

keeping
MARRIAGES
healthy



by David and Teresa Ferguson

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RVA is a global alliance empowering people to experience and reproduce great relationships. We offer a variety of resources and workshops to help every dimension of your relationships flourish.

Keeping Marriages Healthy
by David and Teresa Ferguson

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- **A practical help to make good marriages better!**
- **A timely preparation for an upcoming marriage!**
- **Hope and healing for troubled relationships!**



Intimacy in Marriage

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Intimacy—What is it?

What does the word mean to you?

In *Keeping Marriages Healthy*, we define intimacy as: *closeness, exclusiveness, freedom to share all of yourself with another person, both giving and receiving in your relationship, as well as deeply knowing one another so you're not alone.*

In order for intimacy to flourish, three things are necessary. First, there needs to be a desire to know and to be known. Secondly, there must be the willingness to be vulnerable and allow someone to know us. This second element cannot happen without a third—a motivation of care which leads to trust. We only make ourselves vulnerable if we are sure that the person who seeks to know us, cares for us and will not harm us.

Intimacy, therefore, means to know someone deeply and to be known by them—to be able to disclose innermost thoughts and feelings to someone who in turn chooses to reveal themselves to you. It means to be caringly involved with one another, choosing to affirm and build up rather than criticizing. In marriage there are two complex individuals often with very different personalities. Marriage gives us the opportunity to lovingly and deeply know each other in a special, intimate way. When this is achieved, only then will we be living within marriage as it was meant to be.

Life Events May Challenge Intimacy

Marriages typically pass through predictable stages initiated by certain life events:

- Early days together
- Settling into married life together
- First baby or struggling with infertility
- Employment/unemployment pressures
- Growing children
- Teenage pressures
- Children leaving home
- Responsibility for aging parents
- Retirement from employment

The marriage relationship has been created for specific purposes that we will explore together. Imagine the possibility that marriage was intended to be a source of great blessing in your journey together emotionally, spiritually, and physically.



During each of these stages, relationships can develop and mature as new challenges are faced. Sometimes external pressures or family tensions cause strain on the marriage, and previously enjoyed intimacy is lost. The arrival of a baby, the difficulties of making time for one another in the midst of both having demanding and challenging careers, time spent away from home on business trips, teenage years, extended family, and aging parents all create demands on time and emotions. It can become easy for a couple to drift apart, reacting to the most current pressing demand upon them, resulting in their own relationship receiving little attention. Too often couples reach the time of “the empty nest,” when the children have grown up and left home, to find that they have few shared interests. The friendship in their relationship is lacking. In fact, the thought of the retirement years and spending even more time together is viewed with dread. Marriages reaching that stage have not collapsed overnight. The erosion has been gradual and often unnoticeable. The *Keeping Marriages Healthy* course is designed to equip us to maintain and even deepen our intimacy at every stage and through every challenge of life.

We will learn how to communicate love and affirmation on a regular basis, to deposit strength, and build closeness into our marriage relationship.

Finding opportunities to tell each other that you love one another will increase closeness, whatever your current stage or situation.

Consider turning to each other now and saying something like, “I’m glad you are/are going to be my husband/wife, and I’m looking forward to learning how to better love you.”

Assess Your Relationship—Where are we?

We invite you to reflect upon your intimacy in each of these three dimensions.

- What does it mean to be a friend to each other?
- What would your spiritual or faith journey together involve?
- What does it mean to be physically intimate with my marriage partner?

Take a few minutes now to reflect on your relationship.

On the following page, indicate your perception of the degree of intimacy in each dimension. Place a mark on the scales to signify your view of your marriage health. Work individually on this. You will be sharing your thoughts later with each other.

Assessing Our Marriage Closeness

Take this assessment and share with each other when prompted by the presenters.

1. The emotional or friendship dimension of our relationship is:



What aspect of being a friend to your spouse would you most like to see changed or improved in your relationship?

2. Our spiritual beliefs and values are:



What beliefs or life values would you like to share more in together?

3. The physical dimension of our relationship is:



What aspect of your physical closeness would you most like to see changed or improved in your relationship?



Sharing Truth in Love

Reflect on the three dimensions of marriage intimacy noted on the previous page and finish the following sentences:

It would really mean a lot to me if we could...

I would look forward to us having more...

I think it would be great for us to...

Be sure to continue this skill of sharing the truth in love.

It is one of the best ways to share what you need with your partner.

Say words that are positive and hope-filled in a loving tone of voice. Use the pronouns "we" and "us."

Increasing Emotional Intimacy: Practical Ideas

Friendship takes time—You can't get close to someone who isn't there. When was your last fun time together without family or friends? What is the next thing you are looking forward to doing together to relax and enjoy being together?

Common interests—Spend time together sharing an interest. Prioritize each other's interests and know what each finds important or enjoyable. What would you look forward to doing together?

Feelings—When you talk, express how you feel. Share anxieties, hurts, and joys. This can be a challenge for many, but being able to share how you really feel with another will bring closeness.

Dream together—Set aside regular time for each of you to share goals about the future—your marriage, family, career, friends, finances, etc.



Think about a positive memory or celebration from your growing up years—a pleasant occasion when you felt loved, cared for, or special (e.g., a birthday, family trip, favorite holiday experience, receiving a much wanted pet, taking part in a school play, a sporting achievement, an activity shared with a friend, working alongside a parent).

Share that positive memory now with your partner.

As your partner shares with you, identify what feelings you have for him/her (e.g., happy, glad, joyful, excited).

Express those feelings to your partner. "I'm glad that happened; I'm excited for you; that sounds great."

Now swap roles.

What did it feel like to celebrate together?

Responding with joy about something good is an example of increasing care for each other. Sharing the good memory involves disclosing something about ourselves to each other. This exchange is an example of what's involved in knowing and caring for each other more deeply.