



*return to*

intimacy

couple guide & workbook

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### **How to Use this Booklet**

We strongly encourage couples to incorporate this study guide in their daily quiet time or devotional. Allow a few minutes for individual study and fellowship with God, then come together for a time that will enrich your marriage. It's always a good idea to have your personal time of Bible study and prayer before you meet with your spouse—this helps you bring your best to the relationship, and you'll get more out of the Return to Intimacy curriculum also.

Be faithful to your small group each week and share your experiences with other couples. The body of Christ is stronger through fellowship and your relationship will receive health and support through the prayers of other Christian marriages.

## *Investing In Intimacy*

Because intimacy requires the deepest levels of personal exposure and vulnerability, it needs to be fostered in safe and trusting environments. You can receive prayerful support from the couples in your group while offering what you've learned in marriage to others. Genesis 2:24-25 reveals God's plan for a successful marriage and achieving intimacy. Consider these verses the scriptural road map to your marriage becoming "one flesh". Begin by asking God to adjust your focus from yourself to your spouse, and make you skilled at meeting his or her needs in all the environments of intimacy.

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*God wants you to share times when your emotions are "riding high" for the other, but He asks you to build your love on something deeper. There are grave disadvantages to basing the success of your marriage on chemistry.*

## Session 1: Couple Questions

Are you nervous to begin a group study with other couples on this subject? What benefits are there to sharing your marriage experience with others?

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Start this experience off right. Tell your spouse some things you truly appreciate about him or her, and talk about different ways you can express those feelings all week long.

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In which of the four elements of intimacy is your marriage strongest (value, energy, sacrifice, or trust)? Why is your relationship healthy in this area?

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## *Becoming Your Spouse's Safe Place*

You're probably beginning to discover how each environment of intimacy impacts your daily interactions. A great deal of conflict in marriage can arise from misunderstanding intimacy and the ways in which husbands and wives can build inner closeness. What is the model for the level of closeness you desire in marriage? Is it a friend's marriage, your parents or a fictional movie couple? What kind of expectations is that creating between you and your spouse, and can you build healthy intimacy by emulating the model you've chosen?

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*Value, Energy, Sacrifice and Trust.*

*Combine these elements in any one of the environments of intimacy and you have a powerful system for improving intimacy, and creating intimacy where perhaps none exists today.*

## Session 2: Couple Questions

Have you ever known an example of a spiritually connected marriage? Besides praying together, what habits did this couple reveal to you that seem important to being spiritually close to your spouse?

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Wives, tell your husband the factors that most influence your ability to share thoughts, feelings, spirituality and physical affection with him. When have you felt most assured of your intimate connection?

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Husbands, it's your turn. Describe the moments in your marriage when you've felt closest to your wife. In what ways did she encourage that connection through her words and actions?

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## *Disarming Destructive Fear*

Most fears are traceable to the core needs of humans that were met perfectly in Eden through fellowship with God. Loss of acceptance, identity, security and purpose cause all manner of fears to rise up in men and women. When you were first married, you probably had some apprehension as well as a strong desire to have a happily-ever-after relationship. How have your concerns and fears changed over time . . . are you still experiencing those same fears? Jimmy's message this week was all about identifying the root of fear and fighting back with scriptural truth. This week share your fears with your mate and pray for the disarming of this destructive force in your marriage.

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*Working through fears as a couple transforms marriage into a reflection of the very first marriage in Eden—the longer you're together, the closer you can grow toward paradise on earth as a couple.*

### Session 3: Couple Questions

How do the curses of fear (selfishness, sinfulness, damaging speech and stupid decisions) tear at the foundations of marriages over time?

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It's unhealthy to rely on your spouse for complete acceptance, identity, security and purpose—what are some appropriate needs you can ask them to meet?

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Is the pattern of your relationship to avoid conflict or to be contentious? What fears drive that pattern?

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**Session 3: Marriage Exercise**

Consider a common area of disagreement in your marriage. The object of this activity isn't to completely resolve this area of conflict in a single discussion, but rather you should work with your spouse to identify the fear behind the conflict. For instance, if you commonly argue about family finances, do you fear not having enough, being exposed as a bad financial manager, or the loss of some dream that requires financial stability? Next discuss an area of agreement—a strong point between you and your spouse. How has Jesus disarmed fear in your life to enable this level of intimacy?

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## *Photographic & Prophetic Thinking*

Think about when you've made the best and poorest decisions in your marriage and discuss the motivating factors that drove those choices. What would you change in your relationship today that might make healthy decisions a hallmark of your heritage?

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*The source of destructive forces like fear and dominance is not people, and it's not God. Fear is from the enemy.*

## Session 4: Couple Questions

Are there qualities men and women wrongly ascribe to God because they think He uses fear to motivate people?

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Have you ever wrongly ascribed a quality to your spouse because they said or did something that amplified your fears?

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Talking about fear in your marriage isn't going to come naturally or easily at first. What are ways you can create space in your relationship for non-threatening communication that disarms fear?

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**Session 4: Marriage Exercise**

Read aloud Genesis 3:6-13 in your devotional time together. Discuss the destructive things Adam and Eve first did in response to fear. What do you think God is trying to say about your marriage through these scriptures? End your devotional by speaking something loving and positive into your spouse's life. The simplest compliments can set a lasting tone for a full day of intimate marriage.

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## *Disarming Destructive Anger*

In modern society we get a lot of news and health care updates on the negative effects of long-term stress and anger. How do the physical symptoms of internalized anger mirror what anger does to a person spiritually? Share times when you have made a complaint to a receptive person, and how it changed your perception of the person willing to help you resolve the issue.

