

**5** STEP ACTION  
*The* PLAN TO A  
HAPPY & HEALTHY  
*Marriage*  
WORKBOOK

INCREASE THE JOY  
OF SANCTITY, SAFETY, AND  
STABILITY IN YOUR HOME

A GLOBAL INITIATIVE OF THE MARRIAGE RESTORATION PROJECT  
KEEPING COUPLES TOGETHER, HAPPILY

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The following exercises are designed to complement the material in both the book and the audio cds. The questions are designed to get you thinking about how you can practically apply what you have learned. To gain the most from these exercises, please read the chapter in the book and listen to the corresponding audio before completing. If you are doing this program along with your spouse, you may want to do the exercises together or separate

## STEP 1: COMMITMENT

Commitment is the prerequisite to any successful relationship. With commitment, you can weather almost anything that comes your way. Without it, even the smallest problems will knock you off balance. Although you may have thought you committed by getting married, most couples don't foresee the challenges that wait them after their nuptials.

Now is the time to “renew” your vows, so to speak, and commit to the relationship, even if it did not yet turnout the way you were expecting. Committing, even before the relationship improves will help you show up so that you can do the work to make it better.

Take some time and think about the following questions. When you have an answer, fill in the blanks. These questions will help you understand how ready you are to commit, and what may be getting in the way of actualizing this first step to saving your marriage.

1) Do you think you can commit to your relationship, even before it improves? If yes, how may that be challenging for you? If no, why not?

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2) What is holding you back from committing to your relationship? Is there something that you are afraid of losing or letting go of?

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3) What would it look like if you dropped all of your inhibitions and you fully committed to your relationship (even if your spouse has not)?

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4) List one action step you can take to show your commitment today.

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***The key to commitment is remaining in the present, not in the future. If you have set a “deadline” for your relationship to improve, you may be already pronouncing your marriage as dead.***

1) Do you have a “deadline” that you are giving your relationship? If so, why?

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2) Even if you have not set a date, have you mentally checked out of your relationship?

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*There are many “good” reasons not to commit to your marriage. Even if you believe in theory that commitment is necessary, you may be too \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) to commit. If you are too angry with your spouse or you even hate your spouse, how can you move beyond these feelings and invest in your marriage?*

*Many couples in crisis conclude that they simply married the wrong person. In that case, commitment seems pointless, as their marriage was a mistake. Although it may seem your spouse is not the same person you married, know that if you chose to get married, there is a deeper reason why you made that choice.*

*Whether it be a part of the Divine Plan or to fulfill an unconscious psychological agenda, it is not a coincidence that you chose your spouse. Let’s explore some of the issues you are experiencing with your spouse and how they are not a proof that you married the wrong person, rather they demonstrate how you picked the perfect match that will help best facilitate your growth and healing.*

1) Why did you pick your spouse?

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2) What did it look like when you fell in love?

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3) Describe in detail some of your favorite memories from your dates.

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4) How has your spouse changed since you first met and committed to him/her?

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5) List all of the things that bother you about your spouse that you have discovered since you have been married.

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6) List some of the negative character traits of your primary caregivers (mother, father, etc...)

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7) Is there any similarity between what triggers you about your spouse to some of the negative memories you had growing up or in other relationships?

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8) How might you be triggering your spouse's negative past experiences?

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9) How can you take responsibility for your role in the relationship?

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*There are surprisingly some couples that claim to never have really liked their spouse. If you got married and have children, you have made a commitment to make an effort to create a loving relationship. Love can grow by performing acts of love. It can also increase by learning new activities together.*

1) List thoughts, words, and actions that you can implement to increase your love for your spouse.

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2) What new activities can you do together to increase your bond? (i.e., playing tennis, taking a cooking class)

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***Mental illness is real, yet often treatable. Unfortunately, it can be a major factor in discouraging commitment. It is important to know whether a competent professional has actually diagnosed your spouse and, if so, he/she is being treated effectively. Despite what you may think, it is quite possible to have a fulfilling marriage even if your partner has a mental illness.***

1) Do you believe your spouse has a mental illness or psychological disorder?

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2) What psychological disorders have you thought your spouse has?

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3) Have others suggested that your spouse has a mental illness?

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4) Could they be biased? Are they licensed mental health professionals?

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5) How has this “diagnosis” impacted your marriage on a day-to-day basis?

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6) How has this “diagnosis” impacted the way you see your spouse?

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7) Are you using your spouse's mental illness as a way to get out of your marriage?

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8) Do you think you too suffer from mental illness?

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9) Do you or spouse suffer from stress?

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10) How do you think mental illness is different from ordinary life stressors?

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## STEP 2: SEAL YOUR EXITS

Sealing your exits is a logical continuation of commitment. Once you have decided to work harder to be present to the idea of relationship, the next step is to make sure that you are focused on the relationship as opposed to elsewhere. While there are more serious exits you can take to escape your relationship such as infidelity and substance abuse, there are a host of seemingly benign activities that when done with the motive to avoid your spouse, can have a corrosive effect on your marriage. Whether it is work, exercise, your Ipad, or your kids, if you engage in any of these activities to escape your marriage, it may be an exit. Let's explore some of the exits you may be taking that are sucking the energy out of your relationship.



