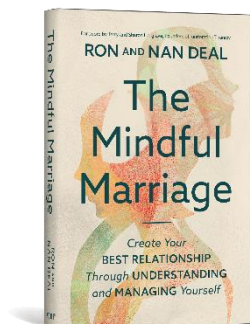


The Mindful Marriage, Bonus Material



What Marriage Ministry Sometimes Gets Wrong

Ron & Nan Deal, with Terry & Sharon Hargrave

[This bonus material is referenced in *The Mindful Marriage: Create Your Best Relationship Through Understanding and Managing Yourself* (by Ron & Nan Deal and Terry & Sharon Hargrave, Worthy Books, 2025). To understand what is meant by “pain cycle,” “coping reactions,” dysregulation,” and other terms, pick up a copy of the book today.]

Some of the top selling marriage books, conferences, and training materials in recent years essentially make one partner’s relational anxiety and/or poor behavior the other partner’s fault and responsibility to resolve. Without realizing it, many marriage education/ministry programs are inadvertently creating dependent relationships. We need to rethink some things.

Common Complaints. Misguided Solutions.

It’s common to hear couples accuse one another with comments like, “You just don’t hear me or care to communicate.” Others complain, “Every time we try to talk about anything serious or substantial, the conversation inevitably ends up in conflict.” Some say other hurtful words like, “There is no way I can ever please or satisfy you,” “I have needs in this relationship that are unheard, unmet, and ignored,” or “We are so different and incompatible.”

Let's unpack these complaints for a minute and examine common assumptions about marriage and marriage education that have inadvertently supported these assumptions and offered misguided advice.

Modern cultural perspectives on relationships, as well as the fields of psychology, counseling, and marriage education within the church, have skewed our perspective on relationships to a tremendous degree. In our experience this cumulative influence has affected how most Christians evaluate their marriage even more than the Bible. For example, the field of marital studies and therapy has essentially taught that communication—understanding and being understood—is one key to successful relationships. It is not. We have been taught that if your partner understood your personality, you would not have conflict (or at least it wouldn't be as bad). That's not true. And it was many of us—ministers and therapists—who taught you that the essence of intimacy and, indeed, the purpose of marriage, was to meet your deepest unmet physical, emotional, and cognitive needs. Haven't you heard it said that "A great marriage is comprised of two people meeting one another's needs"? If only that were true. And if that's not enough, our profession has taught you the language of compatibility as the road to relational fulfillment, lack of conflict, and ultimate closeness. You just need to marry the right person, "The One". (Enter online dating services.) Again, this does not guarantee a loving marriage.

Do these things matter at all? Well, yes, to a degree. But here's the thing: Matters of communication, serving the needs of your spouse, and compatibility are all fairly easily managed when we are emotionally regulated. In other words, when our sense of identity and safety is strong, we can much more easily sacrifice for one another, love out of the abundance of love in our heart, and navigate common problem-solving challenges. Yes, couples have communication hiccups, but self-regulating partners can manage them well, responding to one another like mature adults. It is only when emotional dysregulation occurs that we stop responding in love to one another and instead react out of pain and self-protection to what feels like a threat to our sense of identity and/or emotional safety. In other words, it is our pain cycle that sabotages our ability to communicate, sacrifice, and connect intimately as partners.



Some secular psychological advice and the ideas behind them have been valid and helpful, but the way they have been wholeheartedly accepted into the marriage culture has been, at best, misleading in most instances. For example, of all the ideas that have come out of

the psychology of marital therapy, by far the most damaging and misleading has been the idea that marriage is intended to meet your needs. True marital intimacy, if you are to adopt this societal belief, is that your partner is there to make you feel emotionally secure, confident in your place in the home and world, and physically satisfied. Indeed, underlying most of the complaints couples have about communication, conflict, and not trusting their partner is the belief that my partner should “meet my needs”. This standard has so infiltrated the belief system of couples that it is also the predominant driving force in most family, friend, and work relationships. If *any* relationship does not meet our needs or make us feel better about ourselves, we can cut it off and go looking for our needs to be met elsewhere.

