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Why This Book?

Introducing Intimacy

Laura and I were married in 1984, and to make a long story short, in May of 1996 we hosted our first Celebrate Your Marriage conference. Working in youth ministry together for the first twenty years of our marriage, we never dreamed we would be considered marriage experts. But working with teens and their parents led us to see the importance of strong, healthy, fun marriages. Eventually we felt called to minister to married couples. Our hope today is for every married couple to learn to celebrate their marriage. To that end we offer tools to help married couples see and experience marriage as a lifelong journey of adventure and joy.

Over the past decade of marriage ministry we have noticed a

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trend in what married people hope to receive from us. Men, wanting to better understand their spouses, come to us hoping we have Ph.D.s in “wifeology.” Women secretly wish we could give their husbands a shot of “Casanova-cain” to recapture the magic they felt while dating. Married couples look to us with pleading eyes, hoping we can help them regain the wild affection they once felt for each other.

Because of our desire to help couples find true intimacy in their marriage, we conducted a survey of over two thousand married people, asking them to share their views on intimacy. In addition, we conducted an in-depth survey with nearly one hundred married people delving deeply into the issues of intimacy. We felt we needed to know the problems, issues, and challenges most commonly faced by couples before we could help them.

Throughout this book we will be addressing needs and issues brought forth from the survey. As you read through the quotes and comments, we hope you will be able to relate to many of the universal experiences. Take heart in the knowledge that we all share similar joys and challenges. As Jay’s mom says, “In marriage you will struggle with three things: money, sex, and in-laws.”

Intimacy is something we all long for because it is powerful and life-changing. It is also elusive. We don’t know when it will show up or how long it will last. In fact, no one understands intimacy when they fall in love. We certainly didn’t. We just heard the music in our hearts and started to dance.

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Intimacy is the spark. The spark starts small and grows with time into a burning flame

of love. Over the years, how that fire is stoked will determine the depth of your relationship and the joy you experience together. To keep the fires of love alive, careful attention must be paid to all five facets of intimacy: social, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Each of these facets is key to igniting the passion, romance, and mystery in your marriage.

Priorities

The young people at the FCA golf camp were excited to hear Joe Schumer, owner of and PGA teaching pro at The Pines golf course in Weidman, Michigan. They were filled with anticipation because Joe was going to demonstrate the proper way to hit a bunker shot. I (Jay), on the other hand, couldn't wait to hear Joe talk about his faith. He becomes giddy when talking about Jesus. He didn't disappoint.

Near the end of his demonstration, Joe mentioned something in passing that hit me like a slap on the face. Joe said, "Here are my priorities: (1) God, (2) my wife, (3) my children." In that moment it was as if all the neurons in my brain started firing at once, and I concluded that most Christians really have their priorities screwed up.

Ask typical Christians (male or female) to share their priorities and they will say: (1) God, (2) family. Do you see the slight but essential difference in what Joe said and what most of us would say? Mark 10:8 reads, "The two will become one flesh." It *does not* read, "The two will become one flesh until the kids come along, and then they become part of us too." Here is where we make our mistake: not realizing that our relationship with our spouse is completely distinct from our relationship with our children and the rest

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of our family. While they may overlap, our first and primary relationship after God is with our spouse, and as a result our children must come later.

Our wrongly configured priorities materialize in many dysfunctional ways. An obvious example is parents who spend all their time chauffeuring, coaching, or watching children play insane amounts of sports or other activities. Instead of using our time in these ways, we should be building the intimacy God ordained as his first institution—marriage. Our children must come third. While this flies in the face of so much evangelical thought today, the single best thing you can do for your child outside of having an authentic walk with Christ is to make your marriage a priority.

Some of you might be saying, “But we enjoy watching our child play basketball, and as a result, it draws us closer as a couple.” *Yeah right!* How can sitting in a crowded gym with no opportunity to really connect, surrounded by others who are passively observing sports, bring you closer as a couple?

