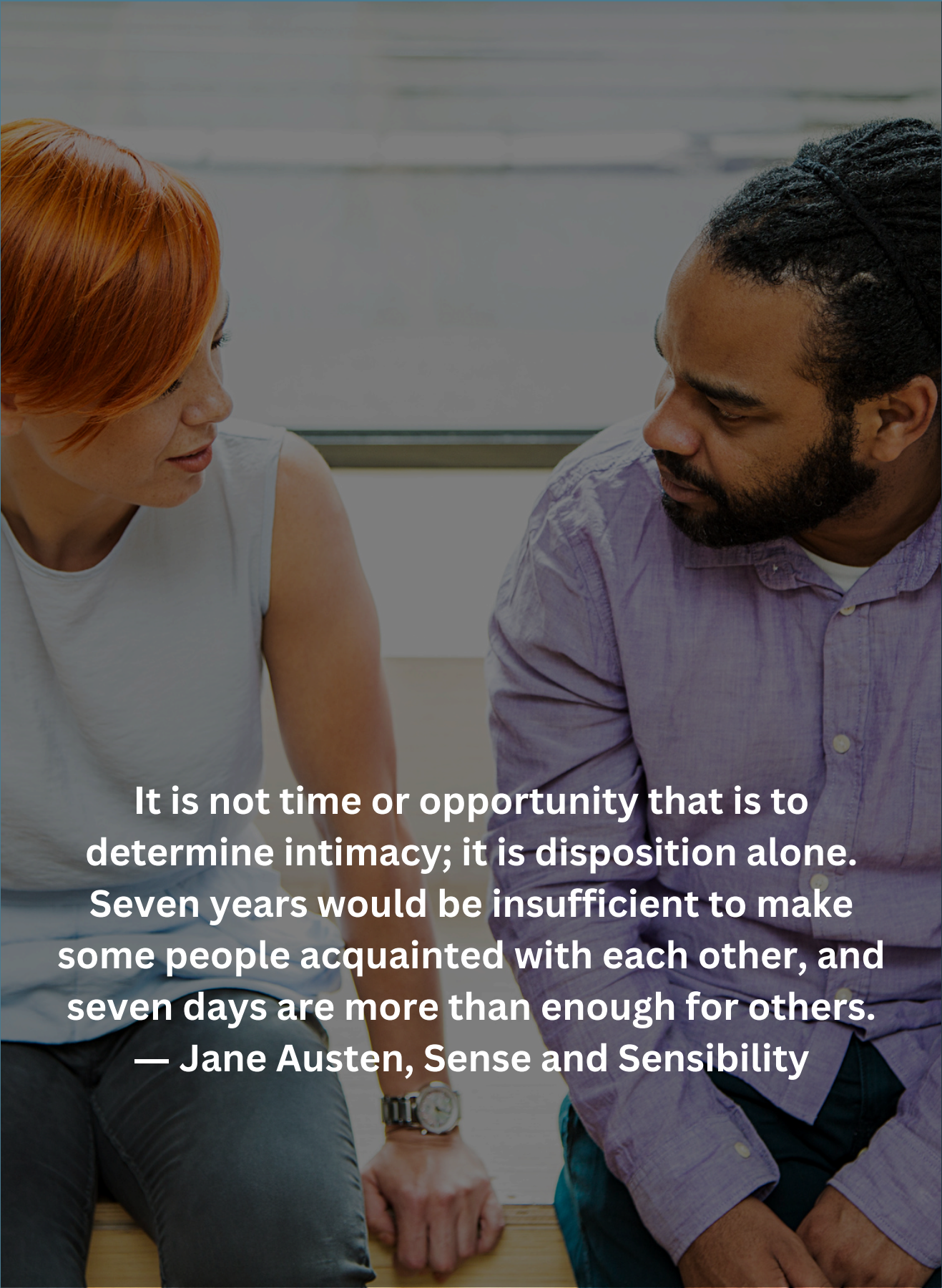
Why it works:

According to practicalintimacy.com, a recent study in the Journal of Psychophysiology found that couples who merely looked at photos of their partner experienced increased infatuation, attachment, and marital satisfaction.

The study showed that you don't even have to try to cultivate those feelings. Simply seeing your partner's face in a photo is enough to bring on the good feelings, and can be a simple practice to help keep the love alive long-term.

Reminiscing on your relationship memories is a fun way to re-live those moments and nurture your connection. It helps to reinforce your relationship story and strengthen your bond.

NOTES

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a wooden table in what appears to be a classroom or meeting room. The woman, on the left, has short red hair and is wearing a white sleeveless top. The man, on the right, has dark hair and a beard, and is wearing a purple button-down shirt. They are both looking down at the table, possibly at a document. In the background, a whiteboard is visible. The image has a semi-transparent blue overlay.

**It is not time or opportunity that is to
determine intimacy; it is disposition alone.
Seven years would be insufficient to make
some people acquainted with each other, and
seven days are more than enough for others.
— Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility**

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

No matter how disconnected we may feel, we are never left without solutions or a way back to one another. On the next two pages are some items which will help you overcome barriers to intimacy and reconnect.

Prayer: Invite God into your desire to reignite intimacy in your marriage. Remember, intimacy is His idea and He wants you to succeed.

Forgiveness: Forgiveness is to release someone from the debt they owe you. It's not easy but it is necessary to rebuilding intimacy when you've been hurt.

Scripture: There are scriptures on latter pages in this guide to help you overcome barriers to intimacy. Take the word of God, pray over them, and do them.

Affection: Show affection again. Hold hands, smile at one another, cuddle. It may be awkward at first but the more you do it the better you will feel

Repentance: If you are the person who did the wrong you need to ask for forgiveness then consistently behave in ways that demonstrate your changed mind and attitude.

Effort: Scripture tells us to make every effort to build unity of the spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1). God expects us to do our part to maintain good relationships with our spouse.

Empathize: Put yourself on the other side of you. Ask yourself how it would be to be your spouse. Be what you want.

Date Night: Schedule regular date nights. Keep it simple; just get alone, do something fun, talk, and connect.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Active Listening: Active listening is respectful and attentive. It is a type of listening that attends to the communication needs of the other person with a goal to understand them. Active listeners are not thinking about their contribution to the conversation, they are focused on the speaker.

Increase Time Together: Intimacy needs both time and attention. Try to set aside 30 minutes a day for uninterrupted catching up with one another.

Seek Help: Overcoming barriers to intimacy can be a complicated process. Sometimes you are able to navigate the process alone. Sometimes you can't. If you find yourself at an impasse, seek the help of a therapist, pastor, or coach.