1) How do you exit your relationship? Make a list of any activities in which you engage where even a partial motivation for doing so is to avoid your spouse.

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2) What triggers you to want to exit? When do you feel threatened in your relationship and why? Begin to notice when it starts...

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3) What exits did you see your caregivers take ? (Ex. Sleep a lot, workaholic)

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4) What exits may have you adopted from your caregivers?

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5) What exits are you able to seal now, even before your relationship improves?

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6) What other exits are easy for you to seal?

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7) Are there any exits that you don't think you will be able to seal?  
If so, Why?

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8) Are there areas where you are susceptible to exits even if you haven't taken them yet? Where are you exit-prone?

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*You may not even feel the need to close certain exits because you feel that you are getting your needs met better outside of the relationship. Whether it be friends, family, a therapist, or a significant other, if you are feeling fulfilled in those relationships you may be reluctant to get those needs met from your spouse. Let's explore the influence others may be having in keeping you "checked out" of your relationship.*

1) Who else do you talk to that listens to you better than your spouse?

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2) How else are you getting your needs met? And with whom?

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3) Do you see an individual therapist? Are they helpful or unhelpful?

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4) Do you fight with your spouse when you get home from a session with your therapist?

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5) Does your therapist talk about your spouse and cause you to doubt him/her?

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6) Who else may be poisoning your view of your spouse?

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7) How may they be jaded against men/women?

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8) Could they be jealous of you?

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9) Is their advice neutral or do they have an agenda?

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*Having relationships with members of the opposite sex can be exciting, especially if you are having a hard time in your marriage. You may have found someone who pays attention to you or seems to take an interest in your life. While you may daydream of what it would be liked to be married to this person, you are only seeing their “good side”. Much like when you fell in love with your spouse, you are overlooking or are oblivious to their negative traits. Even a friendship that is not intimate is a dangerous prospect. A marriage between a husband and wife is a sacred bond where no one else should interfere. Being friends with a member of the opposite sex can damage that sanctity and redirect the positive loving feelings that belong for your spouse only.*

1) Do you have any relationships with members of the opposite sex?

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2) Even if you don't have feelings for them, is it possible they may have feelings for you?

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3) What boundaries and guidelines could you set up to avoid getting into a relationship with another man/woman?

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4) When have you felt chemistry with someone you barely knew? Why do you think it happened? Was it physical touch that started it?

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## STEP 3: DETOX YOUR MARRIAGE

Once you have started focusing your energy on your relationship, you may begin to feel uncomfortable as some of the old toxic patterns that you were trying to exit are still there. Detoxing your marriage is the way to clean up unhealthy habits and ways of relating that destroy trust and make you not want to be with your spouse. Let's recognize some of the ways you make your marriage toxic.



1) What are some of the ways you may use your tongue as a dagger?

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2) Think about how you used to speak to your spouse in the past. If you were critical, shaming, or rageful, what was your intended result? Were you trying to hurt him/her? Did you want to get attention?

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3) What results did you achieve when you related in a toxic manner?

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*Taking responsibility is the key to achieving emotional maturity. It is easy to play the role of victim, especially if you feel like you have been wronged in the relationship. A more mature way of being in relationship is to focus on your feelings and what you need and to ask for it. By taking responsibility for your feelings and asking for what you need, you make it much more likely for your spouse to respond positively.*

1) How are you currently acting as a victim?

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2) What verbal changes can you make to become less of a victim?

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3) What non-verbal changes can you make to become less of a victim?

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4) What are your biggest frustrations in your marriage?

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5) What do you need most from your spouse?

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6) How can you articulate those needs in a more mature way?

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*As with all behavior, we learn how to relate by modeling others. Children learn by watching how their parents behave. As we grow up, we carry with us early memories of how our parents communicated to us and others. It is these memories that consciously or unconsciously influence the way we communicate with others. Think about your early models for communication and you may be surprised where you learned some of the toxic patterns that are harming your marriage. If you grew up in a house where people yelled at each other and talked with disrespect, you may enter a marriage with a rude awakening that it may be inappropriate. By becoming conscious of your patterns and learning what is healthy and what is toxic, you will better be able to make a conscious choice how to behave from here on out.*

1) Who modeled communication when you were a child?

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2) Did they model healthy or unhealthy communication?

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3) What are some examples of how communication was modeled for you as a child?

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4) What similar ways of communicating did you carry with you into adulthood from childhood?

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5) What other traits from your caregivers have you adopted?

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6) List some healthy character traits of your main caregivers.

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7) List some unhealthy character traits of your main caregivers.

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8) What would you like your spouse to know about how communication was modeled for you?

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9) What would you like your spouse to know that you will be working on to shift your current ways of communicating- real practical changes that they can expect to see?