So deep is this cultural belief that my spouse is here to meet my needs, people misuse healthy tools for marriage in selfish ways. For instance, our friend Dr. Gary Chapman has written and spoken extensively on *The 5 Love Languages*; I (Ron) even wrote a book with him for blended families. Gary’s whole intent behind this paradigm is to help people love their spouses better, with more intentionality. But in our “my needs are paramount” culture, people throw his books at their spouse saying, “Read this so you know how to love me.”

Much of what is taught about sexuality falls into this category as well. “This is how you meet a man’s or woman’s sexual needs...” we are told. “This is what you do inside the bedroom and outside the bedroom. If she’s not experiencing orgasms, here’s what you need to do differently so she will.”

Look also at what we’ve done with the Enneagram. This amazing tool is intended to help people grow in their natural tendencies and explore and overcome their areas of weakness. But the Enneagram is misused by many today with comments like, “I am a 1 (strict perfectionist) so you should know how important it is to me to have a clean and orderly house.” And “I am a 7 (enthusiastic visionary) so I should not be bothered by all of the details of managing our finances, just trust me on the direction we should go.” In other words, instead of using this personality typology to grow, change, and expand our individual capacities, we use it to justify our own behaviors and demand that our partner accommodate us. What was meant for good is used selfishly to get you to meet my needs.

It is as if we proclaim, with full psychological entitlement, “This is the way I am. These are the needs and wants I have, and I am entitled to have these met in my relationships and life.” This is the message that relational psychologists, including many within the field of

marriage ministry, have put out there, and it has been accepted and ingrained into current thinking to the point that it is a “common knowledge truth.” But marriage under this mantra becomes a competition of me cajoling, manipulating, and trying to get my spouse to make me happy—and them trying to do the same. Indeed, this is what the four reactive coping strategies of blame, shame, control, and escape are hoping to accomplish (see chapter 4 in *The Mindful Marriage*). But “fixing” a partner so they meet my needs is a power that a spouse does not have and is not meant to have.

So, What Leads to Peace, and What Leads to Pain?

Why are relationships difficult and riddled with conflict? *Primarily it is because of a partner’s reactive coping that comes from feeling unloved (which speaks to their sense of identity) or unsafe (e.g., not being able to trust a partner makes one feel unsafe).* Each person has a pain cycle that typically pre-exists their marriage. In *The Mindful Marriage* we explain that a person’s pain cycle is comprised of the neurological fight/flight reactions they rely on when feeling unloved or emotionally unsafe. These neurological “ruts” of pain and poor coping are usually formed early in life. Given that this reactive cycle usually pre-dates the relationship, is it possible for a spouse to love their partner so completely that their hypersensitivity to feeling defective or insignificant disappears? Can you love someone so magnificently that they stop wondering if they’re good enough to love? Can you be so trustworthy that they stop wondering about the permanence of the relationship. It’s a very romantic notion, but no, you can’t! These painful narratives preceded marriage, and neither partner can perform them out of the other. The irony, of course, is that this is exactly what the “meet my needs” system expects.

What leads to intimacy and depth in marriage is a mutually loving and trustworthy relationship. However, even healthy relationships have painful moments when partners are unloving or unsafe for one another. Restoring love and trust is vital. In these moments, each spouse must steward their own pain and confront their own unloving or unsafe behavior.¹ But what we typically do is focus on the other’s attitude or poor behavior or expect them to change

¹ To be clear, this is not to imply that abused partners should remain in harms way while their partner works on their pain and abusive behavior. Rather, we believe a self-regulating abused partner will act out of their inherent worth and seek emotional and physical safety with the hopes that their partner will take responsibility for their harmful actions, repent, and while in community with a larger church body, for example, seek to become loving and safe for the marriage. For more, see appendix 2 in *The Mindful Marriage*.

so that our pain subsides. That never results in long-term growth of the couple's relationship. Each partner's job is to stop letting their sinful old self run amok in the relationship. It is to confront their pain and sin and not focus on getting their needs met. Partners who take on this challenge will likely not only experience less conflict in their marriage but will find much more peace in their relationship—with increasing intimacy, trust, and depth over time. And that, ironically, helps partners experience greater happiness and feel nurtured by the relationship.