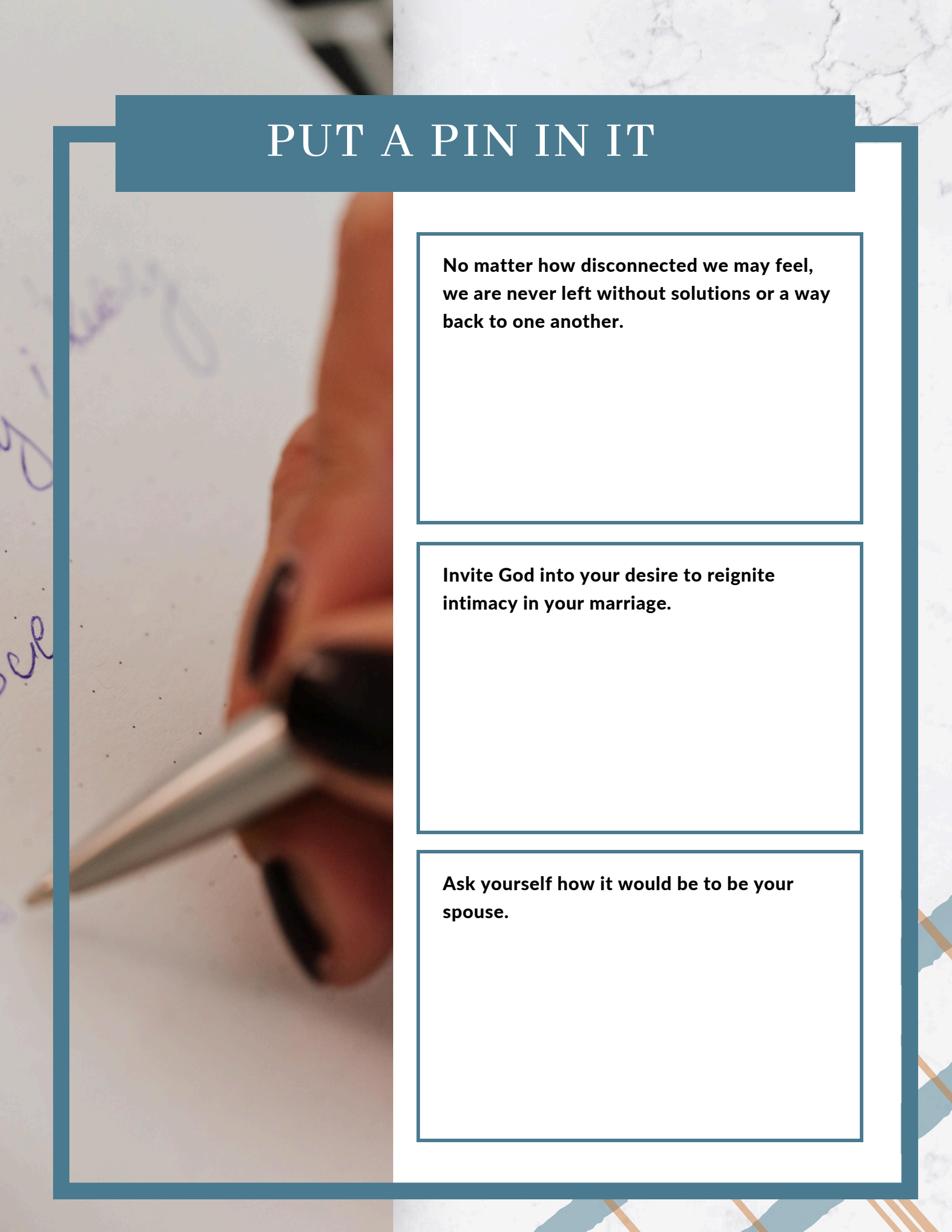
“

Here's a rule for married people:

Don't stop repenting,
Don't stop forgiving,
Don't start counting,
Don't stop giving.

Kingsley Opuwari Manuel





PUT A PIN IN IT

No matter how disconnected we may feel, we are never left without solutions or a way back to one another.

Invite God into your desire to reignite intimacy in your marriage.

Ask yourself how it would be to be your spouse.



Ask the right questions!

What do you love most about your marriage?

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What one thing will you commit to doing to overcome any barrier you may identify with?

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How does understanding there's always a way back to each other put the barriers in perspective for you?

A large, empty light blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their answer to the question about how understanding a way back puts barriers in perspective.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

LOVE FISH

“Go Fish” with a twist.

Shuffle a standard deck of 52 cards and deal 7 cards to each player. Place the remaining cards in a draw pile.

The aim of the game is to make the most pairs. Whenever a player collects a pair of cards (two cards of the same rank), they must lay them face up and perform the Love Challenge that corresponds to that pair’s number (Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9, 8 and so on).

Start by pairing any cards you currently have in your hand, and place them face up in front of you. (Remember to do a Love Challenge for every pair you make!)

To decide who goes first, make eye contact with each other. The first person to smile goes second. Feel free to turn up the flirt to see who cracks first.

Player 1: ask your partner if they have a card of a certain rank to match with your own. For example, “Do you have any 6’s?” If your partner has a card of that rank, they must give it to you, so you can make a pair. After you do the corresponding Love Challenge, you then get another turn.

If your partner doesn’t have a card of the requested rank, they’ll say “love fish!”. You must then draw two cards from the draw pile, and it’s now your partner’s turn.

INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

LOVE FISH con't

The game continues until someone runs out of cards. The player with the most pairs at the end of the game wins.

Love challenges:

Ace: Share something you find physically attractive about your partner.

King: Hold hands until the next pair is made (yes, this is designed to be difficult!)

Queen: Give your partner a 5-second kiss.

Jack: Share a current personal goal or dream with your partner.

10: Share a personality trait that you appreciate in your partner.

9: Share a specific moment when you knew you felt yourself falling in love with your partner.

8: Share something that arouses you. For example, a certain type of touch.

7: Share a cherished memory from your relationship.

6: Give your partner a hug and tell them how much they mean to you.

5: Take a selfie with your partner and post it on social media with a cute caption.

4: Share a funny joke or story with your partner.

3: Perform a short strip tease and remove one item of clothing.

2: Dance break! Put on a song you love and dance together.



NOTES



**Communication leads to community, that is,
to understanding, intimacy and mutual
valuing.
— Rollo May**

GOOD TALKING

God cares how we speak to each other. It matters how we engage with people who are image-bearers of the Most High God. It matters how we address, esteem, and impact others. It especially matters when are pursuing connection.

Good communication is a pillar principle of deepening intimacy, but it is not a skill we all have. We all talk but we don't all talk good. Many of us grew up in households with dysfunctional communication styles. We normalize and mimic what we know. Thankfully, like many other skills we use, we can learn to communicate effectively.

I (Cheryl) once had a conversation with someone who was going on and on about a point of contention they had with their spouse. They were not wrong but neither were they helpful. When they took a breath I interjected with the following:

“Do you want to be right or do you want to be effective?”

We know a few of you are saying, “Both,” right now. You can be both but only if

take the time to learn how to talk good.

Before we get into the brief list of what you need to communicate effectively, we want to encourage you about the lead up to conversations. Good talking needs a good atmosphere in order to do the good work it's supposed to do in relationships.

You can set the stage for an effective conversation by doing the following:



GOOD TALKING

Minimize distractions. Put the phone on silent, turn the TV off, face your spouse and pay attention. Listen with the goal of understanding. Maintain eye contact. Stay quiet until your spouse has fully expressed themselves, ask questions to clarify what they're thinking, then respond.

Effective communication is **nurturing**. It invites the other person to the conversation even when it's a difficult conversation you're having. Let your words be seasoned with grace and kindness.

Effective communication is **empathetic**. Put yourself in the shoes of your spouse. View your conversation from their perspective. Empathy strengthens connection.

