

# GROWING AS INDIVIDUALS



If our marriages are only as healthy as we are, then it's important we become aware of, and attend to the ways in which we can grow and focus on ourselves (rather than our partners). Use the following questions for your own self-reflection:

## MENTAL HEALTH

When was the last time you were grateful for something?

Is it hard for you to talk yourself down or get your mind out of a spiral?

When your mind wanders or when you zone out, what do your thoughts go to?

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

What are you currently worried, nervous, or anxious about?

What are you currently hopeful or excited for?

How do strong emotions usually impact the rest of your day?

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

How satisfied are you with how your body feels in when it comes to...

-the food you eat or hydration you get?

-the amount or quality of sleep you get?

-the physical activity you engage in?

## SEXUAL HEALTH

How satisfied are you with the your side of sexual intimacy with your spouse?

What feels especially vulnerable to you when it comes to your own sexuality?

When was the last time you felt emotionally connected during sex?

## SPIRITUAL HEALTH

How would you describe your relationship with God?

What kind of relationship would you like to have?

What things keep you from relating to God the way you want to?

## RELATIONAL HEALTH

When was the the last time you had a positive thought about your spouse?

When was the last time you had meaningful conversation?

What obstacles are currently keeping you from connecting the way you want to?

# LIVING MUTUALLY EMPOWERED PURPOSEFUL LIVES

The healthiest marriages are those which achieve differentiated unity, as discussed in episode #004. Listen to that episode together, then answer the following questions:

What individual differences do you and your spouse struggle with?

What's good about those differences?

What do you have a hard time trusting each other with, at this point in your marriage?

How would you like to see your spouse celebrate and love you for who you are?

How would your spouse like to be seen, acknowledged, and celebrated by your partner?

Do you ever feel fearful of losing your individuality? If so, what might need to change?

Do you ever feel protective of maintaining your individuality? If so, what might need to change?

Per episode #004, what do you think about the distinction between selfish, selfless, and unselfish love?

Who in your life has demonstrated sacrificial love as couple, leading to mutual empowerment?

What could this look like in your marriage?

How do you hope to demonstrate differentiated unity through your marriage?

What plans do you see God unfolding in your life? In your spouse's life?

What bigger purpose unites you a couple?

Once you've answered these questions together, write out a purpose/mission statement for your marriage:



# NAME WHAT'S GOOD

Take some time to think specifically about what you appreciate and admire in your spouse. Then encourage him or her, using the prompts and questions below!

## APPRECIATIONS

- What are you grateful for when it comes to your spouse? Why?
- When you think about your marriage, what are you grateful for? Why?
- What was the last thing your spouse did for you or followed through on after you asked him or her to?
- When was the last time your spouse offered you a helping hand without you having to ask?
- What things do you appreciate about your spouse that you normally take for granted?
- What do you appreciate about your spouse's personality or perspective (even when it differs from yours)?

## ADMIRATIONS

- What strengths or qualities do you admire about your spouse? Why?
- What aspects of your spouse's character do you admire? Why?
- Specifically, what do you find attractive physically about your spouse?
- Specifically, what character qualities do you observe your spouse working to develop?
- What do all of these qualities mean to you?

## ENCOURAGEMENT

- What short-term goal is your spouse working toward right now that you could encourage him or her in?
- What life goals is your spouse working toward right now that you could encourage him or her in?
- When you stop to think about your spouse's day-to-day life, where could you be more intentional in encouraging him or her in how amazingly they do what they do everyday?
- Where could you be quicker to encourage your spouse?
- (What would you need to work through, if anything, in order to do that?)
- How does your spouse most like to receive encouragement? (If you don't know, ask!)

# CALM YOURSELF



Flooding is a physiological, fight-or-flight response that happens when we feel threatened or attacked in some way - whether that threat is real or only perceived. Answer the following questions and share with your spouse for a better understanding of how to calm yourselves and communicate well when you get flooded.

What physiological reactions let you know that you're flooded?  
(Shaking, heart racing, flushed face, dry mouth, stomachache, heartache, etc.)

Research shows that it takes at least 20 minutes for our bodies to return to their resting, steady states after being physiologically aroused and reactive. How much time, between 20 - 60 minutes, do you think you need to calm down? (Experiment with the length of time until you find what's right for both of you.)

How will you communicate that you need to calm down in a way that lets your spouse know that you plan to return and resume the conversation after the allotted amount of time?