Coregulation or Self-Regulation?

Being dependent on your partner to regulate your emotions or meet your needs is called *emotional coregulation*. Despite being the theoretical basis for much of the advice given today in marriage education and ministry, it does not facilitate intimacy or the personal maturation of partners (from a spiritual perspective this might also be thought of as *discipleship*). Intimacy is about mutual sharing, knowing and being known, and maturing as an individual when a loving and safe relationship causes you to reflect back on your strengths and weaknesses and then take agency over how you will intentionally grow (self-regulation).

Coregulation is about one partner trying to manage the emotional dysregulation and reactive behavior of the other. “If your spouse is lonely,” we teach, “change how you approach them, so they feel more secure in your presence.” That’s coregulation. “Listening is the key to your partner feeling safe with you. Learn these skills and they will not question how much you value them.” That’s coregulation—and is based on the assumption that being understood and accepted mitigates any painful narrative that has already taken root inside one’s brain—which is simply untrue. “If your spouse is angry with you, maybe you need to spend more time with them.” Again, coregulation seems to be our only answer. Hardly ever do we invite the lonely, misunderstood, or angry spouse to ask themselves, “What does this feeling (pain) tell me about me—and how will I bring my best self to this moment in spite of my pain? How will I respond with integrity, grace, or maturity?” That is a very different question, and importantly, it places the responsibility for growth back on the person who can actually carry out the growth.

Parenting or Partnering?

Coregulation in relationships grew out of the attachment research on children. The best thing for a dysregulated child, the attachment researchers tell us, is a self-regulating adult

caregiver. Children need a trusted, loving parent to help them regulate when they can't regulate themselves. Please catch that: Coregulation is how parent regulates a child.

When we were young and just forming our identities and sense of safety, generally it was our primary caregivers that pulled close to us, listened to us, said comforting things, and assured us they were there for us and loved us. For example, a hungry infant can calm down through the coregulation of its mother as the child nurses. This is a good metaphor of what children need emotionally throughout their childhood from the important people in their life. Over time, this coregulation from a securely attached parent helps children form a healthy sense of identity and emotional safety. This is totally natural and appropriate—for *children*.

But as we grow, maturity demands that we learn to emotionally stabilize ourselves. Emotional coregulation, while totally appropriate for children, is not a great strategy for married adults. To expect our spouse to take the place of some former parental figure who failed us is to foster dependency: “I am inadequate to care for myself and I need you to be emotionally stable and healthy so I will be okay.”

Please take note: There are many in the marriage education and therapy field who believe coregulation is the goal (others, like us for many years, don't realize that they are teaching this). But we do not agree. This kind of emotional dependency and connection is much more like *parenting* than it is *partnering*. And who wants to make love to an emotional child, or parent? A parent gives and gives and does not expect anything in return from a child; it is a lopsided relationship because it is the job of the parent to meet the child's needs until the child gradually reaches maturity. Partnering, on the other hand, is where two adults bind themselves together in mutual pledges of sacrifice, work, and enjoying life together side by side. Intimacy in marriage is formed by *sharing* and *mutuality*. In parenting, intimacy is limited to a one-sided relationship where the parent knows almost everything about the child, but the child is just the beneficiary of the parent's care. There is no obligation for the child to give back. This is not a good system for marriage.