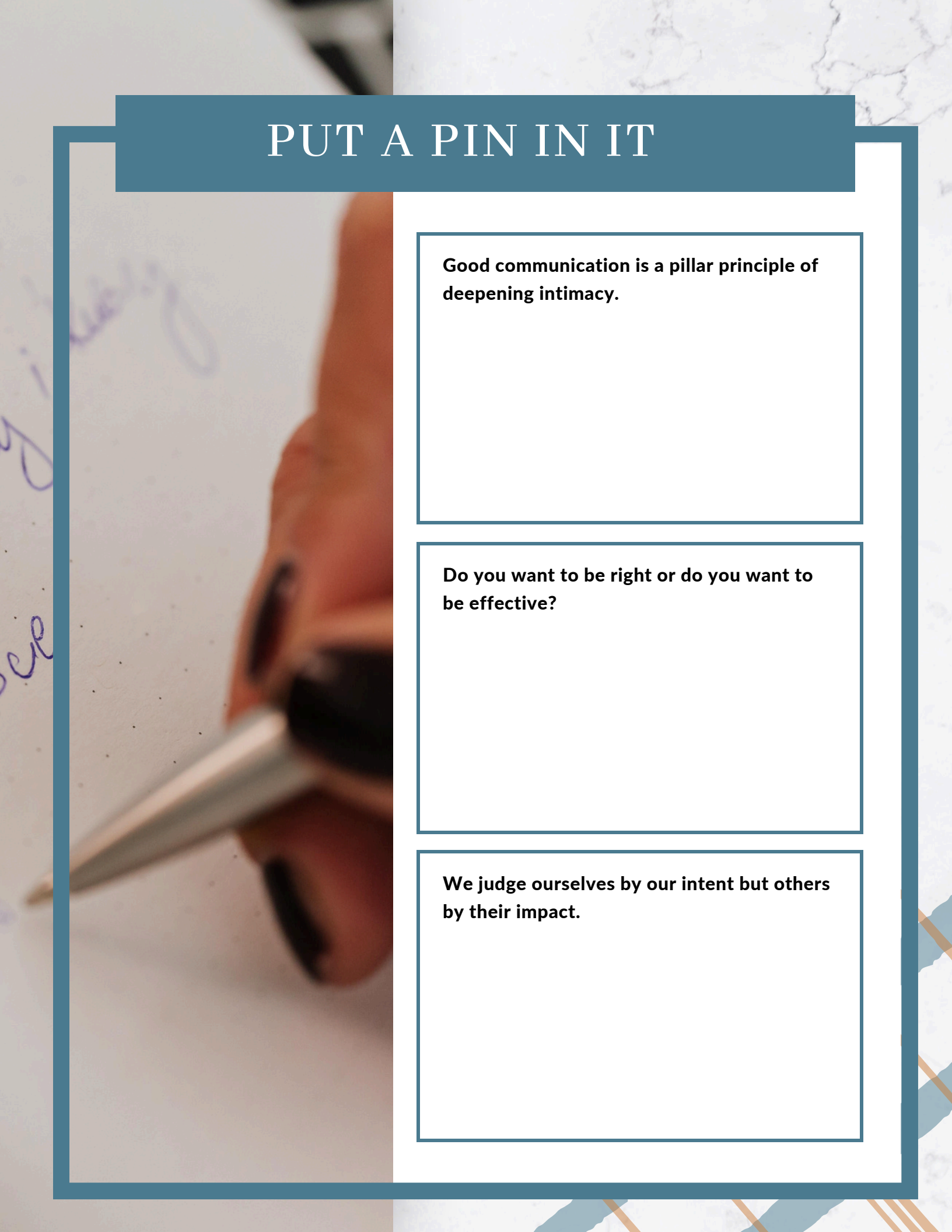
Effective communication is **honest**. The Bible tells us to let our yes be yes and our no be no. (Matthew 5:37). Communicate how you really feel, what you really think. Accept the feelings and thoughts of your spouse without censure, defensiveness, blaming, deflecting, or projecting. Ask questions to clarify thoughts. Attack the issues not the person.

Effective communication is **clear** and **direct**. Avoid avoidance. Try not to talk around a topic. Be direct. Remember we judge ourselves by our intent but others by their impact. Speak in ways that your intent is clear.

Effective communication is **kind**. Think about the feelings of your spouse before you speak with them on any subject. Especially when dealing with a conflict.

These are enough to get you started towards bettering your communication. See our recommended resources to help you gain skills in this area.





PUT A PIN IN IT

Good communication is a pillar principle of deepening intimacy.

Do you want to be right or do you want to be effective?

We judge ourselves by our intent but others by their impact.



Ask the right questions!

How might you become a safer person for your spouse?

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What are you getting from your communication style that you want? What aren't you?

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**What anxiety, fears, or concerns do you have about getting honest with your spouse?
Make a plan to pray about it with your spouse.**

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INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

6 INTIMACY QUESTIONS

Set the Atmosphere: Choose a quiet, comfortable setting where both of you can speak freely and won't be interrupted.

Be Present: Make sure both of you are fully present, setting aside any distractions like phones or other devices.

Take Turns: Decide who will go first. The first person will ask a question, and the other will answer honestly. Then, switch roles.

Here are six sample questions to ask each other:

What is a fear you haven't shared with me yet, and how can I support you in overcoming it?

What is a dream or ambition that you've kept to yourself, and how can I help you achieve it?

Is there something you wish I understood better about you?

What's a struggle you're having in your work and how can I pray for you?

If you could change one thing about how we communicate, what would it be?

What is a form of love or affection you'd like to receive from me that you haven't yet?

Once both of you have answered all the questions, take a moment to reflect. Then, thank your partner for sharing their thoughts and feelings. Expressing gratitude will not only enhance emotional closeness but also make your partner feel appreciated and heard.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

Why it works:

Communication allows to you explain what you are experiencing, what your needs are, and find empathy.

Communication plays a pivotal role in fostering understanding, resolving conflict and, deepening intimacy. However, communication is a behavior, not a goal.

This exercise is designed to help you practice communication as a behavior and improve it.

NOTES

A photograph of a man and a woman embracing. The woman, with curly hair, is smiling and looking down, resting her head against the man's back. The man is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored sweater. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. The image is framed by a solid blue border.

**The opposite of loneliness is not togetherness,
it's intimacy
— Richard Bach**

STAY LIT

Please do not feel embarrassed or discouraged if you are struggling in marital intimacy. Like effective communication, deepening intimacy is a skill that must be learned. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't realize this, therefore they never take the necessary steps to exercise their intimacy muscle. **All of us experience growing pains.**

Additionally, the majority of us reading this guide live in a society that rewards a hustle mindset which focuses on working almost to the exclusion of everything else. Many people have lost their marriages because they gave their all to their careers.