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*Realizing that anger destroys intimacy in a marriage is only a small part of the bigger revelation that anger can rob generations of God's intended blessing.*



## Session 5: Couple Questions

Are you more likely to respond like your mother or your father when it comes to situations that make you angry? Was their method for resolving anger based on God's leadership or a coping strategy?

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Why is it important to children that parents resolve anger in healthy ways within the safe boundaries of an intimate marriage?

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How do men and women cope with anger differently in general terms and how do you and your spouse differ specifically in the way you express anger and resolve tension as a couple?

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### Session 5: Marriage Exercise

Set aside 15 to 20 minutes during a date night you arrange this week to draw up an anger agreement for your marriage. It should include statements like, "You are allowed to come to me with an honest complaint, and I will not punish you by withholding affection or with passive aggressive behavior." Decide on ways you can actively resolve anger in your marriage when one of you is upset, like practicing a short "cooling off period" where you both commit to pray and then return to the discussion for forgiveness. Agree together that if an issue is bigger than you can deal with in a single day to seek counsel without delay. Who are some mature, Christian peers your could seek advice and prayer from when you're angry?

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## *Power to End Escalating Emotions*

Anger is such a powerful destructive agent, that it often causes couples to lose hope. The misconception among many married people is that at a certain point, all the damaging words and angry wounds add up to a point of no return. With God, nothing is impossible, and a couple in the worst imaginable place can begin something new with the help of Christ. You can restore your relationship to paradise by controlling anger and eliminating the forms of escalating language that anger encourages.

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*A good way to recognize these escalating languages is to remember Volume, Venom and Verbal Violence.*

*“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.” Proverbs 18:21 NKJV*

## Session 6: Couple Questions

How does resolving anger in your marriage change your interpersonal dynamics at work, with your children or at your church?

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Proverbs reminds that death and life are in the power of the tongue. How do the following things impact your marriage in light of death and life? Silence, sarcasm, complaint, compliment and prayer.

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Jimmy makes the statement that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison hoping your enemy will die. How does this principle influence your marriage even if the one offending you isn't your spouse?

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## *Disarming Destructive Dominance*

Dominance is expressed in the family dynamic. It prevents intimacy, but it also shapes interaction between parents and children, siblings and when the children are grown it resurfaces in the way they treat their mate. Your group includes many different family backgrounds. Discuss personality traits of people raised in homes where the mother is dominant, where the father is dominant and where the couple is equally invested in marriage partnership.

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*Men and women are absolutely equal in Christ. God places distinct roles of responsibility on men and women, but His ultimate design is for our relationships to exist in perfect partnership.*

## Session 7: Couple Questions

In what ways can an overly submissive person respectfully and lovingly confront dominance in a marriage relationship? What challenges will they face when they begin living up to their identity in Christ?

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How can a dominant person abdicate control and lovingly encourage a submissive spouse? Is a dominant person able to recognize on their own when they are falling back on manipulation, intimidation and domination to achieve their desired result?

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Shared control is the number one trait of successful relationships. In what areas do you and your spouse maintain a thriving partnership?

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## Session 7: Marriage Exercise

What kind of household were you raised in . . . a male or female dominant home or an equalitarian home? Are you able to recognize your own tendency to be either dominant or passive?

Dominance doesn't necessarily correlate to gender roles in marriage. For instance, a protective husband who expresses concern when his wife goes walking or jogging by herself on dark neighborhood streets is communicating care and concern. Likewise, a wife who asks her husband to contribute to housework isn't communicating in any way that she's not submissive. Within the roles that make your household run smoothly, what are ways you can defer to each other and establish an equalitarian home?

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## *Covenant Marriage*

When you understand that your marriage reflects the unbreakable commitment of God to love mankind, you'll be aware of the Father's plan to use your marriage as a representation to others who don't yet know Him as Lord. Karen and I believe every individual is part of God's plan, but more importantly you have a shared call on your marriage to live in the fullness of His blessing. At the conclusion of your group time, bless the other couples who have invested in this study with you by speaking encouraging words into their marriage.

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*Karen and I believe that every individual is part of God's plan, but more importantly you have a shared call on your marriage to live in His blessing.*

## Session 8: Couple Questions

Marriage as a contract is often glorified by media in our society. Can you think of examples of our culture's portrayal of marriage that cheapen the foundations of covenant relationship?

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What in your mind was the most powerful principle you learned through *Return to Intimacy*?

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When others look at your marriage, how would you want them to perceive that you are bound by covenant vows and a deep spiritual connection through intimacy as God defines in His Word?

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**Session 8: Marriage Exercise**

Don't stop now . . . continue your devotional time together and if you haven't already, establish a date night when you can focus on the different aspects of intimacy in your relationship. How will you maintain the honest discussion of intimacy in marriage with the couples that completed this study with you? How can you encourage them to have strong marriages and families?

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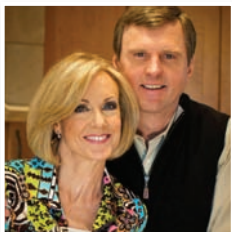
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Karen and I want to thank you for using *Return to Intimacy* to invest in others for the success of marriages and families in God's Kingdom. Our goal is to arm you with the best Bible-based relationship material for instruction, so you can fulfill the call God has placed on your life.

Our ministry staff, my wife Karen and me are praying for you; asking God to amplify the health of your marriage, and for that to reflect on every couple that embarks on this spiritual journey. My prayerful hope is that this guide impacts your marriage on a personal level as you help families in your community take hold of their great future.

—Jimmy Evans, President, *MarriageToday*

God joins a couple together with a spiritual bond, and your leadership can help deepen the bond between couples and their relationship with Jesus Christ. Begin walking through the *Return to Intimacy* keys with your fellowship today.



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