In what way has marriage education and therapy prescribed emotional coregulation? Just a few examples include turning toward a spouse in counseling and asking them what they can do to help their partner not feel insecure or unwanted, asking a “blaming” partner to soften their criticism based on the belief that doing so will result in the “withdrawing” partner returning to them, and encouraging disconnected partners to “communicate their feelings” as if

doing so will magically restore connection. Indeed, a number of the highest selling and most influential marriage books in the last 50 years (secular and Christian-based) teach that meeting the needs of your spouse will affair-proof your marriage, and that not meeting your partner's needs will result in their unloving or disrespectful behavior. Even further, if you repeatedly fail to meet your partner's sexual or emotional needs, you can expect them to be reactive and/or to become vulnerable to an affair. It's *your fault*, this coregulation message implies. And here's the really selfish part: If you want your needs met, start by meeting theirs. In other words, your motivation for pleasing your spouse, *is a happier you*. What? Is that self-giving love, or selfish love?

At the end of the day, the coregulation prescription for a better marriage is one partner regulating the other into being a better partner by meeting their deepest needs and desires. Again, this is more like parenting than partnering—and it creates two mutually dependent partners.

Imagine two scuba divers who are partnering for a dive. They've chosen deep-water in the open ocean hoping to experience all the beauty of the sea and creatures below. They drop into the water, each wearing their dive vest, oxygen tank, mask, and regulator (the device in their mouth that facilitates breathing and regulates the oxygen pressure entering their lungs). But pretty quickly both divers remove their regulator and look at the other with a look of panic. "Help me breathe," their eyes communicate. Because they care for each other, the partners frantically try to put their regulator into the mouth of the other, at the same time wondering, "But how will I breathe—that's my air?" Soon, both partners are floundering in one another's presence feverishly helping the other breathe while trying to attend to their survival needs as well.

Notice, no one is calm. No one is relaxed or feels safe. Both are panicked, and dependent, and as the situation unravels, wrapped up in one another's hoses and devices. *And no one is free to enjoy the ocean or the beauty it holds for them*. Real scuba divers, by the way, know that sharing a regulator is indeed how to save a partner's life if oxygen runs out or their regulator fails. You can share a regulator in an emergency, but everyone is headed for the surface. There's no depth, no peace, and no fun happening at that moment. Coregulation does not offer marriage a safe dive. Intimacy will be limited to the surface.

In contrast, the model that we much prefer for marriage is the one we teach in *The Mindful Marriage* called *self-regulation*. It is where I, as a partner, take charge of my own identity and empower myself around my sense of safety, stabilize my emotions about the truth of who I am and my circumstance, then put myself in an emotionally adult position (not needy or demanding) to work with, problem-solve, and share with my spouse. If you want a relationship that is based on meeting your needs, you will always be looking for a spouse—or should I say, a *parent*—who helps you regulate when anxious or upset. If you want a partnership, then make use of the tools of self-regulation to steward your own pain, choose how you cope with it, and in so doing, bring your best self to the relationship so you can companion with your spouse.

Now imagine our diving couple dropping into the ocean with each partner self-regulating. Each is managing the air in their tank, the air pressure in their sinus cavity (every 10 feet of depth requires an adjustment), and their breathing rate. They can explore, swim at peace, and relax into the dive. Communicating through hand signals is not always convenient so if they misunderstand or disagree, each self-regulates while there is a temporary disconnect. This allows them to remain calm while they huddle and figure out their next move. What results are two people bringing their best self to the moment. Each is free to explore the beautiful ocean, contribute to the other's experience, and touch hands as they navigate the depths that await them. Side-by-side they dive and enjoy *together*.

And something else happens, as well. Not being dependent on the other allows each to become a better diver over time. For example, one partner is able to grow past what used to trigger anxiety (e.g., looking down and not being able to see the ocean floor or seeing a shark off in the distance) while the other partner learns to slow their breathing rate (which save oxygen) in order to prolong the dive.