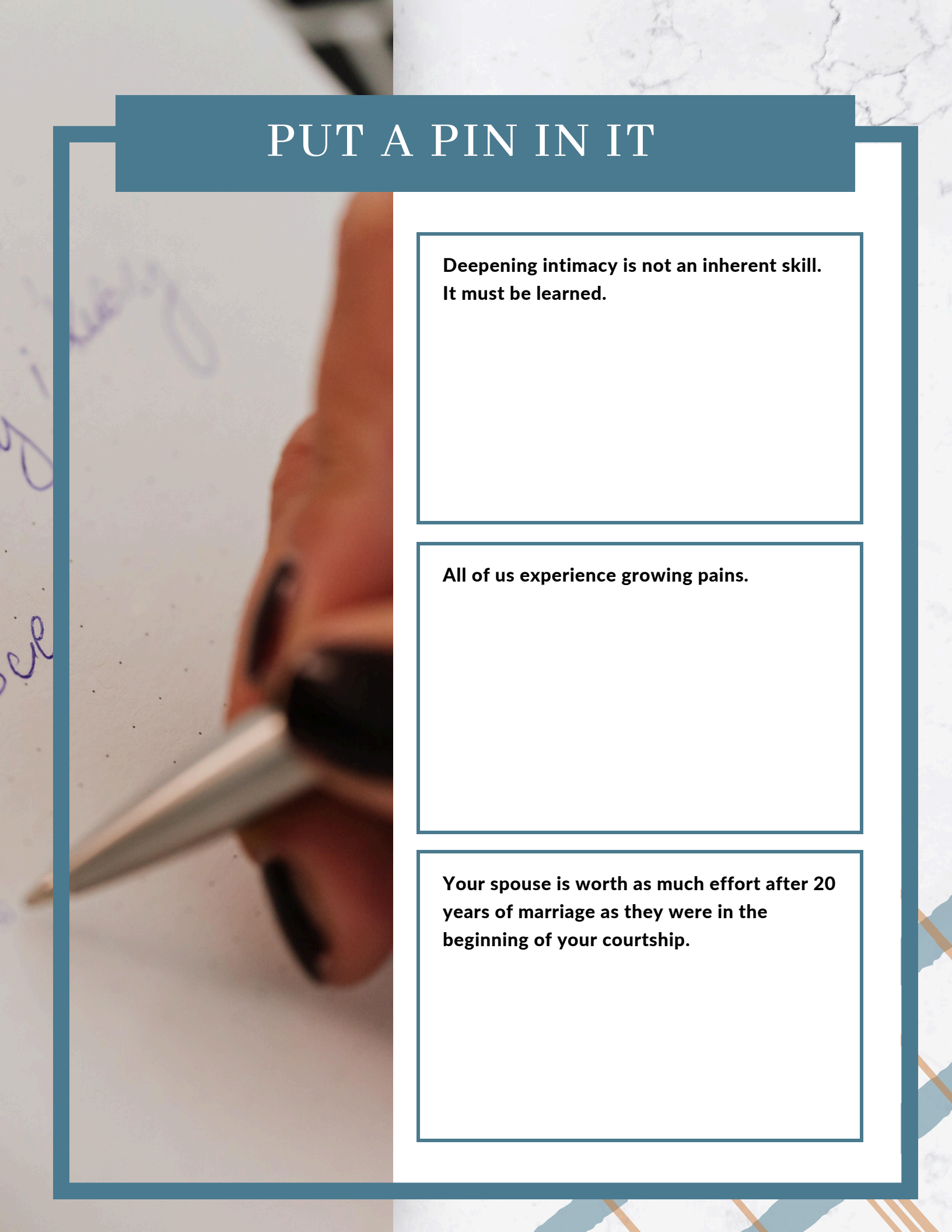
The good news is, many of the same activities you do to overcome barriers to intimacy are what you need to do to keep the fires of intimacy burning. Or, as Jonathan says,

"I gotta do the same things to keep her as I did to get her!"

That's not entirely true, but neither is it untrue. The sentiment is: **Your spouse is worth as much effort after 20 years of marriage as they were in the beginning of your courtship.**

If you're ready to learn how to ignite, or reignite intimacy's flame, take a look at the next couple pages.





PUT A PIN IN IT

**Deepening intimacy is not an inherent skill.
It must be learned.**

All of us experience growing pains.

**Your spouse is worth as much effort after 20
years of marriage as they were in the
beginning of your courtship.**

1

Pray About It

God has invested His goodness in your marriage. He desires His goodness to be seen through your relationship. He is the third cord which makes your marriage not easily broken.

Pray about your desire to experience deepened intimacy in your marriage. Trust God to give you witty ideas, desire, and ability to do His good pleasure in your marriage.

2

Get Real

You won't know how to get to where you want to be unless you know where you're starting from.

Be honest about feelings - your contribution to issues, health, self-esteem, mental and emotional needs.

Without judgement, blame, criticism, etc. allow your spouse the same grace.

3

Get Help

Coaching and Counseling are excellent tools to use when you feel yourselves drifting apart. Don't wait until you are in crisis mode. Preventative support is as valuable as restorative help.

4

Say, "No!"

Learn to say no to commitments that may overwhelm your schedule. You really don't have to do everything at once. Give your schedule margin for the unexpected, the spontaneous.

5

Say, "Yes!"

Say yes to the things that will reignite intimacy - even if they are hard to do initially. Say yes to listening well, to hugs, to playing, to revealing, and more.

6

Remember

Why is this person your friend? Why did you fall in love with them? What things do you enjoy about them? Rehearse what excited you about your spouse when you first met. Express gratitude to God for things you've come to appreciate about your spouse. Stay engaged with what you like about your spouse.

7

Don't Panic

Even the most connected couples go through seasons of disconnection.

Intimacy ebbs and flows. If you find yourself in a cycle of isolation. Don't panic.

You have gotten this far in this guide because you want to increase the intimacy. That passion for your marriage will motivate you to do whatever you can to reignite intimacy.

8

Flirt

I (Cheryl) love flirting with Jonathan. I love the coyness, the suggestive teasing, double entendre conversations.

Flirting is a fun way to indicate sexual attraction and openness, and spark renewed interest from your spouse.

9

Restore Honor

Our grandson watches a nursery rhyme show based in Africa, called Bino and Fino. They have a song called, "Please and Thank You." These words still matter. Honoring others with small everyday touches of politeness communicates consideration. I (Jonathan) still open the doors for Cheryl, walk on the outside of her, wait for her to order, and more, just to show that I honor her significance in my life. And, I (Cheryl), make a deliberate effort to honor Jonathan in how I speak to and about him, how I treat him in public and behind closed doors, how I prefer him over myself.

10

Rebuild the Walls

The marriage relationship is special, unshared, to be enjoyed by the two of you only. Exclusivity is the name of the game. Save your most private self for your spouse. Where you have allowed others to intrude (except for counselors), shut them out, rebuild the walls.

No opposite sex person should be listening to you complain about your spouse. Do not put your family and friends in the awkward position of choosing sides.

Protect the integrity of your marriage.

11

Increase non-sexual touch

The joy that bubbles up from non-sexual touch cannot be emphasized enough. Pat each other on the rear, dance together, hold hands, give pecks on the cheek, cuddle on the couch, lay on his shoulder, lay in her lap.

12

Start Today

No need to wait. Pick one thing and start today. Tomorrow? Start again. Start anew every day.

13

Commit

Do not put a timeline on reigniting intimacy. It may take a few days, or a few years. Keep in mind, the pursuit of connection is lifelong - make the commitment to do the work every day.

14

Practice

They say practice makes perfect. Don't believe that. We never get perfect at pursuing intimacy with our spouse... but, we do get better. And, the more we practice, the deeper the connection.

A Prayer to Ignite Intimacy

Heavenly Father, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we come lifting our relationship before You. Thank You for the gift of each other. Father, we know that Your plans for us are good and those good plans include intimacy and unity in every area of our lives. Father, as You and our Lord Jesus are one, may we be one in You and with each other as well. Help us not be complacent in the pursuit of each other's hearts and best. Enable us to put the needs of each other before our own. Help us to guard our marriage as the holy institution You have made it. We repent for allowing the cares of life to distract us from our second ministry, our marriage, our first being worship of and intimacy with You. Turn our hearts and attention towards each other. Help us to regard the other as the treasure You have declared our spouse to be. Restore the joy of union to us, reignite our passion and desire for each other. You have declared our marriage bed holy. Help us to not defraud one another but bring pleasure to each other through our physical union. Thank You for meeting our physical, emotional, intellectual, and relational needs through the gift of intimacy. We bless and praise Your name, Amen!