What activities or coping strategies could you engage in when you get flooded?  
(Praying, journaling, reading, jogging, walking, cleaning, organizing, watching TV, etc.)

If you were to communicate to your spouse that you're flooded and need to calm yourself, would any of the items you listed above still be triggers for your spouse? (Ask! Then choose a different calming strategy, if needed.)

What defense mechanisms do I engage in when I'm triggered and flooded?

- **denial:** refusing to believe what my partner is saying about me
- **avoidance:** refusing to believe there's an issue at all
- **intellectualization/spiritualization:** using faith or reason to avoid confrontation
- **rationalization:** making excuses for my behavior, intentions, or motives
- **reaction formation:** doing the opposite of what I actually feel
- **personalization:** internalizing negativity
- **passive-aggression:** projecting anger or bitterness indirectly onto my partner

Decide with your spouse how you'll each take a break. What signal, sign, or code word will you use?

Talk specifically about how you'll come back together to finish your conversation or to talk about what happened.

# HOW TO HAVE A DO-OVER

Do-overs can be helpful when our physiology and defensiveness get the best of us. When this happens, here are a few principles to use as guidelines for turning conflict into connection.

## CALM YOURSELF.

When you are triggered, how does that manifest for you?

- I stonewall, shut down, and retreat inside myself.
- I get defensive, engaging in one of the defense mechanisms talked about in Ep. #011-012.
- I become bitter, angry, passive-aggressive, or contemptuous.
- I begin to go negative, complain, and criticize my partner.

How much time do you need personally to calm down?

How will I communicate that I need to calm down in a way that lets my spouse know that I plan to return and resume the conversation after the allotted amount of time?

What are 3 self-care strategies or 3 ways I can self-soothe when I get flooded?

## SHARE YOUR HEART.

When reacting to or processing conflict, I tend to...

- verbally or outwardly process
- try to reason with logic
- look for the good or "what's not so bad"

Think about how this impacts your spouse. Then share what would be more helpful for you to do, post-conflict.

Confess the communication habits you need to drop in order not to hurt your spouse.

- "You always..." or "You never..." (making sweeping generalizations)
- "You should..." or "The right way is..." (judging, critiquing, nitpicking)
- "You're so inconsiderate!" (assigning negative labels to your spouse)
- Rolling your eyes, showing contempt, disgust, or disdain, etc.

# HOW TO HAVE A DO-OVER



## TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Taking responsibility means not only owning your role in the conflict, but also your own triggers and defense mechanisms. Answer the following questions for yourself and share with your spouse:

What words, looks, actions, or inactions did I contribute to our conflict?

- verbally or outwardly process
- try to reason objectively
- look for the good or "what's not so bad"

What from our past or my family of origin triggered me to react that way? Keep in mind, understanding is meant to change our behavior, not to settle into excuses for it.

## SAY "I'M SORRY" AND "I FORGIVE YOU".

What look, words, actions, or inactions contributed to my spouse feeling hurt?

What do I need to say I'm sorry for?

What look, words, actions, or inactions do I need to forgive my spouse for?

## TALK TOGETHER ABOUT WHAT EACH OF YOU CAN DO DIFFERENTLY IN THE FUTURE.

# FAMILY OF ORIGIN SERIES



## THE ROLES WE PLAY - Ep. #026

With which of the 5 roles do you most predominantly identify? Entertainer? Peacekeeper? Role Model? Baby? Fixer? What about your spouse?

What was that experience like for you, growing up as a (insert your role)?

What was going on in the life of your family growing up that you think contributed to you playing this role? (i.e marital strain, loss, instability, etc.?)

Who did you feel you had to be in order to gain your parents' attention or approval?

Which did you seek most - your parents' attention or approval? Why do you think that is?

How does this insight impact your view of your childhood? Of your parents? Of your siblings?

What questions do you have about the role you or your spouse played growing up?

## HOW OUR CHILDHOOD ROLES IMPACT OUR MARRIAGES - Ep. #027

After listening to episode #027, what stood out to you? What did you realize that you hadn't before?

How does the role you played in your family of origin still impact you today? What strengths did you derive from it? What struggles?

How has your childhood role impacted your marriage? Do your roles differ? Contrast? Complement? Support? Empower?

Do you feel free to be yourself in your marriage? Bound by your childhood role? Why or why not?

What's leftover from your childhood role that you know you need to let go of, in order to redeem your childhood and become the person God created you to be?

How could your spouse support you in becoming more of who you truly are?