That last point is critical. Coregulation is helpful, but it is not transformative. It might save your life in a pinch, but you can't grow past your limits. As we experience the bumps and bruises of life, spouses can offer one another a calming, reassuring presence temporarily (and we hope they do). But that presence is not

For further thought: What are we saying to single people when we suggest that coregulation is how married individuals find fulfillment? Where does that leave them? Self-regulation is a personal maturity that is not based on marital status; it empowers people—married or single—to bring the best of themselves to all their relationships.

powerful enough to significantly transform the other partner's sense of self or how they react to pain. That is something only self-regulation can do. Coregulation keeps us stuck and dependent in our pain; only self-regulation helps us grow past it.¹

Notice, the agency in what we just said. When one spouse takes agency over their life—to be more direct, when they stop acting like a needy infant and mature as a partner—they grow. They transform. They mature. And the likelihood of the couple's usness maturing goes up considerably as well.

So, What is the Role of Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Marriage Ministry?

Let's revisit the role of communication skills in marriage for a moment. If you've ever read a book on marriage or attended a seminar, you've likely been taught the importance of communication and listening skills and how to resolve conflict. Where do those fit with the four steps? It's a good question. (If you've not read *The Mindful Marriage* yet, the four steps, taught in detail in our book, teach partners in very practical ways how to self-regulate after becoming dysregulated in all of their most important relationships.)

If the foundation of your home is not solid, it doesn't matter how pretty the walls or decorations are; the house is not safe to live in. Said another way, can you imagine someone whose home has just been demolished by an earthquake still worrying about the color of paint in the bedroom? It's not likely. The two pillars of love and trust discussed earlier are the foundation of healthy relationships; if they are not standing strong, it doesn't matter what color the walls are. And since self-regulation is what makes love and trust stand strong in your marriage, you must always focus on that first.

By the way, the Beatles lyric "All you need is love" isn't true. Imagine a husband whose wife is actively having an affair. He might believe she still loves him, but the fact that he can't trust her has their marriage in shambles. Love is not all you need. And neither is good communication.

For about half a century what dominated marriage education in both secular and religious circles was a focus on communication and problem-solving skills. We taught couples to actively listen, speak words of encouragement, and hone their

When someone says they've fallen out of love with their spouse, more likely what has happened is that they've fallen out of safety with their spouse. First, we fall out of safety, then we fall out of love.

communication skills as a couple. We also threw in lots of insight about what we might call “genderalities,” that is, the differences in male and female brains, the roles of men/husbands or women/wives, and we recommended that couples go on weekly dates, monthly excursions, and annual retreats. But at the center of it all was communication skills.

*And then someone came along with the research to show that it didn't work.*² To be more specific, what researchers have said is that couples don't actually use the skills they have when needed most. Emotional dysregulation blocks a couple's ability to use what they know. Couples who might have benefitted from good communication or problem-solving skills didn't unless they were already calm and settled about their relationship. Did you catch that? When partners are self-regulated and have a good foundation of love and trust, they can utilize communication tools—and lots of other principles for healthy relationships. But in general, it doesn't work the other way around. Research shows that spouses who are relationally connected have better communication skills, but practicing communication skills does not help distressed couples find connection.³

Here's the point: When someone is in a loving and emotionally safe relationship, they can access the better parts of themselves. Once dysregulated, they don't. Even worse, their coping reactivity ignites the couple's pain cycle. Communication skills alone do not override dysregulation.

This is important for marriage educators to understand. The problem, for example, with saying to couples, “When you're hurt by your spouse, set your needs aside and consider what they need,” or “Seek first to understand this person who has broken your trust, then to be understood,” is that dysregulation short circuits self-control and rational thought. Once dysregulated, partners are in a fight-or-flight mode adding blame, shame, control, or escape to the mix (the coping styles). It's like saying to someone, “I know the bear is attacking you, but it's okay. Remember, bears really are nice and cuddly.” *Yeah, right.*

Now, to be clear, much of the communication advice marriage educators teach to couples is spot on, and the skills might be helpful, but only if they work the skill. Emotional dysregulation makes that very unlikely. However, when partners exit dysregulation, and through the four steps become self-regulated, their frontal lobe comes back online, and they can begin to utilize the skills they have in their relational toolbox. It's a matter of timing and getting first things first.