NOTES

A photograph of a middle-aged couple standing on a boat deck, looking out at a harbor filled with sailboats. The woman, on the left, has dark curly hair and is wearing a dark blue top with white floral patterns. She is smiling and leaning her head against the man's shoulder. The man, on the right, has short dark hair and is wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is also smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows a harbor with many sailboats and a city skyline in the distance under a clear sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

**May your fountain be blessed, and may you
rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe,
a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you
always, may you ever be captivated by her
love.**

— Proverbs 5:18-19

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Our reason for giving sex its own section is two-fold. First, since so many people equate intimacy with sex we wanted to isolate it from the larger conversation to help our readers think of intimacy in broader terms. That being said, we wanted to highlight an aspect of sex we don't often talk about. Did you know sex was God's idea? Given as a gift to humanity, for pleasure, procreation, and protection. As God's gift and idea, sex is also sacred, holy. In fact, the imagery of sex was used to convey God's covenant with Israel:

Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

Ezekiel 16:8 says:

The Lord used the imagery of a husband with his virgin wife to describe His commitment to Israel. Marital sex symbolizes the most intimate relationship; our relationship with the Lord.

Sex is a powerful, holy symbol of unity and intimacy.

In addition to its holiness, part of the purpose of sex is to serve our spouse.

Paul writes to the Corinthians:

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband.



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4

In marriage, sex is ministry to one another. The husband's goal in sex is his wife's pleasure. The wife's goal is her husband's pleasure. And we are not to deprive each other.

Although, it is likely one spouse will have sex more than they desire and the other will have less, we should not deprive one another. Talk through these things. Seek to serve the sexual needs of each other. Because, sex is not the goal of intimacy. Oneness is the goal of intimacy. Sex is the expression of intimacy.

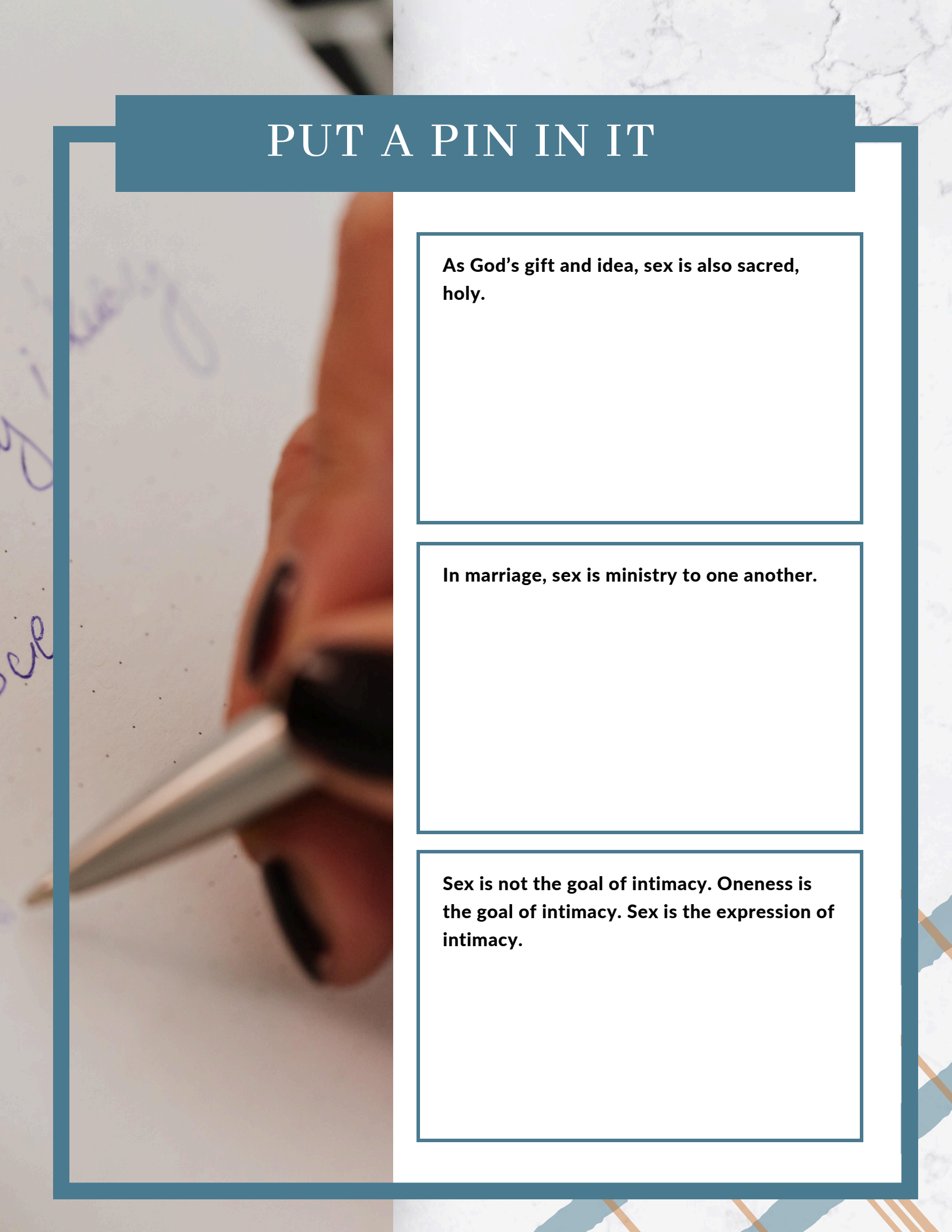
Unlike what the world puts forth, the deeper the connection on other fronts, the deeper the connection in sex.

That is not to say sex is unimportant, or lower on the priority list than other types of intimacy. In fact we think you should

make love as much as possible. We are encouraging you to change your perspective about sex so that it is no longer perfunctory, obligatory, nor a means to an end. Our desire is that sex becomes a celebratory culmination of deepening connection between you and your spouse.

If you are struggling with expressing and enjoying healthy sexuality within your marriage, we encourage to purchase the recommended book at the back of this guide, or seek the help of an experienced therapist.





PUT A PIN IN IT

As God's gift and idea, sex is also sacred, holy.

In marriage, sex is ministry to one another.

Sex is not the goal of intimacy. Oneness is the goal of intimacy. Sex is the expression of intimacy.



Ask the right questions!

Ask your spouse, "What is your favorite sexual memory in our marriage?" Write it down.

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In what ways do scriptures like those in Song of Solomon encourage your freedom in sexual appreciation for your spouse?

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What's your definition of amazing sex?

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INTIMACY EXERCISE

The exercise below is a variation on an exercise found on practicalintimacy.com

THE INTIMATE PAUSE

Try this the next time you and your spouse are enjoying physical intimacy. Agree on a pause phrase beforehand, like “Connection Quickie,” so you both know what to do. You don’t need to completely stop, just find a position where you can keep sexual contact while also meeting each other’s gaze.

Pause, make eye contact, and hold each other’s gaze while staying in close contact with each other.

Place a hand (or both) on each other’s heart center (in the center of the chest). A variation is one hand on your own heart, and one hand on your partner’s heart.

Take a few slow, deep breaths, hold eye contact, and feel the connection between you.

Take turns sharing a compliment or expression of love. For example: “You’re so beautiful.” “I love you.” “I love being with you like this.” Speak whatever feels authentic for you in the moment.

After you share at least one expression of love unpause your sexual interaction while staying with this feeling of intimacy and connection.