What questions do you have about your marital dynamics as it relates to your families of origin?

# FAMILY OF ORIGIN SERIES



## CHILDHOOD MESSAGES - Ep. #028

After listening to episode #028, what stood out to you? What did you realize that you hadn't before? What childhood messages did you resonate with?

In your opinion, did the role you played in your family of origin growing up perpetuate certain childhood messages? Why or why not?

When it comes to your sense of self-worth, what do you tend to struggle with as an adult because of childhood messages?

When it comes to your relationship with your spouse and your own children, have your childhood messages impacted them for better, worse, or both? Explain why.

When it comes to your idea of work, faith, money, parenting, sex, conflict, lifestyle...what childhood messages are you grateful for? What messages and belief systems would you like to change?

What questions do you have about childhood messages and how they impact you today?

## REDEEMING CHILDHOOD MESSAGES - Ep. #029

After listening to episode #029, what stood out to you? What did you realize that you hadn't before?

"Because of Christ, I am worthy. I am loveable. I am enough." To what degree do you believe each of those statements? Why or why not?

If you were to live like you fully believed each of those statements, how would your life change?

If you were to communicate messages of unconditional love to your spouse, how do you think it would change him/her?

If you were to communicate messages of unconditional love to your children, how do you think it would change them?

What is keeping you from believing and living into the fullness of who you truly are? What's keeping you from becoming the person you were created to be? What do you need to do about it?

What questions do you have about your worth or how to communicate messages of unconditional love to those you love?



# REDEEMING CHILDHOOD MESSAGES

Despite the messages you may have received growing up, here's what's true:

## **YOU ARE LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY.**

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. -Romans 5:8

## **YOU ARE LOVABLE.**

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.  
-Jeremiah 31:3

## **YOU ARE AMAZING.**

I praise You, for I am fearfully & wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. -Psalm 139:14

## **YOU ARE ENOUGH.**

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."  
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. -2 Corinthians 12:9

## **YOU ARE ACCEPTED.**

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. -Romans 15:7

## **YOU ARE A DELIGHT.**

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing. -Zephaniah 3:17

## **YOU ARE ABLE, BECAUSE OF HIM.**

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. -Ephesians 3:20

# REDEEMING CHILDHOOD MESSAGES

Despite the messages you may have received growing up, here's what's true:

## **YOU ARE FREE.**

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. -Galatians 5:1

## **YOU ARE WORTHY.**

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. -1 John 3:1

## **YOU ARE SEEN.**

Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands... -Isaiah 49:15-16a

## **YOU ARE IMPORTANT.**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ...So God created man in His own image...male & female He created them. ...God saw everything that He had made, & behold, it was very good. -Genesis 1:26a,27,28a

## **YOU ARE GIFTED.**

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. -1 Peter 4:10

## **YOU PLAY A PART IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS.**

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. -1 Corinthians 12:14

## **YOU ARE ON PURPOSE.**

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.... -Psalm 139:13,16

# TAKING TIME TO ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

Take some time to answer these questions for yourself, and then discuss as a couple:

## APPRECIATION OF LIFE

What are the things I enjoy?  
What are some of my favorite things in life?  
When was the last time I stopped to appreciate the life I do have?  
What basic aspects of daily life do I tend to take for granted?  
How often do I complain compared to how often I express gratitude?  
What or who do I count as blessings or gifts in my life?  
If I had a free day, how would I spend it?  
What does that say about what I most value in life?

## EXPLORING NEW POSSIBILITIES

What trajectory is my life on?  
Am I headed down a path that I want to be on?  
If not, what possibilities have I not given much thought to?  
If so, is there more that I haven't even considered?  
Are we living into the life and legacy we'd dreamed of in the beginning as a couple?  
If dreams and desires have changed, are we on the same page or are we ignoring life paths that need to be addressed?  
What would be our next step?

## DISCOVERING PERSONAL STRENGTH

What do I want?  
What seems to be holding me back?  
What am I good at?  
What skills or strengths do I have?  
What am I afraid of?  
Would I consider myself to be a strong person?  
If not, what stories am I telling myself that lead me to believe this?  
Do I think more of myself or less of myself than I ought, or of others?  
If so, why? What stories am I telling myself that lead me to believe this?

# TAKING TIME TO ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

Take some time to answer these questions for yourself, and then discuss as a couple:

## REEVALUATING RELATIONSHIPS

What do the people in my life mean to me?

How have they shown up for me or encouraged me?