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Now don’t get us wrong. Children need encouragement and support from Mom and Dad. We attend many of our kids’ functions. But what your kids and ours *don’t* need are parents who are out three or four nights a week at the expense of a deeper, healthier marriage relationship.

Unlocking Celebration

We wrote this book for anyone who wants to experience intimacy in their marriage. The main message is simple: we believe the key to unlocking celebration in your marriage begins with something we all desire—intimacy. Building and developing intimacy will help you celebrate your marriage.

Intimacy is a tough subject because it means so many things to different people. Often in our conferences we'll ask the ladies to shout words that define intimacy for them. *Closeness, hugging, talking, and cuddling* are frequent answers and all very good. Ask men the same question and you will hear them reply in unison: *sex!*

Ah, there's the rub—for each person, intimacy is spoken and lived out differently. For Laura intimacy is best realized in time alone with Jay. For Jay intimacy is what happens when Laura initiates physical contact of any kind: holding hands, a foot rub, kissing, or . . .

This book is designed to help you and your spouse go beyond physical and emotional intimacy to build intimacy in every area of marriage. Each facet is essential in developing authentic intimacy:

social intimacy
mental intimacy
emotional intimacy
physical intimacy
spiritual intimacy

Don't put too much pressure on yourself. Laugh with each other and realize no one gets it right all the time. Most likely

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you are deeply intimate in one or more of the facets listed above. Rejoice; be glad! Then take a serious look at the areas that need improvement and begin working on the proven ways we offer to strengthen those areas.

Don't take yourself too seriously; just realize you're both human and won't always get it right. One time a man came to us and said he remembered his first marriage retreat with his wife because it was such a disaster. The leader of the retreat asked, "Can you name your wife's favorite flower?" He turned to her and asked, "Pillsbury, isn't it?" It went downhill from there.

When we were dating our spouse-to-be, we thought he or she was perfect. After the honeymoon we realized this perfect mate changed overnight and did not clear it with us first! Those habits that were cute when we were dating quickly became annoying. We can all look at our spouses and see what we wish we could change. In a successful marriage we accept those idiosyncrasies and don't spend too much energy on trying to change that which we cannot.

As a young teenager, I (Laura) spent many hours babysitting. I loved children and was passionate about babysitting. The mothers who employed me were firm about one thing: after you put the baby to bed, do not get her up again. If she cries, let her cry. After twenty minutes, if she was still crying, I could check that the baby was okay and pat her back. But I could not get her up out of bed.

This was the best training I could have received. When Jay and I had our first child, Torrey, I remembered this training. I put Torrey to bed and, of course, he cried. I waited twenty minutes, checked on him, made sure he wasn't hurt, hungry, or wet, rubbed his back, and then left. Inevitably he fell fast asleep. This process of allowing our baby to cry drove Jay crazy! He desperately wanted to go in and get

Torrey up out of bed, rock him, feed him, cuddle him. I said *no* and was firm about it. We went round after round. Finally, after many nights of watching what I was doing and seeing that soon Torrey did not even cry when he was put to bed, Jay realized I had been trained well.

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At first Jay wanted me to *change*, but as time passed he recognized the benefit of allowing me to be the mother God had trained me to be during those years of babysitting. Jay showed maturity in our relationship by accepting me rather than insisting I change.

When you are young and you watch a romantic movie, you really think that is what life will be like! You watch a TV husband and wife sleeping all cozy next to each other, appearing to be the perfect couple who never drool in their sleep, snore, or make other strange sounds. When the TV couple awakens, they open their eyes, smiling adoringly at each other, and kiss good morning. What a crock of hooley! What about morning breath, bedhead hair, and those lovely morning volcanic eruptions from that perfect man or woman next to you? An important part of marriage is accepting the things we would rather change.

In the first part of this book we will look at the purpose of marriage and how growing intimacy in every facet of marriage will help the two of you become one. Becoming one is what turns the spark into the burning flame of love. In the second part of the book, we will detail some of the steps necessary to keep the home fires burning.