INTIMACY EXERCISE

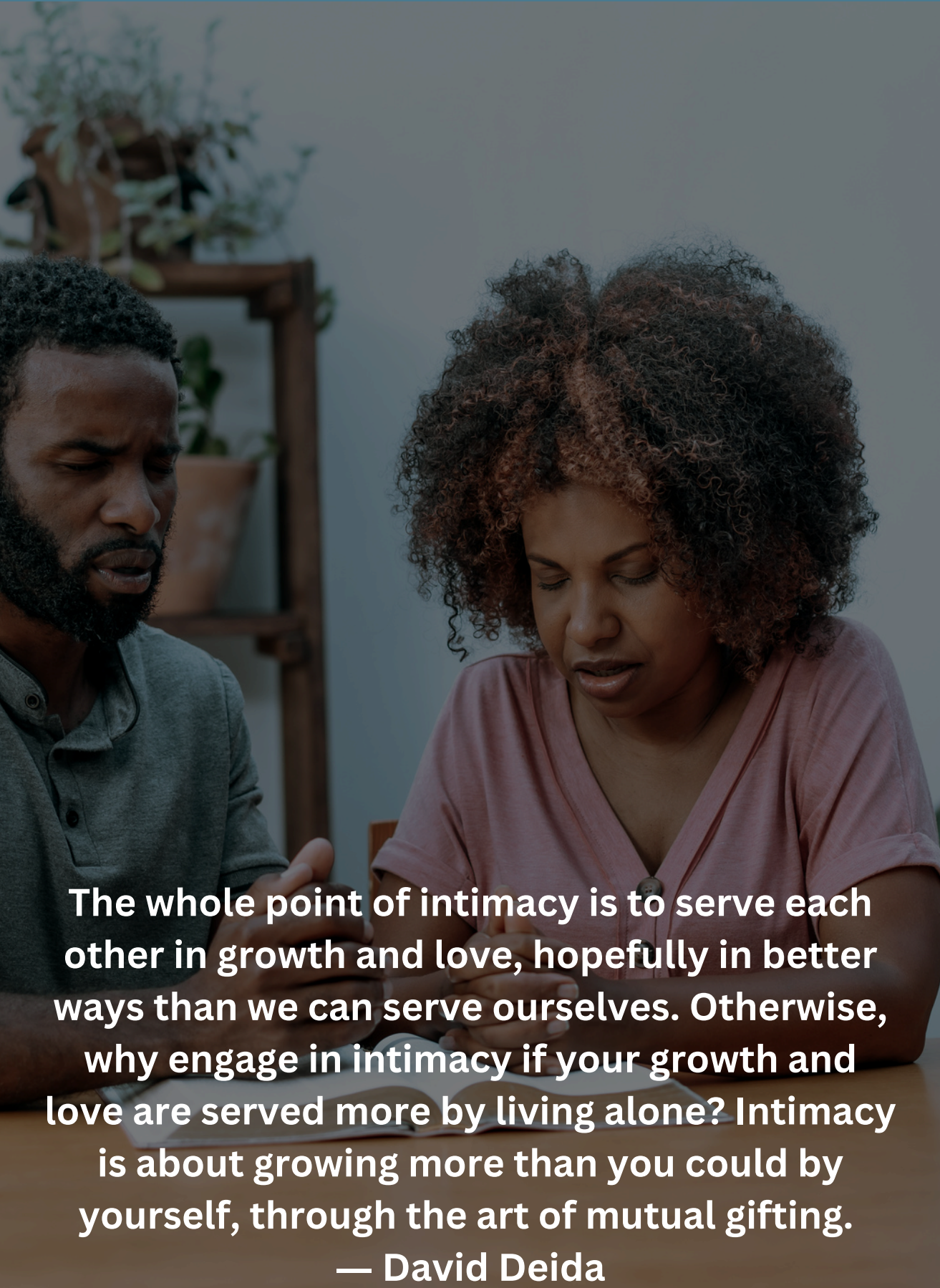
Why it works:

The Intimate Pause is one of the simplest ways to deepen emotional intimacy during sex.

The eye contact helps to release oxytocin and increase intimacy. While contact on your heart helps stimulate feelings of openness and vulnerability.

It can be awkward to speak like this during sex at first. But the more you practice, the more confident you become.

NOTES

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a table, looking down at an open book. The man, on the left, has a beard and is wearing a grey polo shirt. The woman, on the right, has voluminous curly hair and is wearing a pink V-neck shirt. They appear to be in a quiet, domestic setting with a plant visible in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter.

The whole point of intimacy is to serve each other in growth and love, hopefully in better ways than we can serve ourselves. Otherwise, why engage in intimacy if your growth and love are served more by living alone? Intimacy is about growing more than you could by yourself, through the art of mutual gifting.

— David Deida

IT IS WRITTEN

God has a lot to say about marriage. There are volumes of biblically-based books written on every aspect of marriage. So, we will not spend a lot of time here discussing what you could discover with a small investment of time and money.

We will, instead, chat with you a little bit about our mission.

After my (Cheryl) divorce was the first time I had been single as an adult and I was enjoying myself. I did not necessarily want to be married again. One day, out of the blue, the Lord impressed upon my heart that He may send me a husband but no one would ever love me the way He does. I was loved and content in the love of God, so I kept that to myself.

Years later, after Jonathan and I were married, we were playing around, going back and forth with I love you and I love you more. Suddenly, he got very serious and he said, "I know I love you more than you love me because the love I have for you is an extension of your Father's love."

Our mission, as married couples, is manifold. Certainly, part of that is to enjoy one another, have children if we can, and provide companionship through our journey. However, we believe the ultimate mission of marriage is to exemplify the love of Christ for His church - because our love for each other, is an extension of His love for us. Each verse was selected to remind you of that. Space is provided under each verse so you can jot down your thoughts.



1

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3
NIV

3

Awake north wind and come, south wind! Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.

Song of Solomon 4:16
NIV

4

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Colossians 3:18-19
NIV

5

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

1 Corinthians 7:2

6

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

7

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 12:10

8

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Colossians 3:13

9

Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Ecclesiastes 7:9
NIV

10

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James 1:19-20

11

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

John 13:34

12

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

13

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:29

14

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

Proverbs 5:18-19
NIV

15

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4
NIV

16

Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also, our bed is green.

Song of Solomon 1:16
NKJV

17

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.

Song of Solomon 2:6

18

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Peter 3:7

19

Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm; for love is as
strong as death, its jealousy
unyielding as the grave. It burns like
blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many
waters cannot quench love; rivers
cannot sweep it away. If one were to
give all the wealth of one's house for
love, it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7
NIV

20

Let marriage be held in honor among
all, and let the marriage bed be
undefiled, for God will judge the
sexually immoral and adulterous.

Hebrews 13:4

A Prayer for Your Marriage

Holy Father, and God of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, You are enthroned in Heaven and worthy of our love and devotion. Thank You for the gift of each other. Thank You for our family, home and Your plans for us. We repent for times in which we disregarded each other and You. Help us to be the blessing to each other You intended when You brought us together. Help us to receive each other as image-bearers of You and understand and love one another in ways that cultivate the best in each other. Holy Spirit, in tough times, please remind us that we are not each other's enemy. Help us to stand together against the true enemy. Teach us to war against everything that threatens the sanctity, wholeness, and unity of our marriage. We submit ourselves and our marriage to You, we resist the enemy, and we thank You that he must flee. By Your grace, we commit to protecting our marriage for it is holy unto You. We commit to love, honor, and meet each other's emotional and sexual needs. We commit to work together, and not allow selfishness to divide us or impede Your purpose. Thank You for giving us Your vision for our marriage. Thank You for the good and pleasant experience of unity. Thank You for the hope we have in You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!



Ask the right questions!

Using scripture as your context, what one word would you use to describe your marriage? Why?

A large, empty light blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the first question.

When do you feel most at peace with your spouse?

A large, empty light blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the second question.