How have they not shown up for me or taken more than they've given?

How is my avoidance, procrastination, people-pleasing, passive-aggression, inauthenticity, under-functioning or over-functioning interfering with my sense of relational fulfillment?

Am I confusing any of the above unhealthy behaviors with being Christ-like in relationship?

What are my values when it comes to relationships?

Who do I intentionally want to invest my time in?

## DEEPENING YOUR FAITH

What do I believe about myself and why?

What do I believe about the world and why?

What do I believe about God and why?

What spiritual experiences have I encountered throughout my life?

What things do I believe that don't line up with what I know to be true?

(If a Christian), in what ways does Jesus' life look different from mine?

What can be learned from any mismatches between what I believe and how I live?

How can those things be reconciled & lead to a deeper experience of faith?

# CHRISTMAS WITH INTENTION



Wouldn't it be nice to be on the same page this holiday season? Together, sit down and brainstorm what you want this season to look like as a family. Then, create a plan to make it happen (while planning for obstacles that may inevitably arise)!

## MAKE A BUCKET LIST

What do we want this holiday season to look like, activity-wise and busyness-wise? Be sure to brainstorm TOGETHER, taking each person's wishes into account.

## MAKE A PLAN (A)

How do we want to spend this holiday?

Where will we spend it, and for how long?

What's our budget?

How much time do we want to spend together v. with our own children v. with our respective families?

Why? What's our reasoning?

What's important to each of us in the way we communicate this to our respective families?

Who will communicate this, and what will we say if we get pushback?

# CHRISTMAS WITH INTENTION



It's important to communicate plans early and often, so that in-laws and extended family know what to expect. There may be pushback or even manipulation of your well-wrought plans...but now that you know that, you can plan accordingly.

## MAKE A PLAN (B)

Just in case plan (A) goes awry, write down 3 scenarios using the following formula:

"If (fill-in-the-blank) happens, then together, we will (fill-in-the-blank)."

1)

2)

3)

**NOW TOGETHER, MAKE MEANINGFUL MEMORIES!**

 **BRAVE MARRIAGE** podcast ep. #076-077

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# LIVING WITH INTENTION

## ONE WORD

Choose one word to represent this season of your life. Meditate on it and use it as a guidepost or stone of remembrance for this season.

## ONE GOAL

Choose one goal to focus on right now. Here are a few questions that might help:

Of all of your dreams, desires, goals, or interests, what would make the biggest difference in your life and in the lives of those you care about?

On a scale from 1-10, how high is your motivation to actually do the thing?

On a scale from 1-10, how difficult will it be to achieve your goal?

## ONE PRAYER

Write out a prayer for the year to keep you humble, focused, and mindful of God's role in your life in the season ahead.

# COUPLE REFLECTION & LIFE INVENTORY



Take some time to think about what you really desire out of life. Think about it, write it down, then act. It doesn't have to be grand, it just has to be consciously and intentionally chosen. But choose well, believing nothing is impossible with God.

Think about yourself at 80 years old. Think about your family. What do you see?

What will you have done now that you'll be proud of then?

How are you praying to see the world change between now and then?

What do you want to be able to say of your life and the way you lived it between now and then?

How are you acting on those desires now? (If you're not, what's stopping you?)

What next small step could you take to begin engaging the life you just envisioned?

Who are the most important people in your life?

How are you showing them that?

How could you better show them this year?



# DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR ENGAGED COUPLES

Engagement can be a sweet time, but also a stressful one. Here are some questions to open up conversation in this likely busy season of engagement:

All things considered, at present, I am feeling...

When it comes to our upcoming wedding, I am feeling...

One thing that would really help me as we move toward our wedding day is...

What I am mostly feeling stressed out or nervous about right now is...

When we disagree or when we don't see eye to eye, I get...

What I would love your input or feedback on is...

If we were to resolve this (above) issue, I would feel...

When it comes to getting married, the most important part to me is....

When it comes to our marriage, my deepest desire is...

Along those lines, my core concern is...

Therefore, I think it could be really helpful if we...



# BRAVE MARRIAGE

Brave Marriage exists to educate, encourage, and equip couples to grow as individuals, do marriage with intention, and live mutually empowered, purposeful lives.

If these questions have been helpful to you, would you consider sharing the podcast and worksheets with your friends and family? I consider this part of my business a ministry to couples, and would love your help in sharing this teaching with others.

To work with me at the next level,  
please visit [bravemarriage.com](http://bravemarriage.com).