Priority one for every marriage is building love and trust by *first* adding self-control (emotional self-regulation) to the conflict, hurt, or anxiety of the moment. Then, and only then, will speaker-listener skills be helpful (and a host of other tips we frequently give couples like doing on dates, sharing their concerns, making reflective statements, confessing wrong, etc., etc.). Get the foundation of the home strong and stable, and then you can discuss the color of the paint on your walls.

Ironically, marriage enrichment historically has focused on things couples can't do if they aren't first self-regulated. In classes and seminars couples learn concepts and skills they can practice in a calm and public environment but cannot access when privately triggered into their pain cycle. Going forward we should focus on helping them self-regulate first, so they can utilize the skills they've been taught and be the partner possible.

But What About *Them*?

A discussion of self-regulation usually results in someone pushing back. “What about my spouse? They're not pulling their weight. How do I get them to change?” (By the way, can you hear the coregulation plea in their question? “I need you to love me differently, so I won't feel what I feel anymore.” They are asking for *a parent*, not a partner. The problem is, even if the spouse did love them differently, it wouldn't be powerful enough to make their insecurity disappear; only they can renew their mind and change that part of them.)

When partners get hyper focused on what their partner is or is not doing (abusive behavior should not be tolerated; see sidebar for more) we sometimes point them to the story of Jesus' confronting Peter at the end of the gospel of John. Prior to Jesus' death Peter had denied him three times. Following his resurrection, Jesus invites Peter to remember and refresh his commitment to following Jesus; he asks Peter three times, “Peter, do you love me?” to which he says yes.

When Jesus then tells Peter of the death he will suffer as a result of following Jesus (see John 21), Peter looks at the apostle John—who was also following Jesus—and asks, “What about him?”

Self-regulation empowers abused partners to take agency over their own safety. Not waiting on a spouse to improve the emotional safety of the relationship means the abuse will not be tolerated. Accountability and self-empowerment are key to breaking the cycle of abuse and potentially transforming the relationship.

as if to say, “What will he have to sacrifice to follow you?” Jesus replies, “What is that to you? You follow me!”

Jesus basically says, “Stay in your lane, Peter. Focus on the work of discipleship in your life; let me worry about others.”

Sometimes partners need to quit trying to orchestrate who they want their spouse to be so they can have what they want. The purpose of marriage is not for one’s partner to meet their needs and make them feel satisfied, fulfilled, and happy but, instead for each person to let the relationship teach them the hard truths of where they need to grow emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, all while learning to be a sacrificial giver for the good of the relationship and their partner. Decades of research and therapy with couples have taught us that the only way for partners to feel like they are growing and fulfilled as a person and in a loving, safe relationship is to learn how reckon with the hard and unlovely things about themselves (their pain cycle) while focusing on loving and giving to their marriage.⁴ That is how they will truly find peace and fulfillment. In other words, don’t worry about the growth of one’s spouse or whether or not your needs will be met; focus first on your own work. “You follow me!”

So, What Is Marriage Ministry to Do?

Let’s summarize what we’ve learned. Without realizing it, the field and literature of marriage ministry has been heavily influenced by modern beliefs that “marriage should meet my needs”, that compatibility is key, and that understanding your partners personality, love language, spending habits, decision-making style, etc., etc., etc., will result in a happy marriage. But none of these things move partners out of hurtful reactivity when dysregulated. Even further, strategies aimed at coregulation (e.g., meeting their needs, giving them what they want so you get what you want) foster dependency in marriage, not intimate partnerships.

Keep in mind that all these approaches have some value, but only for partners who can self-regulate their worst moments. Dysregulation blocks partners’ from utilizing communication skills and knowledge they possess about healthy relationships. This is why all of us—even those who teach the skills to others—keep doing things in our marriage that we do not want to do.