Gary Thomas asked in his book, *Sacred Marriage*, "What if God designed marriage to make you holy instead of happy?" How does his premise inspire you to love your spouse with a greater sense of purpose?

A large, empty light blue rectangular box intended for the user to write their response to the third question.

A photograph of a Black man with a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, sitting at a table and smiling. He is gesturing with his right hand, palm up. In the foreground, the backs of several other people's heads and shoulders are visible, suggesting a group setting. The background shows a bright, modern interior with white shelves holding various items. The entire image is framed by a solid blue border.

**His divine power has given us everything we
need for a godly life through our knowledge of
him who called us by his own glory and
goodness.**

— 2 Peter 1:3

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Aren't you glad we don't have to do life alone? There are experts, creators, publishers, and more, who have committed to supporting, equipping, and encouraging marriages.

On the next few pages you will find some of our favorite books, websites, conferences, and games. We chose those we believe are especially helpful to you who are leading blended families.

Other than Sawubona Blended Families, we are not affiliated with the other organizations on our list. We do not receive any payment for recommending any of the resources.

All of the resources are referred to because we have personally found them to be helpful, we know the authors or creators behind them, or they were referred to us by trusted sources.

Click on each title to find out more about each resource.

And if you know of other resources, conferences, tools, or websites, that will bless blended family couples, shoot us an email so we can check them out.

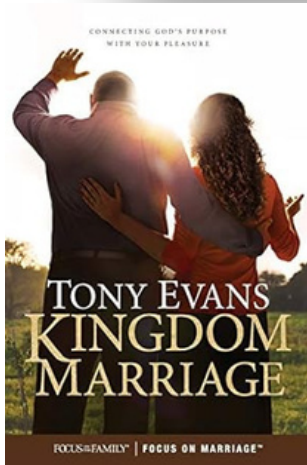
 info@sawubonablendedfamilies.org

We're in this together!



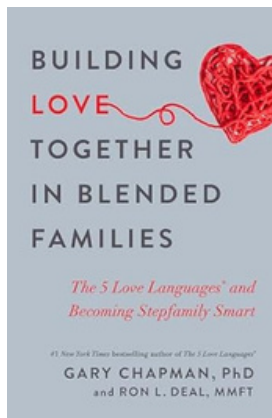
FAVORITE BOOKS

Click the book titles for NON-AFFILIATED links to books on Amazon



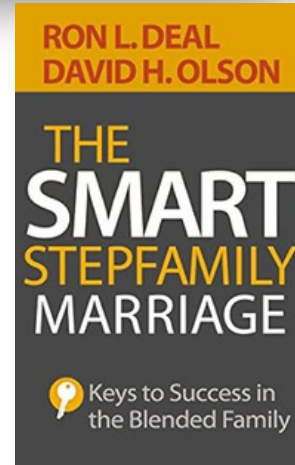
Kingdom Marriage Connecting God's Purpose with Your Pleasure by Tony Evans

This book helps couples grow together as a kingdom couple to fulfill God's design and purpose for their marriage. Through practical insights and powerful stories, Dr. Tony Evans inspires and instructs so couples will discover the hope, challenge, and guidance God's Word provides for their journey together.



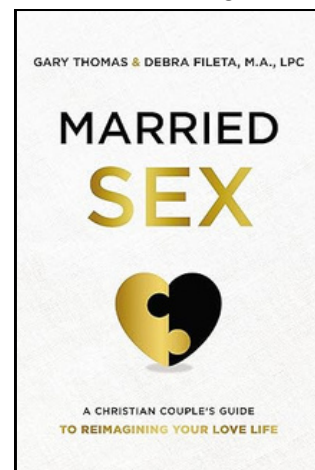
Building Love Together in Blended Families by Gary Chapman and Ron Deal

Gary Chapman, the bestselling author of The 5 Love Languages and national expert on stepfamilies, Ron Deal, join together in this book to teach you how the five love languages can help your blended family.



The Smart Stepfamily Marriage: Keys to Success in the Blended Family by Ron Deal and David Olson

From bestselling author, therapist and leading Ron Deal, and marriage and family expert David Olson show you how to build on your relationship strengths and improve your weaknesses. Whether you're dating, engaged, a young stepfamily, or an empty-nest couple, The Smart Stepfamily Marriage gives you the tools you need at any stage to create a remarriage that will last.

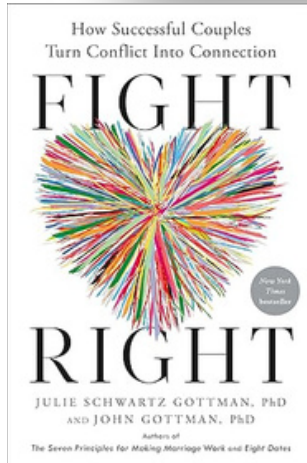


Married Sex: A Christian Couple's Guide to Reimagining Your Love Life by Gary Thomas & Debra Fileta

A great sex life is something you make, not something you find. If you feel confused or frustrated about your sex life--or simply wonder, Is there more to it than this?--Married Sex is exactly what you need to make your marriage stronger, in and out of the bedroom.

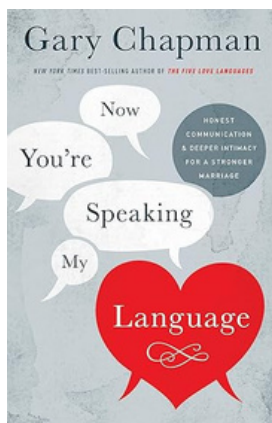
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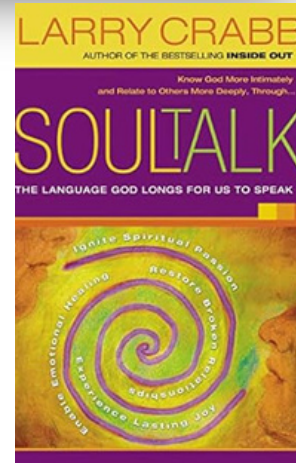
Fight Right: How Successful Couples Turn Conflict Into Connection by Drs. John and Julie Gottman

Fight Right is an essential resource that will help couples escape the win-or-lose mentality in favor of a collaborative approach: calming down, staying connected, and really understanding, so that our fights can bring us closer.



Now You're Speaking My Language: Honest Communication and Deeper Intimacy for a Stronger Marriage by Gary Chapman

Now You're Speaking My Language from multimillion selling author Gary Chapman (The Five Love Languages) encourages husbands and wives to offer steadfast loyalty, forgiveness, empathy, and commitment to resolving conflict, thus encouraging each other in spiritual growth.



Soul Talk: The Language God Longs for Us to Speak by Larry Crabb

In this extraordinary book, Dr. Larry Crabb introduces a revolutionary way for Christians to experience God. "Soul talk" happens when two Christians talk to each other in a way that results in their passion for God being stirred, ignited, and released.



The Power of a Praying Wife and The Power of a Praying Husband by Stormie Omartian

In The Power of a Praying® Husband and Wife books, you'll find the excitement and hope that come from inviting the God who hears and answers prayer into your marriage. The insightful, honest, and life-changing prayers will also encourage your heart as you pray for God's purposes and plans to come about abundantly in your spouse's life.

WEBSITES & OTHER STUFF

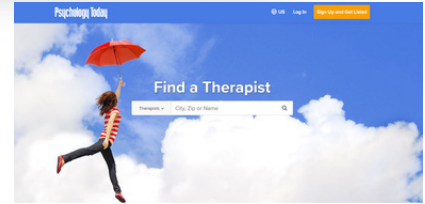
Click the NON-AFFILIATED links to learn more



Sawubona Blended Families® provides biblically-based, research backed resources to help stepfamilies in black and brown communities nurture connections, break cycles, and build gospel-shaped blended families.