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## STEP 4: ACKNOWLEDGE THE OTHER

As you have begun to remove unhealthy ways of relating by detoxing your marriage, you are now ready to begin moving towards a healthier way of relating. Acknowledging the other allows you to be intentional, taking in to account that you are in relationship with an “other.” This process allows you to develop a sense of inner calm which may be foreign in our fast-paced technology age. Yet, this calm is essential to being able to truly experience your spouse, understand them deeply, and have compassion for their story. The first step to being more intentional is to check-in with your spouse and make sure it is a good time to share. Remember, your spouse also has needs. How can you express your needs and feelings at a time when your spouse will be most receptive?

- 1) What is your usual intention when you have a conversation with your spouse? Is it to get attention? Share your anxiety?

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2) How do you feel about making an appointment with your spouse? Does it seem doable?

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3) What do you anticipate may be challenging for you to make an appointment?

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***Stress is a fact of life, yet the way you respond is within your control. The first step to change is awareness. By learning to understand how you react to stress, you will be able to catch yourself when you begin to enter autopilot.***

1) How do you act under stress?

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2) Do you fight or do you flee?

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3) When have you been able to resolve a very difficult and stressful situation? What did it look like? Were you calm?

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4) When you are under stress, how do you calm down?

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5) How do you feel about the possibility of being calm 24/7? Does it seem boring or relaxing?

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6) Do you feel the need to have drama in your life, as if things would not be exciting otherwise?

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7) How did you respond to stress growing up?

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8) When you are under stress do you typically minimize your energy like a turtle or maximize like a hailstorm?

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9) When you are with a quiet person, do you tend to get loud to get their attention or do you find it calming?

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10) When you are with a loud person, do you get stressed or excited?

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*The 90/10 rule is one of the most powerful, yet simple, concepts that you can apply to transform the way you view your spouse. While it may not be an exact science, the truth is that what pushes your buttons may not push your spouse's buttons and vice-versa. As you begin to reflect on the biggest triggers you experience with your spouse, probe deeper and you will be surprised at what you will discover about yourself. These earth shattering revelations will shed light onto your current conflict and provide you a new way for viewing you relationship and how to get your needs met.*

1) Where have you seen the 90/10 rule work?

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2) What bothers you so much more than average triggers? What gets you furious?

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3) Notice how that which triggers you, triggers your spouse in the opposite way.

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4) Does that which bothers you intensely about your spouse remind you of something from your past?

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*Sometimes it may be scary to give to your spouse because you feel so unsafe that you are worried you won't receive anything in return. The dialogue process helps create safety in the relationship so that you can give willingly without worrying about what you will receive in exchange. The main way that change occurs as a result of the dialogue process is through stretching. A stretch is any conscious act that you perform for the sake of the relationship. It can be an active stretch such as taking out the garbage or a passive stretch, where you refrain from responding in a negative way. As you stretch for the sake of the relationship, you will notice that your spouse will be more appreciative for your contribution.*

- 1) What are some examples of stretches that you can do for your spouse?

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2) What makes them a stretch for you?

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## STEP 5: LOVE INFUSIONS

While it is important to learn how to safely deal with frustrations that arise in a relationship, one must not lose sight of the importance of positive interactions. Love infusions help remind us that sometimes a little positive energy is all that is needed to create a big shift fast.

1) How can you increase positive interactions with your spouse?

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2) What does it usually look like when you and your spouse discuss negative issues?

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3) How do you think you could hope for this discussion to change and look different?

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***Appreciations are crucial for increasing your positive feelings towards your spouse as well as curbing resentment for those who feel unnoticed. Begin to look for things you can appreciate in your spouse as much or more than you look for complaints. You will see a change in your relationship when you begin to look for the good as opposed to the bad.***

1) List ten things you appreciate about your spouse.

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2) What are some appreciations that you feel comfortable articulating to your spouse?

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3) Do you believe you are worthy of someone meeting your needs and being appreciated?

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4) How do you react when your spouse appreciates you?

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5) How could you better receive appreciations?

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*Date night is a special weekly time where you can focus exclusively on your spouse. It helps show your spouse that he/she is a priority by making time to spend with each other.*

1) What makes it hard for you to make a weekly time with your spouse?

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2) What are some ideas for date night?

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3) How do you feel when you go out together with your spouse?

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***Many couples in crisis complain that neither one of them feels cared for. Caring behaviors allow couples to give what the other needs to feel cared for. More than just talking about it, these concrete behaviors show real change.***

1) What caring behaviors do you think your spouse would want/like?

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2) What is your love language?

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3) What do you think your spouse's love language is?

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4) How can you start speaking to your spouse in his/her love language?

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***Intimacy is the barometer of a healthy relationship. Whether emotional or physical, intimacy is how we feel close and connected with our spouse.***

1) In what ways do you need intimacy?

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2) Does your spouse need intimacy in different ways?

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3) Do you withhold intimacy? If so, why?

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