

Introduction

Building Emotional Intimacy

more than you can imagine

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...

Ephesians 3:20

From Jeff

I know what you're thinking—what, another book on marriage? Do we really need another book on marriage? Hasn't it all been said? Haven't we heard enough?

Well, I guess that depends upon where you want to go in your marriage. Are you content with simply “staying the course,” or do you have your sights set on new heights?

I've always wanted to be a pilot. The closest I've ever come is when I buzzed the Nashville skyline, my hands firmly at the controls of a friend's Cessna. (Don't worry; he was in the seat beside me, hands and feet at the ready!) With a little effort and a pull, you can orchestrate dramatic climbs!

In contrast, have you ever watched a glider in flight? They are different “birds.” The thing about a

glider is that it doesn't climb much. It has to be towed to its peak; then its entire time in the air is a slow descent back to earth. It may take a while, but eventually it comes down.

Which aircraft best describes your marriage? Are you pushing forward, pulling out the stops and climbing higher? Or do you feel like your marriage is on a slow descent and the ground is getting closer? Maybe it's not about to crash, but it's not exactly climbing either!

Not too long ago, I was definitely relating to the glider. But what I've learned about emotional intimacy has turned my marriage around 180 degrees, and I sincerely hope it will do the same for you.

At the time of this writing we have been married twenty-five years—quite a milestone in this age of “disposable marriage”—and I can honestly say that today I am more in love with my wife and more into my marriage than ever. I wasn't always able to say that. Let me go back about ten years.

By all accounts everything in our lives looked fine. We were busy raising our two boys, busy leading a ministry, busy with life. Nothing out of the ordinary. Your basic life pressures and responsibilities, but I would have these thoughts...these feelings...“Something isn't right here.” I couldn't put my finger on it, but I knew something was missing. Our sexual relationship was strong, but we spent little time really talking with each other. I was busy with people and so was she.

After our third child was born, our together time was watching TV at night. After a few years I finally realized what it was...that missing piece. We had become emotionally detached. I knew I loved her; I just didn't always feel it. There were no bad feelings, just not enough good ones. We had an emotional void in our marriage.

There would be times when I would find my wife crying, unable to express what she was feeling. I felt frustrated and helpless. We had lost touch with each other's real needs, desires and hearts. Our marriage had become stale and tired, and we needed to do something about it. We had to get deeper and address areas of forgiveness, acceptance, grace, humility, honesty and patience. We needed to deal with things from the past and present.

We hung in there, determined to work on this, and God has brought us to a great place. A place with no walls, no barriers, no secrets, no games. An emotional bond we plan on keeping forever!

From Florence

“Oh, I really hope my husband will read this. He certainly needs help with connecting emotionally.” Wives, this might be your first thought! But a warning here: I've learned how important it is to look into my own heart first, not to squelch my desires and thoughts, but to express them in a righteous manner. We both needed to learn how to be emotionally intimate.

This has been a journey filled with pain, joy and amazing rewards. I'm not writing as a professional marriage counselor, but as C.S. Lewis puts it: "Think of me as a fellow patient in the same hospital who, having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice."¹

I can say that I agree with Jeff's description of our marriage! We were in love, happy, no obvious problems. Some bumps from time to time, a seemingly "low maintenance" couple, but I can say now that we weren't completely honest with our deepest feelings and thoughts. Honesty brings potential conflict, and conflict—to me—wasn't good. (So not true, but that's how I felt.) I have memories of fighting back tears as we talked in the car or after having some interaction at home. I would tell myself, "You're fine; just forget about it," and make the decision that the conversation I was having in my head would never be said out loud.

Sometimes I would even hide my tears so I wouldn't have to explain why I was crying. I would tell myself, "You're too demanding emotionally; just stop expecting so much from this relationship."

As the stress of life continued to get more intense (death in the family, job loss, financial strain, spiritual testing), we were forced to face the void we were both feeling but not expressing to each other. We had to make the decision that our marriage being its best

1. Letter to Sheldon Vanauken on April 22, 1953. Quoted in *A Severe Mercy* (New York: HarperOne, 1987), 134.

was the priority God desired. It was imperative that we approach issues from a different angle.

We made promises to each other not to get defensive, to expand our listening capabilities, and to be free to express completely what we were feeling and thinking. We needed to push past the barriers that we had built without even realizing it.

Can you relate?

My eyes were opened to see how Satan wants to destroy our marriages in both obvious and subtle ways. It's amazing how free my heart now feels about my marriage. I'm so much in love with Jeff in a deeper, more emotionally intimate way, but it took a lot of work, a lot of tears, a lot of talking, and a lot of God's power. I understand Paul's words much better now: "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:29).



We realize that all of us are at different stages and in different places with our marriages. Some see the need for change right now; some may not. Some may be ready to dive right in, and some may want to stick a big toe in first!

Wherever you are, we want to encourage you to simply do the best you can at whatever pace you need to travel. Just stay with it and don't give up!

We really hope this book will help you find emo-

tional intimacy in your marriage. Read the scriptures, and do the exercises together at the end of each chapter. Give it your all, and God will give *you* “more than you can imagine.”