FamilyLife Blended® provides biblically-based resources that help prevent re-divorce, strengthen stepfamilies, and help break the generational cycle of divorce.



Browse the extensive directory of **Psychology Today** to find therapists, psychologists, and counselors near you.

CONFERENCES TO HELP YOU REVIVE, RENEW, RESTORE



A Weekend to Remember
A getaway with a goal: Oneness

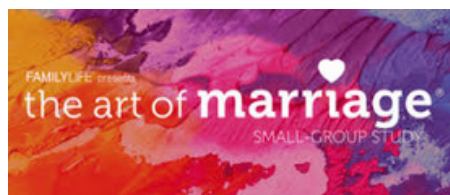


Blended and Blessed
A one day live and livestream event just for stepfamily couples.

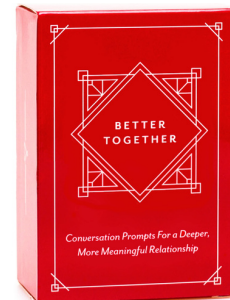
OUR FAVORITE STUFF TO DO



The { } And Conversation Cards
A couples card game to go deeper and grow your relationship.



The Art of Marriage
A transformative small-group resource designed to help you explore new levels of intimacy, communication, and connection with your spouse.



Better Together Honest Convo Cards
Take an adventure in through-provoking conversations served with fun ideas.

TAKE ACTION

1

After reading this guide, answering the questions, and going through the exercises you might

be thinking, "This is too much!"

That's okay. This *is* a lot. Especially if you find yourself experiencing a bit of disconnection right now. But, take a deep breath, you don't have to do everything.

My (Cheryl) favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. I love everything about it, from the sense of gratitude to the huge meal I cook and eat. When my plate is heaping over with sliced fried

turkey, green beans with smoked turkey, cornbread (done in a cast iron skillet, thank you!), mac and cheese, dressing, ham, and more, my mouth waters but my stomach clenches. It's too much! But, it doesn't stop me from tasting, from starting with one thing.

That's what the number one on this page represents. Start with one thing and do that one thing until you do it so regularly you don't even think about doing it anymore - it's habit.

Take a moment to jot down below what one action you're going to take to move towards deepened intimacy.

Thoughts



TAKE ACTION

2

Can you guess what the number 2 on this page represents? If you guessed “2-gether,” “*you is kind,*

you is smart, you is important!” Again, we serve a relational God, who dwells in eternal relationship in the Godhead; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He created you and I for relationship, with Him and with others. He is closer than the air we breathe.

There are some aspects of our journey which we walk in solitude... solitude it can feel lonely but we are truly never alone. We are always *with!*

Thoughts

Your marriage, definitely is not a solo expedition.

Deepening intimacy works better when the two of you are committed to working hand in hand.

If you haven't done so already, invite your spouse to take this journey with you. Jazz up your invitation by creating a formal invite, printed on nice paper. Let your spouse know you look forward to deepened connection, better sex, and more, include a start date and mail it to them.

If your spouse is resistant, commit your desire to prayer, but make sure to do your part.



NOTES

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for downloading this guide and taking your time to go through it. It is our desire that you close this guide with a renewed sense of purpose to do everything you can to deepen the intimacy between you, in every area.

Each new day is an opportunity for you to look again; to reconsider, reconnect, and mostly, rediscover the pleasure of being in a deeply connected union with each other.

We encourage you to keep pursuing, keep praying, keep prioritizing, and keep believing God for your marriage to be one that reflects His best for you two and the relationship between Jesus Christ and *His* Bride, the Church.

Now, we couldn't conclude this guide without giving you a couple of gifts. First, if you decide you need additional help, and want to try coaching, you will find a code for 25% off a coaching package with us at the back of this guide.

Also, we provided you with a roadmap to recreate one of our fondest memories for yourselves.

One of our favorite dates was when I (Cheryl) sent Jonathan on a scavenger hunt around the city. I chose our favorite spots, called each location and got their agreement to participate, and commenced planning. At each location, I had a small gift and a clue to lead him to the next spot.

Day of, I set everything up, got myself together, and arranged a ride to the final location so we would only have one car. One of the best dates ever! Use my plan to plan one for you and your spouse.



YOUR SCAVENGER HUNT PICNIC GUIDE



1

Choose your destination. Bonus points if it's a favorite park, or special place for the two of you.



2

Plan what goodies you want to pack. We recommend easy to transport hand foods like charcuterie board items.



3

Add special touches, like an elegant blanket (put a plastic picnic blanket underneath it.)

4

Write out your clues. Don't make them too easy or difficult. You want your spouse to have fun "finding you".



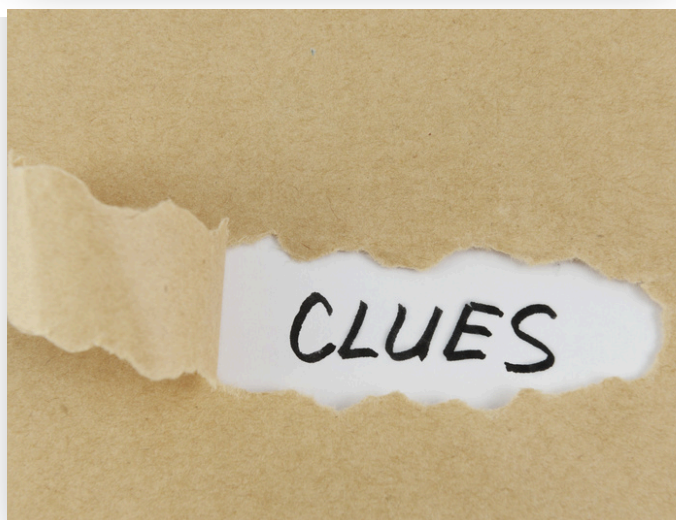
5

Download your romantic songs playlist. Make sure your phone has a full battery so you don't lose the mood in the middle of your picnic.



6

Drop off your clues at the spots. Don't forget to get buy-in from the managers at your locations. Most places love to participate in scavenger hunts, especially if you video their participation and share that on your socials.



7

Set up your picnic spot. Enjoy this time thinking about how much fun you're going to have together.



8

Consider prettying up your spot a bit, have a tent ready in case it rains or the sun is too strong. Have food covers handy to prevent insects and messes. Make sure you have plenty of paper towels and wet naps.



9

Bae has arrived! Now the real fun can begin. Enjoy!



Get a 25% discount on coaching for
downloading this guide with code DYI25

WANT HELP FROM US?



One-on-One with the *Shumakes*



Before You Step
PREMARITAL COACHING

Stand confident at the altar with
your new blended family, knowing
it can and will last.



Step Up
REMARRIAGE TUNEUP

A fulfilling marriage is closer
than you think. Sometimes a
tweak is all it takes to find it.

Coaching includes the
**SYMBIS ASSESSMENT
AND REVIEW:**

The SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts) assessment, developed by Les and Leslie Parrott. The SYMBIS and SYMBIS+ is a comprehensive overview of your relationship that gives you a personalized road map to making your marriage everything it was meant to be. After your assessment, we will review your results, identify strengths and a plan for succeeding as partners in the blend.



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Not sure where to start? Scan the QR
Code to book a Discovery Consultation



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**Being confident of this very thing, that He who
has begun a good work in you will complete it
until the day of Jesus Christ;
— Philippians 1:6**