Currently, very few marriage education or ministry resources, seminars, or programs teach self-regulation concepts to couples. We need to fill the gap.

From a Christian faith perspective, we need to equip partners with the ability to manage their dysregulated “old self”, turn away from its unloving and unsafe reactivity, and bring to the relationship a new self, which is continually being transformed with the mind of Christ and reflects the fruit of the Spirit. This is exactly what *The Mindful Marriage* attempts to do. In humility couples first come to understand the pain narrative behind their dysregulation and how they react *at* one another in harmful fight or flight reactivity (their pain cycle). They then learn through the four steps how to “take off” that behavior and “put on” a new self governed by emotional self-regulation (creating their peace cycle). This creates the optimum environment for both partners to mature as people and give deeply of themselves in love and faithfulness to the other, their family, and those around them.

This is what marriage ministry has been missing. We must help couples operationalize self-regulation and “grow up” into Christ, maturing both themselves and their usness.

Keep in mind that much of what we already teach and practice will have value to those who self-regulate when anxious, upset, hurt, or feel unloved, but only *after* they apply self-regulation.

Taking off the old self, as the New Testament calls for, and putting on the new is very difficult. Anyone who repeatedly does things they aren’t proud of knows what we’re talking about. It takes a lot to overcome a lifetime pain cycle, let alone be transformed by the renewing of their mind. But with God’s power it can be done, and partners can learn to do it. In *The Mindful Marriage* we wrestle with the reality that despite being forgiven and adopted into God’s family, our “old self” still hijacks our mind, heart, and behavior. Speaking for myself, I want to do good. I want to love Nan well, and she wants to love me well. But when triggered, that old self rears its ugly head.

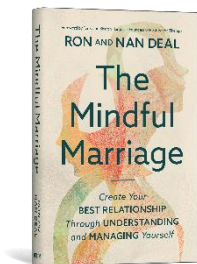
It is *my* responsibility to take off this old self and put on a new one—it is not her responsibility to fix me.

Marriage affords us the opportunity to work out our salvation in real life circumstances with the people who mean the most to us.⁵ It’s an opportunity to become more like Jesus and less like our old self. At its core, this is discipleship training – and this is what marriage ministry should orient itself around.

It's time the church upgraded its understanding of marriage and its approach to marriage ministry.

Want more bonus material? Check out these other bonus insights.

- Humility: Fuel for Change
- Everyday Humility
- Scripture Wisdom about the Nature and Relational Impact of Humility (and Pride)
- The Humility Shift Daily Exercise



Pick up a copy of *The Mindful Marriage: Create Your Best Relationship Through Understanding and Managing Yourself* today from [FamilyLife](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), or [Books-A-Million](#). Find locations for [The Mindful Marriage Conference](#).

¹ Terry D. Hargrave, Nicole E. Zasowski, and Miyoung Yoon Hammer, *Advances and Techniques in Restoration Therapy* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 90–92.

² See, Burleson, B.R. and Denton, W.H. (1997). *The relationship between communication skill and marital satisfaction: Some moderating effects*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *59*, 884-902; and John M. Gottman, *The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 22-23.

³ Nguyen, T.P., Karney, B.R., Bradbury, T.N. (2020). *When poor communication does and does not matter: The moderating role of stress*. *Journal of Family Psychology*. doi 10.1037/fam0000643.

⁴ We do recognize that sometimes partners are actively doing things that sabotage trust and your desire to give. We want you to find safety. See Appendix 2 in *The Mindful Marriage* entitled “If You Have Experienced Abuse”.)

⁵ But not just marriage. All intimate relationships, like close friendships, family relationships, and those in the church community, are opportunities for growth. Relationships are a refining fire if we allow them to be because loving people in trustworthiness will always require more of us than we imagined. This is one significant way we become more like Jesus—which is why we urge church leaders to make relationship ministry with singles, couples, and families of all shapes and sizes a priority within the local church. For more on how you can do that, visit [FamilyLife.com/equip](#).